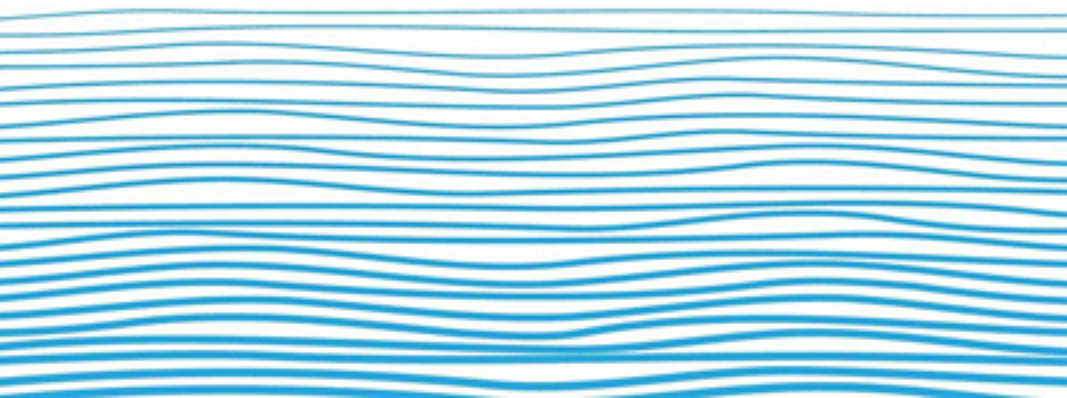


Megumi Miki

# Quietly Powerful

How your quiet nature is your hidden leadership strength



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## Quietly Powerful

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## Quietly Powerful

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# Introduction

## **The quiet girl who didn't fit in**

I was only five years old when my family moved to Sydney from Japan. It was April and I had just finished kindergarten. While I was born in Melbourne during my father's first transfer to Australia, we'd returned to Japan when I was 18 months old, and the only English words I knew were 'yes', 'no' and 'toilet'.

I entered the wire gates of Turramurra Public School, holding my mother's hand, walking slightly behind her. It felt like a very big school with a very big playground, especially compared to kindergarten in Japan. We walked into a classroom and were greeted by the teacher. Lots of blue, green and brown eyes looked on as the teacher said something I didn't understand and pointed to two girls who were smiling at me. I didn't know what to say, but my mother left and the two girls came over and took my hand.

I didn't need to understand English to know what the kids meant when they made facial expressions and said, 'Eew, what's that?' while pointing to the rice balls in my lunchbox. That afternoon I told my mother that I didn't want Japanese rice balls for lunch anymore. It was long before the days of sushi shops in every suburb. My daughter has had rice balls in her lunchbox since she started school eight years ago and she receives looks of envy from her friends!

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A few weeks later, a boy came running over to me to pull the ends of his eyes up and down and yell out ‘Chinese, Japanese!’ I was the only Asian girl in my year level, so it was difficult to hide. It was the first time in my life that I realised I was not the same as everyone else – that I didn’t fit in. While I didn’t have a terrible time at that school, it was something of a relief to move to the Sydney Japanese International School two years later. In hindsight, years 3 and 4 at the Sydney Japanese International School were the only school years that I can say I really enjoyed.

We moved back to Kobe, Japan, when I started year 5. Surprisingly, it was just as difficult, if not more so, in Japan, particularly when I reached high school.

In year 5, I’d joined a swimming club in Kobe to train competitively, and at my peak I was swimming ten times a week. With that much training in a highly chlorinated pool, my hair started turning a reddish brown, and became lighter and lighter over time. My hair is naturally wavy, too, and the damage from the chlorine made it frizzy. In a school full of Japanese kids with black hair, I really stood out! High school rules were strict, and colouring, bleaching and perming your hair was not permitted. (There were also rules on the length of your uniform skirt and your hairstyle: it was the collectivist Japanese culture at its worst.) The ‘naughty’ kids used to deliberately bleach their hair to rebel against the school rules. So, you can imagine what the teachers thought of me!

Sure enough, I got pulled aside by the homeroom teacher in year 7. He told me off for bleaching my hair and, when I tried to explain that it was from swimming, he got angry. That night, my mother wrote a note to the teacher to explain the situation, and he stopped hassling me, but I felt like he was watching me all the time. I really had to blend in to avoid getting into trouble.

There was also the time when the popular girls in the class backed me into a corner in the schoolyard. They told me that I was a show-off for standing out with my hair, for speaking fluent Australian English in the English classes and for getting

good marks in all the core subjects. After that, I started telling white lies about my marks, saying that they were around average, and playing dumb in the English classes, trying to speak with a Japanese-American accent. I stopped swimming altogether by the time I was 14. It was safer for me to be quiet and hidden.

Over the course of my childhood, my family continued moving around a lot, and in total I went to eight different schools in three countries. I became a master at blending in. Being quiet was a survival mechanism; it was also my natural tendency.

I am an introvert and have always been the quiet one. In Japanese, I was always told that I was *otonashii* – ‘mild and meek’. If you look at the Japanese characters, however, they actually say ‘adult-like’, with connections to being honest, warm and rounded. I was praised for being calm, doing things at my own pace and handling pressure well – so being *otonashii* didn’t feel like a bad thing.

Staying quiet and hidden was safe and felt natural. Standing out made life difficult.

### **Putting quietness to the side**

After university in Adelaide, Australia, getting a job at a global management consulting firm was a shock to the system. As a twenty-something consultant, I was thrown in front of clients and expected to have intelligent conversations about their business. I had to look like I knew what I was doing, and I constantly worried about not knowing enough and being found out. I was expected to speak up in the presence of outspoken, articulate senior leaders – mostly white men – and to be considered for promotion to manager level, we had to make a presentation to a group of senior leaders and peers who knew more about the topic than we did. On top of that, we socialised regularly with our peer group, with an unwritten rule about working hard and playing hard.

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To get through this, I had to find a way to look more polished and confident, fast. So, I worked long hours to be as well prepared as possible. I did professional development in areas such as presentation skills and relationship management. I learned to project my voice, to watch my ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’, how I stood, how I used my hands and where I looked. And I put on my suit and high heels, hoping I looked the part.

I stayed six years, learned a lot and completed some excellent and not-so-great projects, and burned out at the age of 29. I lasted six years, only because I was still in my twenties!

A few years later, I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to make a big change in careers, with a job as a facilitator and consultant for an organisation-wide cultural transformation program at ANZ Bank, doing leadership and culture work. It was a dream job in terms of what it allowed me to learn, my passion for the topics and the feeling of making a positive difference.

However, it required me to stand in front of groups to present and facilitate most of the time. I had a difficult time taking off my ‘professional’ mask due to all the presentation techniques I’d learned, and regularly got told to ‘be myself’ and bring more energy. Other times I’d be told to ‘be more confident’ and develop my ‘executive presence’. The feedback made me more anxious and self-conscious, which made it even more difficult to be myself.

Being on the road and in front of groups so much exhausted me, but I pushed on, telling myself and others that it was my dream job and I wanted to do it well. There were as many downs as ups through this period, but I learned a lot. I have been in the leadership and culture field for over 18 years now. It still gives me a buzz when I see pennies dropping for people, when the so-called ‘soft’ or ‘intangible’ work we do leads to positive, concrete outcomes. About six years ago, however, I had my own penny-dropping moment, and it changed how I see myself and started shaping what I’m about to share with you in this book.

## The penny drops

I was co-facilitating a leadership workshop with a colleague who has the opposite style to me – gregarious, entertaining and loud. He started the workshop and had the group laughing within the first two minutes. I enjoyed his energy until it got closer to my part of the workshop.

As I watched people laughing, the little voice started in my head: ‘Gosh, I don’t get people laughing so much’, ‘I’m going to seem boring compared with him’, ‘What if they disengage?’ and ‘How am I going to keep the energy up?’ The silly thing is, I had been facilitating for over ten years by then and I’d had plenty of positive feedback in the past. I didn’t need to worry, but I did.

I stood up and facilitated my part of the workshop until morning tea. Nothing went wrong. People were engaged and ready to take on the rest of the day’s learning. At morning tea, however, I felt exhausted. A colleague I had worked with for a few years was participating in the workshop, and she walked over to me during the break. She said, ‘Megumi, what’s going on? You don’t seem your usual self.’ I thought to myself, *Oh no, so it was visible to the participants that I had all this internal turmoil?* I told my colleague about my inner voice and how it prevented me from being fully present.

She looked me in the eye and said, ‘Megumi, stop comparing yourself with your co-facilitator! You bring something very different to him and that’s what makes you valuable. If you keep trying to be like him or keep comparing yourself, we don’t get to see the best of you.’

That five-minute interaction was an absolute gem! I got myself back into being present and we had a fantastic workshop. People commented on how much they valued the contrasting styles of the two of us, and that they got a lot out of both.

In retrospect, there had been many hints before this that I needed to appreciate myself and my unique contribution. I was

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sometimes told not to try so hard to be like someone else or to be overly energetic. I only accepted this intellectually, however, and I didn't know how to fully embrace my own style.

After that penny-dropping moment, though, I began really understanding and appreciating the unique approaches I brought to my work. It was the seed for *Quietly Powerful*.

I started experimenting with reconnecting with my quiet nature and not hiding it. One such experiment was with a client who wanted to hold an all-team strategy review workshop with about 40 people. I designed the workshop so that there were many opportunities for pair, small-group and whole-group discussion. Pre-reading materials as well as questions were sent so that people could reflect before the workshop, should they prefer to do so. And I facilitated the workshop so that most of the talking was done by the client team.

The CEO who commissioned the work gave me feedback afterwards. 'That was a fantastic workshop. People were really engaged; great ideas came out of it and I could see the team taking ownership of the strategy. It was as if you were invisible: you guided us when there was a need, but you had us doing the work, and that made a big difference.'

As I continued to experiment, I kept receiving similar comments about my style, not only in facilitation but also presentations and consulting. The consistent themes that kept coming through were that clients appreciated that I listened and understood their needs, that I ensured that everyone was involved, that my understated style made everyone comfortable to engage, and that my observation skills allowed me to notice and engage the quieter people.

The successes helped me to believe that quietness is valuable and that more people should appreciate and leverage it. And so, in August 2016, I anxiously sent out my first email to a group of contacts, asking whether they or their colleagues would be interested in a breakfast to talk about the challenges of being a quiet professional woman.

## What is Quietly Powerful?

During its humble beginnings, my business Quietly Powerful was an experiment to see if quieter professional women could benefit from hearing my story. I hosted small breakfasts to share my learnings about why the workplace is challenging for quieter professionals, what holds us back and what we can do about it. The breakfasts kept selling out, so I did many more breakfasts and some learning programs.

When I had reached about 200 women, I noticed that it wasn't just introvert women who were attending. In fact, a few of the women who joined my coaching programs were extroverts. Some of these women were struggling with speaking up and being recognised; others were looking for ways to access their quiet powers.

Two major events convinced me that Quietly Powerful was more than an experiment. The first was a talk at the Vic ICT for Women, a member-based organisation that champions women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) in the Australian state of Victoria. The event sold out a few days before the registration close date, which had not happened before, and on the day, more than 100 people packed the room. Positive feedback comments included, 'one of the best ... events I've attended, great topic and speaker' and 'Sorry you had to turn people down, perhaps allow standing room?'

Soon after, men started to approach me and ask why I was 'excluding' them. If my experience as a quieter professional woman was relevant and useful to men, I was happy to share. This led to the second major talk at Ernst & Young, sponsored by both the Asia Professionals Network and Network of Winning Women. Both men and women were invited, and the organisers had chairs and catering organised for about 50 to 70 people, which was their usual turnout. As we opened the doors to the event, though, people just kept coming in; by the time I started the talk, rows of



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people were standing by the walls and windows, as there were not enough seats. We had about 150 attendees.

By this time, Quietly Powerful had become a movement with the aim of shifting collective beliefs about what good leadership looks, sounds and feels like. I had started researching Quietly Powerful leaders – interviewing people who had successfully progressed in leadership careers using their quieter nature. This research is still continuing, and these interviews have solidified my belief that Quietly Powerful leadership is not only important for giving opportunities to people who feel quietly disempowered, it is important for improving the quality of leadership in organisations and in society. We need Quietly Powerful leaders now more than ever.

A shift in our beliefs about leadership will allow talented quiet professionals to view their quiet nature as a strength and to succeed in their own way, rather than seeing it as a disadvantage. It will also enhance diversity in leadership and help organisations to stop wasting their hidden talent – those quiet achievers that get either overlooked or taken advantage of without recognition. Ultimately, valuing and developing Quietly Powerful leaders and instilling their attributes in not-so-quiet leaders, as well, will address the leadership gap (poor-quality leadership) we are experiencing today.

Quietly Powerful initially drew attention from professionals who are quiet, but now senior organisational leaders, human resources, leadership and talent, diversity and inclusion professionals are seeing how this approach can improve leadership capabilities, gender and cultural diversity, cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and coaching capabilities.

### **How to use this book**

This book challenges quiet professionals to reframe the story they tell themselves about their leadership potential and encourages

organisations to expand their ideas about what good leadership looks, sounds and feels like.

Here's a short description of what you will gain from the various chapters:

- **Part I** (Chapters 1–3) describes the organisational and individual cost of undervaluing our quiet nature and quiet approaches to leadership. Most quiet professionals would recognise these challenges, but organisations and not-so-quiet individuals may be surprised to discover the high price of undervaluing their quiet nature.
- **Part II** (Chapters 4–7) offers the reasons why individuals may remain quiet and hidden. It goes beyond introversion, which is often what people talk about. You will find out that being quiet and hidden is a lot more complex and requires further exploration.
- **Part III** (Chapters 8–11) explores why organisations overlook and underutilise their quiet talent. It is an invitation to them to challenge their cognitive and structural biases and to update their thinking on the type of leadership they need and how to get the most out of quiet talent.
- **Part IV** (Chapters 12–17) describes what Quietly Powerful leaders are like, and the quiet superpowers that set them apart as leaders and distinguish them from simply being quiet leaders. Chapters 15 to 17 give individuals the strategies to move from being quietly disempowered to Quietly Powerful.
- **Part V** (Chapters 18–19) invites not-so-quiet people and organisations to also reap the benefits of Quietly Powerful.

My hope is that whether you are quiet or not-so-quiet, you will start to see the power of your quiet nature, so you can use it for your benefit and in your leadership. You might find that you need it more than you realise.

## Chapter 13

# Three key attributes

If quiet does not equal Quietly Powerful, then what is Quietly Powerful? Three key attributes emerged as I interviewed Quietly Powerful leaders. They include being comfortable, being present and being purpose-driven:

### 1. **Being comfortable means:**

- Being authentic
- Acknowledging strengths and weaknesses
- Being comfortable sharing flaws, quirks or lack of knowledge
- Being humble and curious to learn
- Having self-compassion.

### 2. **Being present means being:**

- A great listener and observer
- Thoughtful
- Respectful and having meaningful relationships
- A great one-on-one mentor and coach
- Resilient and able to manage stress and anxiety.

### 3. **Being purposeful means being:**

- Focused on the work, the collective good and the right thing to do
- Inclusive and empowering
- Collaborative and not directive
- Able to share credit for achievements
- Able to build others up.

### **Being comfortable**

Quietly Powerful leaders know themselves well and are comfortable with their strengths *and* weaknesses. They are transparent about their weaknesses and often surround themselves with people who are good at what they aren't. Humility comes naturally as a result. They have an inner confidence that allows them to say that they don't know everything and they can laugh at their weaknesses. Because these leaders are authentic and human, people around them feel more comfortable with them.

Dianne Jacobs, founding principal of The Talent Advisors and former partner at Goldman Sachs JBWere, is a quietly spoken person who struck me as being very comfortable in her own skin. I asked her what her secret was. Her view was that everyone brings strengths and unique perspectives, such that different people with different styles can achieve the same outcomes, but in different ways. By acknowledging this, you can become comfortable with your way of achieving outcomes. You can enjoy your strengths by knowing and using them effectively, while being careful not to overplay them.

Quietly Powerful leaders can be authentic, honest and show vulnerability.

Stacey Barr, who runs a successful training organisation around performance measurement and KPIs, finds it easy to admit when she doesn't know something. She said:

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*If you're asked a question [and] you're not sure of the answer to it, I found that if I just say, 'You know what? Off the top of my head, I don't know the answer to that, tell me a little bit more about it from your perspective...' It gives your brain a little bit of time to ponder and pull things together, and have a response. When you can be vulnerable in a group of people, they tend to have more trust in everything else you have to say.*

Clive Peter, mentioned in Chapter 2, makes a point of asking for feedback from his team, including calling out his own behaviours. He is keenly aware that he, like everyone, has blind spots and acknowledges the importance of having trusted people around him who feel safe enough to call him on them. He is also aware that it can be difficult for his team members to give him corrective feedback, so he works on establishing a norm of giving and receiving feedback with them. He would say:

*You can always tell me what you think and if you think it's going to be a bit painful for me, close the door. I'll listen to it. I may not like it, but I'll listen to it. Because, I think, when you do that, you are able to learn.*

What goes hand in hand with this level of authenticity and openness to being vulnerable is humility. Quietly Powerful leaders, without exception, know that they don't know everything and they aren't overconfident as a result.

Steve Hodgkinson, CIO at the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), described how he adds value by knowing something, even if it's not everything.

*It's a confidence you have that you can see things that not everybody can see. So, I think that's the starting point, because otherwise you don't feel you have anything to offer other than just going through process, which anyone can do. That doesn't mean that you're an expert or that you know everything, it just means that you see things that others may not.*

## Three key attributes

The authenticity, vulnerability and humility based on being comfortable make these Quietly Powerful leaders human and approachable. The hallmark of their comfort within themselves was their self-deprecating humour. They had no problem pointing out some of their flaws or uniqueness as something to laugh about and they didn't take themselves too seriously.

Susan Allen, first mentioned in Chapter 1, had no problem sharing some of her 'quirky' side with her team. She never hid her fanatical support for Carlton Football Club, displaying a full-sized photograph of Chris Judd on the wall of her office. She also joked about how she wouldn't get off the dance floor at functions, which some would find surprising given how quietly spoken she is when you meet her.

Paul Boasman, mentioned in Chapters 1 and 4, told me that when he's stressed, he makes a beeline to his desk without seeing the people around him. He tells his team that he has such a tendency, so they know not to get concerned when he doesn't acknowledge them as he rushes past.

Yamini Naidu shared the story about the first time she told a joke about being Indian on stage. Owning her identity was a powerful step to demonstrate her comfort with herself and in being authentic. She was presenting to a large audience at IBM and noticed that the room was full of Indian engineers. She decided to have a go at sharing her Indian mother joke:

*I said to my mum, 'I want to be a storyteller.' My mum replied, 'why can't you be a doctor or an IT professional?' And I did the whole Indian mother accent and the room just exploded with laughter. That was the first time that I had the courage to embrace my identity and also to just unleash my humour on stage.*

As an experienced speaker and storyteller, Yamini believes that what makes you different is the X-factor and that's what people want to see. It also shows that you are comfortable in your own

skin. Yamini has now not only embraced her Indian identity, she has gone on to train in stand-up comedy!

Dr Jason Fox, mentioned in Chapter 2 and 3, unapologetically talks about his introversion in the first five minutes of his presentation. He jokes about how he would avoid the networking after the keynote presentations using a range of avoidance strategies like going to get a drink or going to the bathroom straight after a talk. By explaining his version of introversion, he clarifies that his introversion is not about being shy, but that his behaviours depend on the context and that he recharges his energy by being alone.

Every single Quietly Powerful leader I interviewed said that wholeheartedly being yourself is critically important and empowering. Being yourself doesn't mean you don't challenge yourself, learn new skills and try new things, it's about being true to yourself and being the best you can be.

Dr Jenny Brockis is a successful professional speaker on the topic of brain health. She is a quietly spoken medical doctor who used to enjoy one-on-one consultations as a practising GP. She now speaks to thousands of people and enjoys it; she feels that she can be herself on stage.

*You don't have to pretend to be something you're not. I think the risk is we sometimes believe we have to behave in a certain way to fit in and meet the expectations of others. Knowing we have our own unique strengths and accepting we are enough, enables us to stay authentic, true to our own values and to be ourselves. There is nothing to be gained from being anyone but your true self, because this is what frees us up to play the bigger game. If we pretend, the only person being fooled is ourselves.*

Being comfortable with yourself is the pre-condition for authenticity, transparency and humility and gives you the courage to be vulnerable.

## Being present

Quietly Powerful leaders have a powerful presence because they are present. They are mindful and not distracted, so they listen intently and speak only when necessary. They connect deeply, often one-to-one, and many have mentor and collegial relationships that have lasted for decades. They are present because they are comfortable within themselves, and they have learned to manage their anxieties and focus their attention on others.

Ruth Picker, partner at Ernst & Young, does a lot of listening by being fully present so she can listen beyond what people say. She said:

*I don't only listen with my ears; I listen with my eyes and my heart. I look at people and I observe. How are they feeling? What's the mood in the room? How are they responding to what's being said? Are they engaged or disengaged? It's not only what they say, but it's what they don't say.*

This deep listening allows Ruth to check with people who have been quiet in a meeting to see whether they are okay. She makes a judgement call about whether to check during the meeting or afterwards and more often than not, the person who remained quiet has an issue or concern. Her listening ensures that people's concerns are heard and addressed.

Susan Allen explained that her listening and reflection were valuable leadership strengths for senior leaders. She used her presence to listen and learn from others to make informed and considered decisions. Not only that, people appreciated that Susan took others' ideas seriously and they felt encouraged to share again. She also listened and observed the leadership team dynamics in order to navigate through the politics of the workplace to get things done. She said:

*I was on the leadership team of RACV as well as on the leadership team of VicRoads. You can sit back and read the politics to work*



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*out the motivations of the people around the room and how to help them achieve what they want to achieve rather than seeing it as a competition.*

Similarly, after a few years in Ernst & Young's Australian practice after returning from Japan, Giovanni Stagno was pleasantly surprised to receive some feedback on his openness and willingness to listen. He said:

*People felt very good about the fact that, regardless of organisation rank, I was genuine and authentic in listening and [I was] actually taking feedback or input onboard. It's easy to unconsciously dismiss someone's input when they are at a lower level within the organisation, as they usually don't have all the facts for any given circumstance. I was careful not to do that... people could say what they wanted to and knew they were heard.*

Not only was listening important, he also made an effort to ensure that he was transparent, especially when difficult messages needed to be communicated. He shared his experience of when the business was not doing as well as expected; he communicated with his team early and transparently and he undertook steps to encourage working together in determining a positive way forward. This was a different approach to that of his peers who weren't prepared to communicate as openly about the uncertainty surrounding the business. While he felt vulnerable sharing the difficulties, he found that people appreciated his honesty as they could make their own informed decisions about what to do. He found that being present with his team was key to engaging and leading them on a change journey that other senior leaders were not ready to take.

Kevin Larkins, Interim CEO of The Bodhi Bus, spent many years working with Indigenous Australians. In his first role, he set up the first Alcohol and Drug Bureau in the Northern Territory. He realised at the time that in his 20 years of formal education he could only recall one talk on Indigenous Australians. The only

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Indigenous people he knew were footballers and boxers. He said that the most important learning he had was summed up by an Indigenous elder: 'If you want to know culture, come, sit down and listen. Don't talk, just listen.' This listening and openness to learn profoundly influenced his work with Indigenous people and their communities.

As you can see from the examples given by the Quietly Powerful leaders, a key leadership strength that many of them highlighted was effective listening – not just hearing the words but being present and considering what's been said and listening to what's not being said.

Another leadership strength listed by Quietly Powerful leaders is having strong one-on-one relationships. Brad Chan, first mentioned in Chapter 7, found that he enjoyed using his strengths in listening, analysis, inquiry and guiding to mentor and grow the people around him. He said:

*I'm quite comfortable speaking in front of a large audience, but I think where I am most effective is using some of these natural gifts in [a] mentoring or coaching role. And I think a leader is also successful in relationships [because] you can get more meaningful relationships through those personal connections through engagement.*

Caroline Stainkamph also found that connecting with people helped her to bring the best out of her colleagues in order to develop high-performing teams.

*I think what it's really helped me do is connect with my team. I really enjoy that one-on-one interaction and I think that's what can build [a] really strong relationship with your people. By getting to know your people, you start to understand their strengths and what their motivations are; you can help [and] shape the job that they're doing for you, so that you can make the most out of their skills and abilities.*

Similarly, Aneetha de Silva, Managing Director, Government at Aurecon, invests in building trusting one-on-one relationships. It enables effective group dynamics where people feel comfortable to contribute their views. She finds that reaching out to people on a personal level lets them know that she values their opinions. So often groups fall into groupthink or falling in line with the most senior person in the room. Aneetha invests in the one-to-one relationships so that she can tap into the collective wisdom to solve problems, generate new ideas and move forward *together*.

Your presence also impacts how you speak, not just how you listen.

A tip that Lisa Evans, mentioned in Chapters 1 and 6, shared was to ‘be present rather than polished’. There are many tips on making yourself look more polished when public speaking, but if these tips get in the way of being authentic and present, it’s not very helpful.

Ruth Picker described what she loves to do when public speaking:

*I love to stand up on stage in front of a thousand people and deliver a public speech. Now, deliver a speech is probably not the right word because, I think why I’m a successful public speaker is because I treat the audience as a group of individuals [rather than as a group]. Sometimes I walk down onto the floor and engage with the audience as individuals, one by one. I love it. And I love asking them questions and getting feedback.*

Her approach to public speaking is to connect and engage, not to talk at people. It’s a unique strength that allows her to build relationships on a large scale.

Our presence also has a significant impact on how effectively we navigate difficult conversations. Many of us find difficult conversations uncomfortable and our mental energy goes into preserving ourselves. We are more easily triggered and may say things in ways that can trigger the other person. When we’re

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present, we can manage our thinking and emotional state to help the conversation. Clive Peter described how he has tough conversations respectfully and honestly:

*Somebody once said to me that I had a conversation with him that was really difficult, but at the end of it, he didn't know whether he'd been hugged or pushed around. I try to have conversations that are honest and respectful, and I don't think that they need to be mutually exclusive no matter how tough the message is.*

He demonstrates honesty and respect by listening, playing back what he has heard and sharing his views clearly, explaining his logic and what is important and why. He is conscious of speaking in short sentences and speaks less so that the other person has opportunities to share their view. Clive doesn't shy away from acknowledging emotions either, as he believes that being authentic during difficult decisions and conversations is important.

Being present enables Quietly Powerful leaders to connect, build trust and understanding, listen deeply and have effective conversations.

### **Being purposeful**

Quietly Powerful leaders are often reluctant leaders. They don't set out to gain power and control, and they prefer not to seek attention. When they do, it's for a purpose that they care about. The Quietly Powerful leaders step up because they want to make a difference and fulfil the organisation's mission; something bigger than themselves.

In my interview with Angie Paskevicius, CEO and Executive Director at Holyoake, I asked her about her career and she replied, 'I never really aspired to leadership or to become a CEO'. Her journey into leadership was driven by her desire to make a difference and be of service, which was instilled in her by her mother, who tirelessly volunteered to support people in fundraising. She

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also learned from her Lithuanian father – who came to Australia with nothing in his twenties – to persist in the face of adversity and strive to be the best that you can be.

She began her career as a speech pathologist because she wanted to help people with disabilities. She found herself leading speech pathology departments and then moving into general management roles. She then took an opportunity to lead a new start-up not-for-profit organisation and became the first CEO.

What keeps her grounded and committed to leadership in the not-for-profit sector includes her own experience of financial hardship, exposure to mental health issues, knowledge of homelessness, drug and alcohol issues and her earlier experiences of working with people with disabilities. Her empathy for people who find themselves in difficult life circumstances drives her willingness to lead. She described her leadership style in the context of having a clear purpose:

*I'm a very calm leader. In fact, I'm an introvert. I know how to be an extrovert on the continuum. I can do all the things that I need to do as a CEO, but I do need time to recharge my batteries from time to time. I think what really drives my leadership style is that I'm very clear about who I am and what my purpose is and my 'why'. I'm very approachable, and I genuinely care about people. And I think that comes through in my leadership style.*

Steve Hodgkinson and his team at the Victorian DHHS have won many awards in recent years. What stands out is his ability to give credit to his team. An example of this is in one of his LinkedIn posts:

*The Victorian DHHS is #2 in the Australian 2018 #CRIO50 Awards for ICT teams... cool! Up from #7 last year. This is all due to the excellent #DHHS technology leadership team: Fiona Sparks, Ray Baird, John Henderson, David Stephens, Liz Hughes also Marianne Walker and Jodie Quilliam and the many collaborative executives and staff across the department... and our*

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*partners Cenitex, Microsoft, Salesforce, CNI and many others.  
Thank you.*

He then congratulated the other CIOs who were in the top 10. His focus is very much on the team and others, even though it was clearly an award for him, the CIO.

Steve also proudly told me that he successfully nominated two members of his leadership team for the Queen's Birthday Honours Public Service Medals – Jodie Quilliam in 2018 and Ray Baird in 2019 – unprecedented for technology roles in the public sector. He loves creating opportunities for his team to flourish and be recognised.

He is also a visible supporter of diversity and inclusion. After being named #2 in the CIO awards, he called out a lack of diversity; there was only one female CIO in the top 10 and nine in the top 50, saying, 'we all have more work to do.' His team also won the 2018 TechDiversity champion award for the RISE at DHHS program to create employment opportunities for people with autism. His sponsorship and support is making a difference.

Steve Hodgkinson extends his effort to inclusive activities, which involve actively communicating with people in the team. His team ran a branch meeting called 'You can't ask that!' where he and his directors agreed to answer anonymously submitted questions from staff. This was a powerful example of transparent communication and fearlessness to listen and be challenged, where the leaders ended up receiving positive feedback from staff.

The Quietly Powerful thought leaders and experts put themselves out in the public eye, even if they feel uncomfortable, because they want to help others with their message. Interestingly, many of these leaders now not only enjoy public speaking, they say they love it. Something seems to happen when our discomfort from being the centre of attention is overtaken by our passion to share our insights to help others.

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Lisa Evans, who started her career as a neonatal intensive care specialist, overcame major challenges when she lost her hearing from a virus. In retraining her brain to hear in a different way, she became interested in public speaking, which led her to doing what she does now – empowering people to speak and tell their stories on stage. She said that she is still shy but she shines on stage because of the pleasure she gets from making a difference to people. She said:

*I'm known as The Story Midwife, which is a tagline that one of my clients gave me. Even though I do love being on stage, what I love more than that is to empower others to step up and be on stage and to help them bring their stories into the world. It just gives me so much joy seeing others who may not have had the courage or skill to do so be able to step up and share their stories.*

When Dr Jenny Brockis decided to share her thought leadership on brain health, she left her general medical practice where she felt comfortable building safety and trust in her one-on-one or small group consultations. Her mission to help people with their brain health meant that she had to speak to large groups and learn new ways to engage and be heard. She said:

*This was such a steep learning curve, but because I passionately believed the messages I had to share were important, I knew I had to move from speaking one-to-one to many. As scary as that was for a natural introvert, by staying true to my message and understanding this [wasn't] about me and all about helping others to achieve greater success and happiness, this made the prospect of stepping onto a stage slightly less terrifying.*

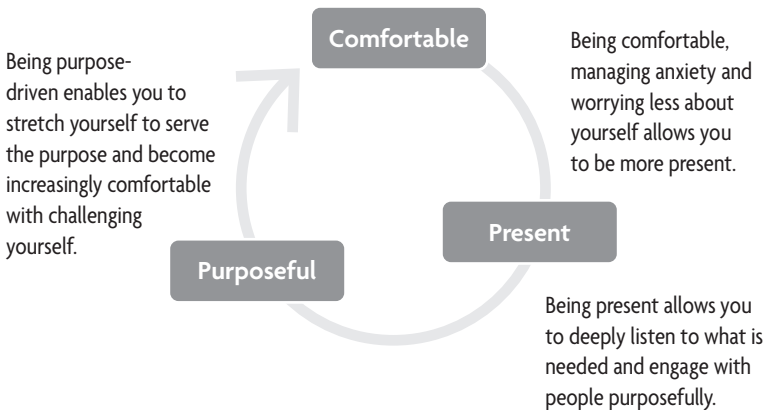
When you are purpose-driven, it allows you to persist in the face of difficulties and to do things that may be outside your comfort zone. It's a powerful trait of any leader and is one that shines brightly in Quietly Powerful leaders.

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The three key attributes of Quietly Powerful leaders are mutually reinforcing. Being comfortable in ourselves allows us to be more present with others, as we worry less about ourselves. Being present allows us to serve a purpose, to focus on others, the work, the team or the cause. Being purposeful allows us to stretch ourselves, potentially gain additional skills and behaviours and still be comfortable with who we are.

### *Mutually reinforcing attributes of Quietly Powerful leaders*



What makes these leaders powerful?

- **They step into leadership roles for a bigger purpose than themselves.** They wouldn't have done so unless there was a compelling reason for them to step up. Their interest in the collective – the team, organisation or purpose – is stronger than their self-interest. They tend to demonstrate servant leadership as a result.
- **They don't develop a sense of entitlement or self-importance;** they remain humble and aren't 'poisoned' by power – thinking that they are better than others. They haven't lost empathy for others; they have an ability to listen and show respect to



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everyone regardless of rank and position. Humble leadership comes naturally to them.

- **They develop their own style of leadership.** As they don't step into leadership roles to impress or to gain power for power's sake, it's important for them to feel authentic. They work on identifying and nurturing their own style of leadership.
- **They're committed to their own development.** Sometimes they are reluctant leaders because they know that they're missing some skills, such as public speaking. Because they're aware of this, they're committed to developing these skills and often excel in them after practice.
- **They look for opportunities to develop others,** as they know how much they've benefited from having mentors and supporters. Some have kept in touch with mentees for decades. They support and develop others not out of a sense of obligation but out of the joy of seeing others succeed. They tend to be development-focused leaders.
- **They are inclusive and lift others up.** They promote their team's work, the organisation and people they serve more than themselves. They are truly inclusive because they involve a variety of people who can contribute to the work, regardless of seniority, background or style.