



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

S E R I E S

# THE SUMMARY OF MAKING ROOM FOR LEADERSHIP

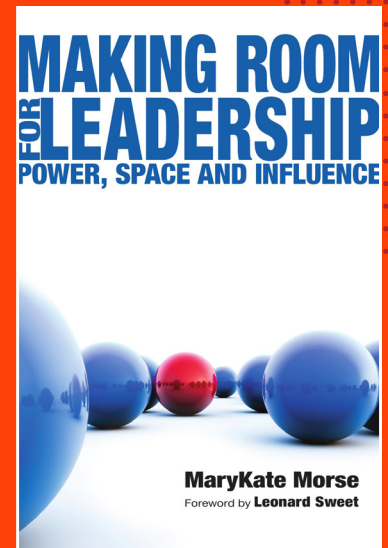
By MaryKate Morse  
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### Introduction: A Leadership Journey

A sandbox is a simple thing: a box with four sides, filled with sand. Kids don't need instructions. They instinctively plunge into it and create a miniature world. Life can be like a sandbox, but too often someone stakes claim, knocking others out and stomping on creativity. There's a cosmic sorting process, like the Sorting Hat in Harry Potter: "You, go to the middle. Go crazy! Have fun! ... You, off to the side. Be good and don't make any waves." Our bodies carry the message of power—who gets to play and who doesn't.

This book is about unpacking the message our bodies send as we play together in the grown-up's sandbox. It asks, "What is my body telling others? How can I become a player? If I'm already a player, how do I manage myself so that others are invited to play?" The story of Jesus and a sinful woman in Luke 7:36–50 taught me how power, used well, can lift people up—or crush them.

I wrote this out of my own leadership struggles, from feeling powerless to sometimes taking up too much space. "There is no free



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space. Get out of the corner, into the game,” my counselor used to say. My frustration with leaders who seemed oblivious to how they used their bodies to assert power plays drove me to study how power is group-made. Power is constituted between persons in a group through myriads of little body cues and instinctual decisions.

My hope is that by seeing and managing how we carry our power, we’ll use the group’s power and resources to be Christ’s light to a hurting world, making room for everyone in the sandbox.

1. Bodied Influence: Leadership and the Body

Several years ago, Ben—a young representative on a senior-level board—attended a special meeting that kept haunting him. After hours of creative problem-solving, everyone felt good about their decision. But during a coffee break, a popular pastor rushed in. As soon as the pastor was seated, the group changed their decision to correspond to the view of the come-late pastor. Ben was astonished. What had just happened?

I’ve experienced this too. I greeted an eminent statesman who leaned in close and declared, “I am the speaker. You are a workshop presenter,” then walked away. I felt like a scraggly hen in the chicken coop. Both he and the pastor took up space; everyone deferred to their presence.

Leadership means influence—thousands of little body postures, gestures, nuanced voices. Power is constituted between persons in a group when others grant the social space. Jesus demonstrated true leadership by coming in the flesh. He didn’t assume earthly power titles. Instead, he took on the form of a servant. The New Testament calls us Christ’s body, with Jesus as head—organically linked, each member responsible to steward influence.

Here are some questions to ask yourself:

- 1. When have you felt dismissed by a person of power?
- 2. In what ways have you used your body to assert authority over someone else?
- 3. What does it mean for your church or organization to be the kingdom of God?
- 4. How do you differentiate between personal agendas and the influence of Christ?
- 5. How does being a member of the body of Christ affect roles and responsibilities in a group?

2. Holding the Dynamite: The Ethics of Power

Mark, a youth pastor, sat on a church’s search committee, finalizing their choice of senior pastor. Everyone except Mark and Bess, the secretary, favored Jim, who only wanted to preach and counsel in his office. Mark worried Jim craved total control; Bess felt snubbed by him. Yet both were overruled. As Mark later lamented, “It was like I wasn’t even there.” Jim ended up abruptly firing Mark, belittling Bess, and driving church attendance from 700 to 230 before he was finally dismissed.

Eileen felt even more powerless. She told of a wealthy, church-elder husband who beat her. Seeking help from her pastor, she was told to submit more. After he divorced her for alleged infidelity, she lost her home and children. At her new job, a staff leader stalked, then raped her, and she again received blame. Eileen felt stripped of her voice and dignity.

Many Christians love God’s power but shun human power, equating it with corruption. However, God designed us to have dominion, to nurture and steward creation. Power is the ability to cause or prevent



change. In healthy settings, people use power positively. But, as Mark, Bess, and Eileen discovered, power can also easily oppress those with less status.

Social psychologists identify four types of power: expert (special skill), character (earned trust), role (positional authority), and culture (what a society values). Each of these can bless or harm.

Jesus models the redemptive use of power. He was reviled but didn't retaliate, and humbly served others as both Savior and servant. He influenced others toward God's purposes, showing how human and divine power can intersect redemptively.

**3. Simon and the Sinner Woman: Jesus' Use of Power**

Jesus had all four social powers. He was noted for his expertise with the Scriptures and for meeting antagonists with logic, parables and probing questions. He was known for his righteousness, which gave him character power. At Jesus' trial, Pilate could find no reason to charge him. As a prophet, sage and healer, people flocked to hear his teachings and be touched by his power. Wherever Jesus traveled, he used his power to catalyze a reformation of hospitality, outsiders, the interpretation of the law, economic systems and religious practices.

The Pharisees also had all four categories of power. But they used their power to maintain the current religious and social systems, reinforcing their status and authority. In conflict situations, the true color of one's social power emerges. Luke 7:36-50 illustrates this vividly.

Jesus was invited to the house of Simon the Pharisee, but Simon omitted the usual hospitalities of greeting with a kiss, washing of the feet and anointing with oil. A woman described as "a sinner" came, bringing an alabaster jar of ointment. She stood be-

hind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears, drying them with her hair and anointing them. Simon silently judged Jesus. In response, Jesus told a parable of two debtors, leading Simon to see that the one forgiven more would love more. Jesus then declared the woman's sins forgiven, saying, "She has shown great love."

This story reveals the audaciousness of the sinner woman's loving act and Jesus' redemptive use of power. While Simon used his power to preserve his own status, Jesus used his considerable power to restore the woman's identity and challenge Simon's self-righteousness.

**4. The Epicenter: How Leaders Take Up Space**

James and Bennett attended a Holiness Bible college that taught the second blessing—complete submission to the Holy Spirit—aiming to result in a life free of sin. Their professors were warm and passionate people who urged students to believe in Holiness living. Elected as student representatives on the faculty committee, James and Bennett anticipated mentoring and open dialogue. But during their very first meeting, an Old Testament professor and a systematic theology professor erupted into a heated conflict over curriculum changes, hurling personal jabs. The meeting abruptly ended and left James and Bennett troubled by the disconnect between the professors' classroom teaching and their actual behavior in the meeting room.

Sam owned a successful house-painting company and served as an elder at a large church. The pastor sought his input, but Sam's employees whispered about his dishonest business practices. He began staff meetings with prayer yet routinely cut corners and lied to customers, confirming his workers' suspicions that "faith doesn't really change people."





Despite having Christ in us, we see through a glass, darkly. Sometimes leaders are blind to their own hypocrisy. Jesus told the Pharisees, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains” (Jn 9:41).

Our bodies shape social settings. Researchers like Edward Hall identified four space zones: public, social, personal, and intimate. In social space—like meetings—one’s true character and use of power become visible.

In these smaller “epicenters,” leaders can’t hide behind public personas. James and Bennett saw the faculty’s inner conflict; Sam’s employees saw his duplicity. Real integrity is measured by how leaders occupy these close quarters, not just by their public words.

5. The “It” Factor: Power in Presence

“On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!’” (Mark 6:2)

Princess Diana was one of those women who had a presence—the “it” factor. “You couldn’t help but stare,” people said. Some call it “gravitas,” from the Latin word meaning “heavy,” referring to an appearance of dignity or authority. Bill Clinton is tall, intelligent and outgoing, and when he walks into a room, everyone knows he’s got it. On the other end is the invisible person—like Mr. Cellophane from the Broadway show Chicago, who laments, “You can look right through me ... and never know I’m there.”

At Grace Community Church, Jason and Frank represented these extremes. People waited for Jason before starting meetings; they sought out his thoughts, and he wrestled with pride. Frank, by con-

trast, was often overlooked; he felt unused and undervalued. Both wondered how to lead like Jesus—who had all the attention yet used it for good.

Presence is the visual manifestation of power carried in the body that has an influencing effect on others in social settings. Some aspects are fixed, like gender or age, and some are fluid, like education or confidence. Presence is neutral and can be used wisely or not. Charisma is presence at full throttle, but lacking it doesn’t prevent a person from following Jesus’ model.

A superintendent, five feet three inches tall and laid-back, led his denomination through major changes with a non-threatening presence. “He loves the people,” one pastor said, “and he’s centered in Christ.” In this way, he used presence to guide others, proving that genuine influence depends on how we manage our “it” factor.

6. The Law of the Jungle: Visual Marks of Presence

We have an innate survival instinct that helps us distinguish the mighty and the meek. In the jungle, the lion is unequaled. He is the king, and he is feared. Our bodies, too, communicate mightiness or meekness. Sir Richard Branson demonstrated this on his Rebel Billionaire show by dressing as a disheveled taxi driver: most contestants ignored him, never guessing he was the powerful billionaire they hoped to impress.

First impressions are powerful. Our presence matters when we walk into a room. Christians, who believe what’s on the inside matters eternally, still face the reality that people make decisions based on physical presentation. This chapter doesn’t offer dress for success tips. Rather, it highlights the importance of awareness so we can steward our power responsibly.

Presence is a complicated package of the tangibles



and intangibles we carry in our bodies. It includes “visuals” (like gender, age, race, dress, physical features) and “viscerals” (the inner qualities that influence how others perceive us). Mother Teresa—barely five feet tall, wearing a simple habit—had enormous presence through her sacrificial work. Jesus was an ordinary man with little social status, yet people followed him in crowds.

Typical Western markers of “more presence” are extroversion, certain ages, good looks, wealth, higher education, versus “less presence” which are introversion, old age, ordinary appearance, lower economic status, little education. Culture affects how we perceive status. We typically value youth, tallness, and good looks, and often give more leadership roles to the married or those with higher education. Role authority also commands attention: The pastor gets more attention than the usher.

The apostle Paul recognized these outward markers yet said his true confidence was in Christ. Visual cues are powerful, but they are not meant to determine whether someone should be given power. Instead, understanding them helps us see how presence—and the power it brings—can benefit the kingdom of God.

## 7. Second Impressions: Visceral Marks of Presence

Before a recent conference, I reviewed the attendees’ bios and formed quick judgments based on their credentials and theology. However, when we were doing a small-group exercise, I was paired with someone I’d initially dismissed, yet her story completely changed my impression. These “second impressions,” or viscerals, can confirm, enhance or reduce the space we grant someone to influence us.

The visuals (like age, gender, race) create first impressions. But viscerals—our demeanor, emotional tone, and sense of purpose—form second impressions.

For instance, someone with humble outward markers can have strong internal qualities, like Mother Teresa, whose simple attire belied her powerful character.

### Here are a few important visceral markers:

- 1. **Focus** – Having a clear purpose, direction or calling.
- 2. **Risk** – Willingness to take bold steps, whether planting a new church or speaking truth to power.
- 3. **Attitude** – Optimism and hopefulness can energize a group, whereas cynicism or depression stifle it.
- 4. **Boundaries** – Healthy boundaries (knowing when to rest and when to say no) convey stability. Overcommitment or fuzzy personal limits show scattered energy.
- 5. **Social Interaction** – Basic skills like greeting people or reading social cues can build trust. Eye contact and body position convey presence; appropriate touch can establish a connection.

Leaders with “dark side” traits—narcissism, histrionics, rebellion, or authoritarianism—often take up considerable social space in negative ways. Others with overly submissive or passive stances shrink from participating. Both extremes can undermine a group’s health.

Emotional and spiritual health plays out in how people use these visceral qualities. If a group sees Christ-like integrity and self-awareness, they offer the leader more space to influence. Conversely, dysfunctional behaviors or toxic motives result in less trust in the leader and reduced credibility.

Awareness of visceral markers protects against unfair assumptions. When we recognize how presence is formed internally and perceived externally, each

member of the body can steward their power to benefit the whole—just as Jesus modeled.

8. Bean-Counting Social Space: The Economics of Power

When we walk into a room, the visuals and viscerals of our presence are quickly calculated. This “bean-counting” happens as groups decide who deserves influence or not. Power is a resource we steward, as vital as money or land. The Bible is filled with teachings on stewardship, and the principle extends to immaterial resources like power.

Dr. Leighton Ford exemplifies wise stewardship. Tall, handsome, and socially adept, he once served with Billy Graham and chaired the Lausanne Committee. Yet Dr. Ford now spends his time mentoring small groups, using his stature and connections to highlight others. Meeting him, I expected an assistant to pick me up, but he did it himself. Later, he publicly affirmed me to young leaders, anointing my gifts and increasing my influence. He used his power to benefit others, much like Jesus did.

In contrast, another influential figure—a glamorous, bestselling conservative author—uses her platform to aggressively attack opponents. This exemplifies a Western unlimited-goods approach, where power is seen as personally earned and freely wielded to push one’s own agenda.

First-century Palestine viewed resources as limited. Honor and social space were not infinite. If you gained, someone else lost. Jesus confronted that system’s abuses, welcoming outsiders, affirming the marginalized, and modeling “inclusive hospitality.” We have a similar choice: treat power as a “limited good” used to invite others in, or adopt an “unlimited” mindset where we assume endless personal entitlements.

A social setting is bounded; not everyone can hold center stage. Stewarding power means asking: Who’s being included or excluded? If power is shared, the entire body grows. Jesus deployed his presence by calling people close, even healing them with a touch. Leaders who do likewise—like Dr. Ford—mirror Christ’s economy of grace rather than a consumerist one.

Recognizing power as a group resource frees us to serve rather than dominate. When those with influence steward it for God’s purposes, everyone gains.

9. Space-Taking and Space-Hiding: Using Power Well

Power in social space varies among leaders: some people absorb lots of space like sponges, while others shrink into little influence like shadows. Sponges often appear to be servant leaders but can sometimes be absorbed in their own agendas, unaware of how they block out others. Shadows see themselves as humble, yet they rarely engage, leaving their gifts unused.

Jake, an associate pastor, felt invisible in meetings. He felt that their volunteers were burning out, but no one listened to him. After fifteen years of “toy soldier” status, Jake finally realized he couldn’t make an impact if he stayed in the shadows, just doing what he was told. True servant leadership requires gifts, calling, skills and passion laid down at Jesus’ feet, not silent compliance.

Carl served at a Friends church where an elderly member monopolized the open-worship time, speaking every Sunday for twenty minutes. Congregants complained, but no one confronted him for fifty-five years. The man insisted, “God wants me to talk,” and he was allowed to soak up all the space. This “shadow-think” kept everyone else quiet rather than risk conflict.



In another congregation, the pastor’s wife announced she had God’s revealed choice for the women’s group leader, overriding the actual nominations. The group felt they couldn’t argue with “God told me,” and thus God became the excuse for someone’s personal agenda. The real issue was unchecked power—no one wanted to pull back the curtain.

In any group, leaders who seize extra influence may become targets for projection (“Yes-people”) or rebellion. Healthy leaders create a safe space for their people where dissenting voices are heard. This requires them to have self-awareness and to invite others out of the corners.

In Luke 13:10–17, Jesus healed a woman bent over for eighteen years, bringing her into his space on the sabbath—shaming the synagogue leader’s rigid legalism. Jesus never acted like a sponge hoarding attention or like a shadow hiding away. He welcomed the marginalized into the center.

We are priests who carry Christ’s presence. If you’re a shadow, step forward; if you’re a sponge, share the spotlight. As players in God’s mission, we must steward power well, ensuring everyone can join the game.

10. Open Space: Managing Our Own Souls

Jesus’ ability to handle insults and engage in honor disputes flowed from an inner quiet. In chapter three, we saw that although Simon the Pharisee insulted Jesus by withholding basic hospitality, Jesus didn’t overreact or go off in a huff. He simply told a story that restored the sinner woman’s dignity. Such public interactions require ample time managing our own souls, emotions and minds beforehand. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “Be prepared in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2).

Emotional intelligence experts say great leaders spend serious time on self-leadership—managing

your ethics, character, principles, purpose, motivation, and conduct. Jesus modeled this by praying for forty days before beginning his ministry and spending hours in Gethsemane before the cross.

- **Open space for spiritual attentiveness.** We need time and space to be still and relinquish control to God. Whether outdoors or in a quiet corner, we let the Holy Spirit move in us at a deeper level.
- **Open space for emotional attentiveness.** Reflect on strong emotions—anger, anxiety, fear—by asking “why” until you uncover their root cause. One pastor realized his anxiety about firing a difficult leader stemmed from personal hurt and fatigue. Prayerful reflection refocused him on God’s mission.
- **Open space for rational attentiveness.** Leaders must carefully think through ideas. Fuzzy instincts aren’t enough when we’re dealing with complex decisions.

Jesus warned his disciples, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; be wise as serpents and innocent as doves” (Mt 10:16). Balancing a pure heart and a sharp mind is tough. Without creating open space, it’s difficult to remain connected to Christ while discerning pitfalls and power struggles. In that stillness, the Spirit motivates and guides us, so that we lead from a posture of Christlike hospitality.

11. Getting in the Sandbox: Practical Strategies

Power is constructed in social settings, and your presence shapes how people perceive your leadership. You can watch from the sidelines, or you can “play in the sandbox.” If you want to influence as Jesus did, you need practical ways to step into social space.

Michael, a big, laid-back pastor, hesitated to assert himself because he thought servant leadership meant hanging back. But after learning that presence and power can be used positively, he decided to manage meetings differently. He arranged the group in a casual circle, took a comfortable yet central seat, guided the discussion, and addressed negative behavior privately. “I felt free as a leader for the first time in my life,” he said.

Strategies

1. Seating

Where you sit matters; face key people or sit in a central position if you need to direct. Avoid always claiming the “head” seat unless necessary; a circle arrangement can foster shared leadership.

2. Body Language

Leaning forward, open gestures, and calm eye contact show confidence. Overly loud or stiff posture can intimidate. A relaxed, warm presence communicates readiness to serve.

3. Speaking

Know your audience. Initiate ideas at least once per meeting if you’re more introverted; avoid dominating if you’re more extroverted. Speak clearly, without disclaimers. Present your perspective or proposal succinctly, no more than three times, then let it go.

Use rational language, especially when emotions run high. Avoid question-like inflections (“It’s a good idea?”) that undermine authority.

4. Boundaries & Preparation

Don’t lose yourself when feelings of anger or anxiety arise; step back, pray, or table the topic. Respect others’ boundaries too: invite quieter members to speak.

Come prepared with facts, biblical support, and input from all who’d be impacted. Offer more than one option so others can engage creatively.

Jennifer, a creative arts director, faced strong opposition from Eric, who disliked her interpretive dance ministry. She anticipated his objections, stood confidently to present her plan, and showed how it aligned with the church’s mission. Eric ended up removing his objections.

Using these practical steps doesn’t guarantee success, but thoughtfulness about our influence matters because the kingdom of God matters. Whenever you enter difficult spaces, let it become “sacred space,” praying, “Lord, with you and like you, in this space I serve.”

12. The Guardians: Overseeing a Leader’s Use of Power

A missionary named Anna witnessed pastors at her denominational gathering who skillfully used parliamentary rules to block a vote on women in ministry. Later, those same pastors lined up to serve Communion as “humble servants.” Anna found it “distressing,” realizing they’d misused their positional power.

Many Christian organizations lack a way to address power abuse. If a leader is “godly” and “successful,” we often ignore interpersonal damage. But misused power drives people away from faith. Stewarding power is as critical as doctrine or budget decisions.

Here are some things we can do to create a culture attuned to power:

- **Make It Mission-Critical at the Top.** Leaders must prioritize discussing and stewarding power.
- **Model It at the Top.** How leaders treat others—publicly and privately—must match the message.





- **Live It at the Bottom.** Empower voices from every level so that they can contribute meaningfully.
- **Use a Common Language.** Embed shared words and stories around power so that the whole group develops consistent norms.
- **Value Diversity.** Homogeneous teams can't easily see blind spots. A mix of gender, culture, and perspective offers clearer insight into power dynamics.
- **Promote Equitably.** Provide opportunities for those with leadership gifts, even if they fall outside the "usual" type.
- **Share Decision-Making.** Involve those impacted by decisions—like a volunteer who unexpectedly gives his pastor vital guidance.
- **Provide supportive supervision and 360-degree feedback.** Leaders have to hear peers, subordinates, and even those they serve. Feedback sheds light on how presence and past wounds shape actions.

Denominational heads, boards, and executive leaders act as guardians of healthy power usage. They foster honest dialogue, diversity, feedback, and an environment where love isn't corrupted by pride or turf-protection. With Christlike openness, they protect the fragile ecosystem of the church, ensuring the Holy Spirit's power flows freely—unhindered by pig-headed stubbornness or insecure leaders.

## Conclusion: One Leader Makes Room

While honoring Steven Spielberg at the Kennedy Center on December 26, 2006, Liam Neeson said that when Spielberg was asked, "Which is your favorite ending?" he replied, "Hope."

Reading inspiring books and truly transforming our daily lives can feel like a deep chasm. It's not hard to read, reflect, and imagine a better way, but integrating ideas into our coffee-and-commute reality is tough. Under the Spirit's guidance, we can decide something matters and then move toward it step by step. Influencing like Jesus begins with choosing to use power redemptively.

Chris encountered a power struggle in his second church plant, recalling the confusion of his first attempt. He'd joined two seasoned pastors, Al and Jake, and quickly discovered his power quotient was low. When Chris tried to speak up, he was often ignored or overruled. Eventually, he left that church to plant another, vowing to keep relationships with Christ at the center. But again, he found himself at odds—now he was labeled the overbearing one, always in conflict.

Feeling defeated, Chris retreated to Montana for two weeks of prayer and rest. Lying in a wildflower meadow each day, he confessed his shame and anger and offered himself to God. Slowly, clarity emerged. He realized he possessed significant presence and had failed to address it openly with his team. He wanted them all—himself included—to admit their darkness and steward their power for the mission of their faith community.

He resolved to discuss hidden tensions and create space for peace, re-creation, dignity, and the Spirit's fruits. He outlined practical ideas: a personal and group "power audit," short reflections after each meeting—"Did this draw us closer to Christ?"—and new language signals like "I'm in lion mode" or "Are you in the shadows?"

All leaders who love Jesus want to serve Him faithfully. But leadership is complex, and we often fail, hurting ourselves and others. Still, we can't give up. We need leaders everywhere, and learning to use power





well—second only to maintaining our walk with God—is transformative. God has placed us in this giant sandbox with bodies that express our inner life. Through Christ’s Spirit, we can do greater works than we ever imagined, bringing hope to every space we occupy.

