

# Leading with Gravitas

Unlock the  
six keys to impact  
and influence



Antoinette  
Dale Henderson

## **Praise for *Leading with Gravitas***

Gravitas is the all-important but often elusive factor that we all seek to have. In writing this book, Antoinette Dale Henderson has, for the first time, given us an incredibly practical way to access it. Gravitas is an essential quality for success in business and in *Leading With Gravitas* it is possible to fully examine in detail and properly understand the different dimensions within it. Unlike other books on the subject, the analytical approach outlined, which is based on real life experiences from a broad range of leaders, allows the reader to gain a clear understanding of the vital components and not only how they currently perform against them but also what they can actually do to improve. This book is a must read for emerging leaders who are looking to increase their personal impact. For experienced leaders, its fresh perspective provides the opportunity to revisit and even challenge what may be otherwise taken for granted in this crucial but often evasive business skill.

Sarah Matthew, Joint CEO, Virgo Health & Joint MD,  
Global Healthcare Practice, Golin

I admire the work and the study that Antoinette Dale Henderson has put into getting this important topic out into the world in the form that she has. There is no doubt that gravitas is needed in abundance right now and the good news is that it can be learnt. And Antoinette offers us simple and practical ways of learning it. Her background research is admirable and the logical way in which she presents this makes it easily accessible and available to anyone. I encourage you to read this and to take the learning she offers on board.

Sue Knight, author of *NLP At Work*

In today's fast paced life we often overlook the basics of what being a good leader is. This book provides a holistic and digestible approach on how to be an effective leader. A structured and valuable framework for young and seasoned leaders to gain insight into and continuously improve their verbal and non-verbal communication styles. A must read with good reference material you will come back to over and over again.

Mobina Salahuddin, Senior Manager, Deloitte UK

*Leading with Gravitas* is a wonderful resource for getting on in life. Few of us are born with the qualities needed to inspire others but as Antoinette Dale Henderson shows in her book many of these qualities can be acquired. *Leading With Gravitas* provides a well researched framework for self-assessment and action informed by the latest developments in psychology, contemporary case studies and lessons from the ancients. If you are on a quest to fulfil your potential by harnessing what you have to offer more effectively this book will give you the practical tools to realise your goals.

Margot James, Member of Parliament for Stourbridge, UK

Antoinette Dale Henderson demonstrates that she really understands the essence of gravitas and what it can mean for you and particularly for your business or career. Many writers have shared stories about leaders with gravitas, but she goes way beyond that. Her book gives you a simple yet comprehensive and flexible framework to develop your own gravitas to give you greater impact and influence.

Dave Clarke, CEO, NRG Business Networks

A very pragmatic and insightful read. This will be very helpful to a broad senior management segment who are looking to move into senior leadership roles.

Shrey Viranna, CEO, Discovery Health

Gravitas is a trait that is hard to define — someone's got it or they haven't. But that doesn't help a person to self-develop professionally and personally. This book provides a vocabulary, a methodology, tools and exercises to help recognise and cultivate these aspects in yourself, without helping you to 'fake it'. The real person stories lend great insights into how people from a range of sectors have overcome challenges. It could be especially helpful for Millennial emerging leaders and rising stars who may need to build their confidence to try new things. I especially liked the chapter on Authenticity. We're not automatic conformists at the workplace. Encouraging leaders to embrace their passion and individuality is so important.

Brian Tjugum, Global Director, Health Impact at Weber Shandwick

Gravitas. Everybody wants it, few know how to get it. This is the very first time that I have seen that all-important quality broken down into meaningful components, combined with practical exercises to strengthen it in us all. A must read for anyone serious about making an impact!

Kelly Teasdale, Director, Global Brand Communications

*Leading With Gravitas* is an insightful read. It pushes all the right buttons on topics that will be equally useful in day to day life as within the working environment. Working in a position of leadership can often be a daunting and isolating experience. This book helps the reader grasp the tools necessary to unravel the code of great leadership.

Luke Dale Roberts, Chef and Entrepreneur

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*To Zoë and Mia, with all my love,  
admiration and gratitude.*

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# Preface

*'I want to be all that I am  
capable of becoming.'*

• Katherine Mansfield •

In over 25 years of working in communications I've observed that it's leaders who articulate their message with clarity and confidence that make the most impact over the longest term. In times of change, what people are looking for is a leader with vision and integrity, someone who commands respect while being themselves, a voice that's heard without shouting; in short, a leader with gravitas.

Gravitas is important for anyone who wants to present a professional image at whatever stage in their career. It's crucial for planned occasions – delivering presentations, negotiating deals, getting promoted – but is just as essential day to day – leading teams, meeting new clients, or networking. Developing gravitas is particularly important for leaders, as it enables them to inspire others through their personal qualities and stand out from the crowd without being fake or compromising their values or beliefs.

It is rare for people to be born with this ability. If you think of the world's most memorable leaders, few were natural communicators. Most of them earned their right to speech through a process of self-discovery and time spent honing their delivery. Winston Churchill described himself at the early part of his career as having a speech impediment which he worked hard to overcome. Margaret Thatcher hired a voice coach who taught



her how to speak more slowly, and took advice from Laurence Olivier, who encouraged her to project more personality into her speeches.<sup>1</sup>

Most of us have, at some point, experienced the challenge of not being able to express ourselves effectively. The heart-sinking moment of knowing that we didn't quite do ourselves justice. Or that annoying feeling when the point you've just made is brushed aside, only to be fervently agreed with when made by someone else.

It may be that you have experienced some of the challenges faced by the managers and leaders who have come to me for coaching in recent years.

John: As CEO of a software company one of my main roles is delivering motivational presentations to the team. Although I am proud of my achievements I have always had a nagging voice in my head telling me that I haven't truly earned the right to my position. When I stand up and present, in the back of my mind I have an irrational fear that someone will find me out and make a fool of me in front of the whole company. I suspect that, because of my weak delivery, my team don't see me as the strong leader I know I can be.

Melissa: I am a Director in a global communications agency. I have been told that to be promoted to the next level I need to increase my gravitas and personal profile. I have no idea what gravitas is, whether it can be learnt, and if so, what I need to do to develop it. I know that to get promoted I will need to stand out from my peers.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/margaret-thatcher/8999746/How-Maggie-Thatcher-was-remade.html>

Melissa : However, I feel uncomfortable taking on what feels like a superior role to my colleagues, and don't want to come across as pushy, fake or arrogant.

Simon : Simon: I was recently interviewed for a position in a company I have admired for years. Although on paper I was more than qualified for the job I walked out knowing they would not invite me back. I was very nervous at the beginning of the interview. They asked me a question and my mind went blank. I then rambled on for what felt like hours. If only I could have relaxed, got my message straight, they would have seen the real me, and I'm sure I would have gone through to the next stage.

**What united these people was a desire to fulfil their potential, a drive to step fully into their role of leader. What they all had in common was a need for inner confidence and the ability to communicate their message with impact.**

Gravitas is a topic that's been close to my heart for many years. During my career in communications we'd refer to it as though it were a passport to senior positions. Through my work in leadership development and executive coaching, it's become more and more pertinent as people feel the pressure to step up, be taken seriously, and respond to demands to deliver faster results earlier in their career.

Gravitas is traditionally associated with statesmanlike qualities. Classic examples are silver-haired men with the wisdom of age and the senior positions to go with it. Like a fine wine, their gravitas has matured over time. However, in today's competitive and fast-paced environment people are expected to display it at a younger age. There's no time to simply allow it to develop.

I have written this book to demystify gravitas, maximise its potential as a leadership skill and accelerate its development. My

goal is to provide you with the tools to uncover your own gravitas, find your unique voice, and develop the strength to lead in whatever situation you find yourself.

As part of my research I've interviewed and modelled leaders from diverse backgrounds and cultures to define what gravitas represents today. From this, I've created a model that makes the intangible nature of gravitas tangible, uniting six qualities which together convey a strong and powerful version of you.

Throughout this book we will explore what gravitas means for today's leaders and how they use their individuality to make a lasting impression. We'll consider people who break the traditional silver-haired model of gravitas, people who inspire confidence and command respect by revealing their authentic personalities. Most importantly, we'll look at what you can do to define your own gravitas and leadership style.

At this point, I'd like to highlight that to get the most out of this book, you will need to put the work in. I encourage you to not only read the chapters, but also apply the tools and techniques and seek feedback on your progress. Although it will not be possible, or advisable, for you to take everything on board at once, I have found through the *Leading with Gravitas* programme that it is the people who immerse themselves and go beyond their comfort zone who go the furthest, fastest. I encourage you to do the same.

I wish you all the best in reading this book and applying the learning to your career and personal development. I look forward to hearing how building gravitas has helped you be the leader you were born to be, and achieve your purpose in your organisation and in life.

Antoinette Dale Henderson

*Further information on the Leading with Gravitas programme, the Gravitas Profiling Questionnaire© and other useful resources can be found on the Leading with Gravitas website [www.leadingwithgravitas.com](http://www.leadingwithgravitas.com)*

## Understanding Gravitas

The word 'gravitas' has its roots in ancient Rome and was one of the virtues that Romans were expected to possess to fulfil their role in society, along with pietas, dignitas and virtus<sup>2</sup>. Gravitas is translated as weight, seriousness, solemnity, dignity and importance. It denotes a certain substance or depth of personality that elicits a feeling of respect and trust in others. The word is also linked to 'gravity', a centrifugal force that keeps you grounded and 'gravitate', an energy that attracts people to you.

In today's work environment it's not enough to rely on authority or title to lead others. What is required is an ability to communicate, collaborate, influence and develop meaningful relationships. Building gravitas enables leaders like you to command respect and increase their personal visibility. People with gravitas lead better, present better, communicate better and network better. In a competitive environment, leaders who know how to access this quality build stronger relationships, win more business, get promoted more quickly and get better results.

In researching this book, I examined the characteristics that leaders with gravitas share in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, characteristics that you can emulate if you are looking to develop your leadership style.

One of the first things I realised is that gravitas is defined not by how you see yourself, but by the perception of the people around you – your audiences – and so it is within their gift to bestow. However, although gravitas, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder, the good news is that the extent to which people see gravitas in you *is* within your power to determine. If you feel worthy of people's attention and respect, you will be more likely to receive it.

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<sup>2</sup> Pietas: translated as duty, loyalty and devotion; Dignitas: dignity, prestige and charisma; Virtus: valour, courage and worth.

As part of my research I found that there is no ‘one size fits all’ model of gravitas; that it encapsulates a multifaceted array of qualities and that people tend to value the qualities that they see, or would like to see, in themselves.

In examining people with gravitas I also found that some develop it over time and others have it naturally. Compare, for example, two employees at a City law firm, one of whom has gravitas with polish – impressive credentials and a powerful ability to command attention – and the other, who has none of the trappings, but an inherent ability to state the facts persuasively and with impact. Both have gravitas, both express it in very different ways.

At a fundamental level a leader with gravitas has spent time exploring who they are, and their unique purpose and direction in their organisation and life. Whether corporate or community leader, entrepreneur or business owner, they look beyond their immediate horizon to the world on a wider scale, and are willing to make a contribution that is beyond personal gain, working towards what they believe in without getting carried away by their own personal agenda. At the heart of gravitas is a sense of purpose.

In addition to possessing strong foundations, a leader with gravitas has the ability to communicate with conviction, earning admiration through their actions, words and ability to listen. This conviction gives them a certainty which inspires others: they know what they are there to achieve, their line of sight is focused on a compelling future and, as such, they ‘walk their talk’. For them, gravitas reflects who they are on the inside, rather than how they think they should be to fit in. They share the belief of the late Steve Jobs who urged: ‘Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life.’