

## INTRODUCTION

# The Invisible Force That Rules Human Interaction

### **The Dalai Lama, My Father, and My Early Death**

Three things happened to me when I was seventeen that turned out to have a significant effect on my interest in communications and, specifically, nonverbal communications, later in life. First, I read a book about the Dalai Lama and made him one of my personal heroes.<sup>1</sup> Second, I learned my father was gay. And third, I died.

Let me take those in order. I read a book about the Dalai Lama's escape into India from the Communists in 1959 and immediately cast him as one of my heroes in a pantheon that included Martin Luther King Jr., President John F. Kennedy, and the Beatles. I was excited, therefore, a half-dozen or so years later when I had the chance to hear the Dalai Lama speak at the University of Virginia, where I was

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a graduate student, and cheerfully queued up for a seat in the small auditorium.

The room was overflowing with devotees, local Buddhists, and the merely curious. There was an excited, impatient buzz—or at least as impatient as Buddhists get—and the Dalai Lama was late. He was an hour late when he finally took the stage, crossing to the middle of the space slowly, hunched over a little, dressed in his signature saffron robes, much smaller than I'd imagined.

I realized I was holding my breath as he crossed the stage. To my astonishment, when he finally reached the center of the space, he sat on the floor, bypassing the comfortable chair that had been provided. He arranged his robes. He looked at us.

Then he said . . . nothing. He just looked at us for one minute, saying nothing. Two minutes went by, and he was silent. Three minutes passed, and still His Holiness said nothing.

We were transfixed. Finally, he let out an unearthly laugh, high and spacey, like a child's "hahahahahaha." He said, "I'd better say something really important, I've kept you waiting for so long."

After that, his speech was an anticlimax. There was something about the way he looked at us in silence, each person in turn, for those three minutes, that made a much deeper impression on everyone in the room than anything he could have said about the science of happiness.

Comparing notes afterward with other attendees, I learned that we all shared the feeling that he had touched us in some profound way. I wanted to know: What was it that passed between us? What was it about the Dalai Lama's silent gaze that was so profound?

More broadly, how did nonverbal communication work? How could one person transfix me with a look?

### A Look That Changed Two People Forever

A look also forever changed my relationship with my father. And it took place in a nanosecond on Christmas day.

I'd rushed around attempting to buy him a present with my usual lack of success. He was a hard man to buy presents for; he didn't have many hobbies and divided his life rigorously between work and home. When he was at home, he did DIY projects or played the piano. But he wasn't the kind of man you'd buy a hammer for; his deep interests were artistic and literary. I couldn't afford to buy him a second piano, so I was looking for a book.

I finally found E. M. Forster's posthumously published novel *Maurice*.<sup>2</sup> This was the book that revealed his homosexuality, and so had been embargoed until his death. I was dimly aware of this back story, but it wasn't foremost in my mind.

I chose it, I imagined, because of its literary merit. Glad to have the chore accomplished, I thought no more about it. I wrapped up the book and put it under the Christmas tree.

On Christmas day, when my dad got around to opening it, he tore off the wrappings and gave me a very brief, startled look, before regaining his composure, saying thanks, and moving on to the next present. But in that momentary, startled glance, I saw suddenly, intuitively and finally, that he was gay. It wasn't a question; it was an answer—to a question I hadn't realized consciously that I had asked.

Nothing was said out loud, and it was ten more years until my dad came out to me deliberately, but I knew it in that look.

That a whole secret life could be revealed in one glance was astonishing to me. Humans didn't need words to tell each

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other things, even very deeply guarded, private things. How could this be? How could his unconscious mind speak to me that way without him being consciously aware of it?

### Never Toboggan Alone

Later that eventful Christmas season when I was seventeen, I was tobogganing with a couple of friends on a cold, icy afternoon. The first run went smoothly, so with seventeen-year-old bravado, I said, “We didn’t go fast enough.” My friends suggested that perhaps I’d like to try a solo run, so I did.

I got a running start, jumped on the toboggan, and crashed headfirst into a tree on the second turn. I fractured my skull and was taken to Geisinger Medical Center in Danville, Pennsylvania. The neurosurgeons there operated on me for a subdural hematoma—a blood clot—that was putting pressure on my brain and causing intense pain.

I was in a coma for a few days and, at some point during that coma, I died briefly—for a total of about fifteen minutes. I came back to life, woke up, and asked the nurse, “Where am I?” because, despite the cliché, it was what I wanted to know first.

I think the doctor was relieved too, because my question meant that I was at least roughly intact, mentally.

As it turned out, I was alive, yes, but not everything was normal. Over the next several weeks, I noticed that something odd had happened to my mental processes. The world—or at least the people in it—had become distant and strange for me.

I couldn’t figure out affect—intent—in other people. Their words seemed hollow. I couldn’t tell what they were thinking or feeling. I knew I should be able to tell what was going on with other people, but I couldn’t. Everyone around me seemed

like automatons, robots, without the affect I was used to before the accident.

Something in me had switched off, and I had no idea what. It meant that people were suddenly complete mysteries to me. It was terrifying.

So I began to study body language consciously, in a deliberate and indeed panicked attempt to figure out what people were feeling, what their intent was, what they actually *meant*. I focused obsessively on gesture, facial expressions, posture, the ways people revealed tension in their arms and shoulders, the way they moved closer or further away from each other, their smiles and frowns—everything, in short, that I could see that might tell me something about what they were feeling.

Then, after a couple of months of agonized and largely unsuccessful efforts to read people, efforts that were making me more and more anxious and depressed, something switched on again. The part of my brain that read other people effortlessly, more or less, switched back on as mysteriously as it had switched off.

But the whole experience awakened in me a lifelong interest in body language, gesture, and the conscious effort to understand what other people took for granted, happy to pick up emotion and intent for the most part unconsciously.

Over the years, I've continued to study unconscious human behavior to try to understand how people actually communicate. My work, first in a university setting with public speaking and Shakespeare students, and then with clients over the past two decades, has given me a rich set of experiences in the practical implications of focusing on body language in order to make communication more effective and persuasive for leaders and future leaders in politics, education, business, and entertainment. More recently, startling advances in brain science have made it possible

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to have the beginnings of a rigorously tested and grounded understanding of this essential piece of human behavior.

Out of these experiences and from these advances in science, I have developed the seven-step process to communications mastery you'll find in this book. The integrated system is mine; the research that underpins it comes from many scientists around the world.

### **We're Not Aware of Our Most Important Activities**

Most of our communication is indeed unconscious. Our conscious brains can handle something like forty bits of information a second. That sounds like a lot until you know that our unconscious minds can handle 11 million bits of information per second.<sup>3</sup> So we've evolved to push much of our behavior down to our unconscious minds because they can handle these important chores so much more powerfully and rapidly.

Within those constraints, by far the biggest activity the brain undertakes is handling visual input. Visual data can be as much as 10 million bits of information per second out of that 11 million.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite all that computing power and effort, we don't see reality. What we "see" are the mental images our brains put up in response to the visual input. In essence, the brain gets the visual stimuli, then scans its data banks to find the closest approximate forms that correspond to the visual data. Our minds then offer that stored image as an interpretation of reality. That's what our brains think they see. For example, in a field of view in which most things are still and one thing is moving, the brain doesn't bother to get input on all the still stuff, just the moving item.<sup>5</sup>

This kind of triage of visual input has evolved to such an extent because it's essential to our basic survival. It's part of how

we're able to act before our conscious minds realize exactly what's happening. For example, if something dangerous is thrown at you and you duck without thinking, getting out of the way a split second before it could hurt you, that's your unconscious mind at work. If you move at virtually the same instant and with the same gesture as someone you love, that's your unconscious mind at work. And if you get a suddenly powerful gut feeling that the person across from you is concealing an important feeling or piece of news, that's your unconscious mind at work.

In the first instance, the conscious mind would be too slow to react. In the second and third instances, you'd simply have a much harder time relating well with others.

Precisely because all of this mental activity is unconscious, we're not aware of it until it has already started to happen. Studies show, in fact, that we make most decisions *unconsciously* and only become aware of them *consciously* afterward, once we already start acting on that decision. The delay can be as long as nine seconds.<sup>6</sup>

In short, for most of the things that matter, your unconscious mind rules you, not the other way around.

That should disturb you.

The idea chips away at the sense of personal autonomy you have, the sense that you're a sentient being in charge of what you think and how you feel. And, what's most important, the sense that you're aware of what's going on with you and around you.

In fact, your unconscious mind is in charge. That part of you that you're aware of, that you think of as you, is a chip of ice on top of the tip of the proverbial iceberg that is a human being.

But what if you could learn to become aware of the important parts of this unconscious mental activity? What if you could learn to read it in others' minds? And what if you could

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control conversations, meetings, and all sorts of interactions among the people around you, using that conscious awareness of everyone's unconscious minds, including your own?

What if you could walk into a room and effortlessly (or apparently effortlessly) take charge of it? What if you could switch on charisma at will, making all heads swivel in your direction when you walk into that room? What if you could become the natural leader—the go-to person—of most of the groups that you join?

*What if you could learn the essential power cues that will enable you to master virtually any situation where you want or need to be in control?*

Would that be worth the effort?

### **Take Control of Your Communications Before Someone Else Does**

That's what this book is about. I'm going to take you through seven important nonverbal power cues that will teach you how our communications really work, show you how to take control of your own communications, and help you learn to guide others'.

Power in human communications and relations is indeed determined largely by the interplay of our unconscious minds. Recent neuroscience has given us for the first time a clear understanding of how that unconscious interplay works. We can now identify a series of specific cues that people exchange with one another to determine how they relate to each other. These seven power cues, if mastered, will allow you to control your own communications and those of the people around you.



By the final chapter, you'll know how to literally synchronize others' brain waves with your own. Along the way, I'll talk through some of the brain science, where it's helpful, and the experiences of my clients, because their stories will illuminate what's possible and what has actually worked in the real world.

### The Seven Power Cues

Let's get started. Here's a quick overview of the seven power cues that will help you signal that you're the leader of the tribe gathered around you. I'll begin each discussion of the individual power cues with a question that highlights the opportunity for strengthening your interpersonal communications.

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*The first power cue is all about self-awareness.  
How do you show up when you walk into a room?*

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You need to begin to get some sense of how you inhabit space, what your characteristic gestures are, and how you affect others. So you're going to take inventory to find out what you're doing that's effective and what's not. How are you showing up in your conversations, your meetings, and your presentations?

In short, what's your persona when you connect with others? Are you powerful and commanding? Are you friendly and warm? Do people fear you, trust you, like you, avoid you, flock to you? What happens? Do you take charge or take a backseat? These are the sort of impressions you need to understand better in order to begin the process of turning into a charismatic version of yourself.

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*The second power cue involves taking charge of your nonverbal communications in order to project the persona you want to project—through your emotions. What emotions do you convey through your body language for important moments, conversations, meetings, and presentations?*

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Most of us are not charismatic most of the time because we don't manage and focus our emotions. So we meet other people with a hundred things on our minds and a mixed bag of emotions, like our cluttered to-do lists. The result is muddle, not charisma. In step two, you'll begin the process of learning to manage and focus your emotions when you need to, thus taking charge of your nonverbal communications, your persona, and your charisma, to use it at will.

Because gesture does in some ways help determine thought, you will also spend some time understanding groups of gestures so that you can monitor how you're doing. In other words, sometimes it does help to fake it until you make it! Or more precisely, you can work from either the inside out, that is, from emotion to gesture, or the outside in, that is, from gesture to emotion. The two approaches complement one another.

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*The third power cue helps you learn to read others' unconscious messages. What unconscious messages are you receiving from others?*

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Because you're already an expert, but at an unconscious level, this step in particular is all about becoming aware of unconscious messages you're already sending yourself, making them conscious in specific ways and at specific times, and then making the new habits routine.

Because your skills at reading others involves intent—intent toward you—you'll learn to shape and phrase what you ask of your unconscious mind in that way. It's a matter of learning what specific polarities or pairs of questions to ask your unconscious mind.

In this way, you'll begin to be able to recognize and understand what others are thinking before they themselves know it, in many cases. That's because emotional attitudes and decisions are made unconsciously first, then gestured about, then brought to the conscious mind. You'll learn to see the attitude or decision at the gesture stage and, thus, before the other person is self-aware.

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*With the fourth power cue, on the mysteries of the human voice, you will turn your voice into a commanding instrument for taking charge of a room. Do you have a leadership voice?*

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The research on the voice is surprising and little known; it will give you an edge over your colleagues and competitors that you will be able to master with some weeks' practice.<sup>7</sup> What's important to note, however, is that individual responses to this step vary considerably. Some find it easy to take control of their voices; others, less musical, find it more difficult.

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But the results can be powerful and life changing, if you undertake them carefully and thoroughly. Your voice is something you likely take for granted and rarely think about except when you have a cold, but it is one of the primary ways in which you connect with and influence people every day. Controlling your voice is worth the effort.

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*The fifth power cue teaches you how to combine your voice and a host of other social signals to greatly increase your success rate in pitches, meetings, sales situations, and the like. What honest signals do you send out in key work and social situations?*

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Researchers at MIT have discovered that, for example, the success of a venture capital pitch meeting can be predicted with astonishing accuracy by tracking a few aspects of body language.<sup>8</sup> You need to know what those are and learn how to use them to your advantage in high-stress, high-stakes situations.

As with the second power cue, either you can learn to control the gestures that signal these messages or you can control the emotions that control the gestures. As you work your way through the seven power cues, you'll find that while the idea of taking emotional control of your life may at first appear strange or daunting, in the long run, you'll find it by far the easier, more natural way to project powerful leadership and the communications that go with it.

*The sixth power cue shows you how to use the power of your unconscious mind to make decisions, rid yourself of phobias and fears, and create a new, more successful persona. Is your unconscious mind holding you back or propelling you forward?*

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You'll apply insights top athletes have used for decades to your personal and work issues in order to redefine your approach to the world, as you wish to design it. You'll use these techniques to remove your unconscious story lines that say, "I always go blank under stress," or "I tend to choke when the boss is pressuring me to speak up," or "When I get in front of a crowd, I get nervous and can't seem to do my best." All it takes is a memory of a bad experience to throw you off your world-class game.

You'll work at replacing the mental maps that are currently holding you back with winning ones. If it all sounds too "New Age" to work, take comfort in knowing that the technique was developed by top Soviet researchers during the Cold War in an attempt to dominate the Olympics—and it worked. It garnered the Soviets an extraordinary number of gold medals. The results are real, even if the actions are all in your head.

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*Finally, the seventh power cue helps you put it all together to become a master storyteller who actually synchronizes brain waves with your listeners to enhance your natural leadership capacity, increase your charisma, and move others to action. Are you telling powerful stories?*

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Good storytelling creates a sense of anticipation in the reader's or viewer's mind, and the experience is a pleasurable one for the participants. We humans like that kind of anticipation and confirmation. It's part of our deep-seated desire for communal experiences and tribal connections.

Great leaders are great storytellers. These leaders know that they must tell powerful stories to engage and enlist their followers. They know that storytelling is the only effective way to create the kind of transmittal of ideas and values that allows a leader's message to be heard and carried out over time and with many people. They know that the best storytelling taps into deep patterns in the human brain so that the stories fulfill the needs and expectations of the listeners and also create the right sets of messages for the leader's agenda.

The last power cue in this process involves becoming one of those master storytellers and learning how to create stories that will convey the essence of your leadership, your mission, and your passion.

I will argue that powerful storytelling is the only possible road to the radical authenticity demanded of leaders. In our 24/7, warts and all, YouTubed world, leaders have to be willing to show up with an authenticity that goes well beyond anything demanded of leaders in the past. This book will help you on that road.

### Take Your Time

These concepts are easy to master, but mastery of your unconscious communication systems takes time. After all, it took a million years of evolution to put all that activity management into your unconscious mind. Most of it should stay there, with good reason. The unconscious mind handles chores like

regulating your breathing, heartbeat, and skin temperature, and that's a good thing. You don't want to have to think about all the stuff that keeps you alive and healthy.

The aspects of unconscious thinking that I'm describing have to do with your so-called intuition, your reading of others' attitudes, emotions, and intents, and your control of your own body language, broadly defined to include your voice and posture as well as your mannerisms and gestures. These aspects turn out to be the most important for communication.

They do take time to bring to the conscious mind, master, and then send back down to the unconscious mind for retrieval when you need to. These are not simple changes; you're reengineering a finely tuned, incredibly complex organism with more synapses and connections than there are stars in the Milky Way.<sup>9</sup>

If some parts turn out to be more challenging for you, then take it slowly. Make sure that you're comfortable with each power cue before you move on to the next. For the most part, each step builds on the ones before it. So practice each concept for a few weeks until you're comfortable with it and then move on to the next step.

Above all, don't rush the process. You need to get into the habit of listening to your own unconscious mind in ways you most likely haven't before, and that takes time and patience.

Let go of your preconceptions. Open up your thinking. It's time to get to know your own mind.

### **Alice Got Here Before You Did**

Welcome to Wonderland. Most of what we think about the way people communicate is wrong, yet the reality is much stranger and more astonishing than we can even imagine.

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A series of recent breakthroughs in science have overturned the accepted wisdom about how we express ourselves to others, how we interpret what they say to us, and how we decide whether or not to follow another's leadership. These scientific studies not only allow us to understand communication in a new way, but also reveal how to become much more persuasive and successful without changing a single word we say.

Take the following recent findings from brain research:

- You gesture *before* you think consciously about what you're doing.
- You have neurons that fire when you witness someone else experiencing an emotion—and *they give you the exact same emotion.*
- If you lose your ability to process emotion, you lose your ability *to remember or to decide anything.*
- You emit *low-frequency sounds* that align with the most powerful person near you through matching vocal tones.
- Your *measurable nonverbal signals* concerning your confidence in a negotiation predict success or failure far more accurately than the relative merits of your position or what you say.
- Neurons are distributed *throughout your body*, not just in your brain, including your heart and your gut.
- When you communicate with someone else, *the two of you align your brain patterns*, even if you don't agree with the other person.



Each of these findings is surprising, and some truly defy common sense.<sup>10</sup> I'll talk more about each one in the coming chapters. But taken together they add up to a very different view of how people actually communicate and what you should do to connect with other people powerfully and persuasively.

### **Our Important Communications Are neither Verbal nor Conscious**

Here's the good news. If we can tap into the hidden power that these findings reveal, we can take charge in meetings, dominate groups, and speak in front of audiences with charisma and persuasive eloquence, no matter what the subject or the occasion. We can lead people through the unconscious communication power our *bodies* give us. We don't need words—well, only a little bit; mostly, we need gesture and sound.

With the right gestures and vocal tones, virtually anyone can take over a group and lead it, creating an instant tribe with herself at its head. We humans literally want to align our brain patterns through interpersonal communications, and we feel safest and happiest when we're doing so. You can master group dynamics with your voice, your hands, and your posture. You can learn how to shape, control, and prompt the natural, unconscious responses people have in groups. You can learn how to control your own unconscious mind so that it does your bidding.

*You can jump-start your leadership and propel it to the next level with these techniques.*

In sum, people crave leadership. In order to be the best leader possible, you need to align your *unconscious* power cues with your *conscious* content to be able to lead groups, persuade

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others, and maximize your personal impact. Then you need to find your tribe.

No one gets led anywhere they don't want to go. Machiavelli was wrong; leadership is not manipulation, not in the long run.<sup>11</sup> It's alignment, the leader with the group and the group with the leader. But you first have to maximize and focus your leadership strengths in order to be ready when your moment comes.

### What Humans Really Want

At the heart of this book is a surprising truth, one that defies most of the previous thinking about body language. People have studied it as a way of reading others, gesture by gesture and, indeed, sometimes as a way of consciously sending secret messages to others—messages of control or sexual interest, perhaps. Most of those early attempts to understand body language are silly and primitive.<sup>12</sup>

Here's what is really going on. We humans are much more communal than we realize. It's something we've forgotten, as we tune in separately to our thousand channels of entertainment and news using devices that isolate us even as they offer pseudo-connections to the group through music or headlines or games. We only remember our communality when we get together as a group to hear a speech, attend a concert, or root for a sports franchise.

But when we get together in groups, we become a tribe again, and we instinctively want to have a leader. That's *your* chance to take control, consciously using the power of everyone's unconscious mind.

That's why an audience is so eager for a speaker to succeed, for example, and so disappointed when one fails. There's an

opportunity that is squandered a thousand times a day in a thousand meeting rooms around the world. Instead of focusing on the group, the emotion, and the need for leadership, speakers think about PowerPoint and content. What a huge amount of wasted effort!

We create a leader to make us feel safe and to give us a group purpose or direction. Because, like a group of fish or birds or zebra, we need and want guidance. As you'll see, the unconscious signals that the speaker sends out to the audience must create trust and credibility or else the audience gives up, disappointed, and looks elsewhere for another leader.

These group activities satisfy deep cravings that developed during our early evolution in the cave. In our prelinguistic, less individualistic childhood as a species, we depended on one another for survival, and leadership was both essential and instinctive.<sup>13</sup>

When we lived in caves, we humans were a relatively frail, weak species, below some formidable foes in the food chain—woolly mammoths, saber-toothed tigers, and the rest of the menagerie. So we learned to respond instantly to one another in order to stay alive. We could read each other's emotions, and we could tell who was in charge, without a word being spoken.

Today, most of the dangers to which we were ready to respond then have gone away. But our cravings for leadership and connection remain. Where once we needed to react instantly to physical danger, now most of us face long-term tensions associated with jobs, relationships, and communities. Where once we needed to be ready to act quickly as a tribe to stand united against dangers, now our individual opinions matter more than our tribal loyalties. Where once we found comfort in group rituals around a dim, smoky

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fire in a cave, now many of us put on ear buds to connect emotionally with our fellow humans through recorded music. Indeed, recent research shows that we respond to new music much as we do to sex and drugs.<sup>14</sup> When the baby boomers talked about sex, drugs, and rock and roll, they were on to something.

With what you're learning from the brain scientists, you can begin immediately to make your own communications more effective and powerful by tapping into that ancient craving for connection. You can learn how to overcome shyness, how to increase your charisma a hundredfold, how to control a room, how to get your teenager under control, even how to cure yourself of recurring thoughts, habits, and dreams.

It's not just brain research. I have lots of practical experience in these techniques through work with clients over the past two decades. For example, I trained one woman, who had always been put down by men in her professional life, to change their perception of her and take charge of her career—without saying a word.

I worked with another person whose shyness was damaging his career and his marriage. He learned to become a more effective communicator at work and at home—and became a CFO.

I helped another client double his speaking fees by making a few small changes in the way he stood in front of an audience.

You'll learn that what the brain research shows actually happens when people communicate, and how you can use that understanding to become a new kind of persuasive, charismatic leader yourself. You can achieve the same kind

of transformation that I have seen over and over again in my work with clients over the past two decades.

### **How to Read This Book**

I've sought to make this book as easy as possible to read, given the sophisticated nature of the coaching. Each of the seven chapters describes a particular set of insights derived from my coaching work, supported by a breakthrough in brain research, and discusses the implications for leadership and communications. Each chapter also describes, in very practical terms, a power cue leading to personal communications mastery that builds on the cues before it and overall creates a complete program for your personal transformation. You can jump right to the power cues and skip the research, but I recommend studying it because of the insights it will give you into why people communicate the way they do. It will help you in your pursuit of communications mastery to understand how the brain works and what science is showing us about aspects of the human unconscious.

I've tried to anticipate as many of the questions you will naturally have as possible, and answer them in the descriptions of the steps and instructions for implementing them yourself. I've also added "field notes" at the end of each chapter that cover some of the issues that may arise as you start to put these ideas into action. Think of them as deeper dives into the practical side of this work.

It's important to understand that much of this brain research is still in its early stages, and as such I have only included discussion of work that I have personally found to be helpful and practical in my work with clients—a nonstatistical

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but nontrivial form of confirmation. Where it's relevant and helpful, I will share stories of my client work to illustrate how the steps work, what pitfalls to avoid, and what you need to focus on to achieve the best results.

This work is going to take some weeks, and it's not easy. It requires paying attention to aspects of your behavior and others' behavior that you've probably not thought consciously about before. But the results will be worth it. Personal mastery and an opportunity to change your leadership level await you.

When I say *mastery*, I don't mean manipulation. These power cues will actually show you how to deal more authentically with your colleagues, your family, your tribe. In seven chapters, you'll learn how to clear away all the unconscious messages you don't mean to be sending—and don't even realize you're sending—in order to strengthen the messages you *want* to communicate. You'll learn to show up as the best version of yourself instead of as a jumble of unconscious fears and distractions. You'll become more persuasive and more powerful *because* you'll become more authentically yourself.

When you're ready, take a deep breath and turn the page.