

A Tool Box for Authentic Leadership

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I would like to dispel a myth and expose a great deception occurring in our country, both in businesses and government. What looks like power is often not authentic power! What we see in many leaders today is actually an artificial attempt to appear powerful. Many people today are masquerading as leaders, when in fact; they are operating from insecurity and fear. Sometimes it is helpful to understand authentic power by looking at what is not power. The traits of artificial power are:

- A need for external props to validate a powerful image.
- Decision making that benefits a few at the top rather than all people.
- Arrogance and grandiosity.
- Lack of compassion and understanding for others.
- One-upmanship or overcoming other people.
- A need to be right and have all the answers.

The workplace today is uncertain at best and too often permeated with insecurity, power struggles, ego drama, gossip, discrimination and fear. A survey by The Conference Board found that 51% of employees are dissatisfied. As the economy has continued to flounder, I believe that percentage has increased. Other research indicates that people who are unhappy at work don't work productively or creatively, don't refer business, and don't provide good customer service. In addition, dissatisfied employees are not loyal, leading to high turnover.

A huge unrecognized cost occurs when leadership does not operate from authentic power. Providing a healthy, emotionally satisfying workplace environment is good business. Employees who are honored and respected operate with integrity, creativity and commitment. My audiences all over the country, from all industries, and at all levels describe the lack of integrity, honesty, respect and compassion occurring in their workplace. The problem is critical and people are crying out for a change. That energy drain on human potential hits the bottom line.

Authentic leadership cannot be feigned or contrived. The very essence of authentic leadership is that it is genuine. You cannot fake authenticity. If you look at the traits possessed by great leaders who span the test of time, you will see they have the qualities that are quite different from the artificial leaders. Here is a toolbox for leaders who want to be truly great leaders and also achieve powerful levels of success:

- 1. Honor the spirit in yourself and that same spiritual essence in those you lead.**

A true leader recognizes the inherent power in those they lead. When leaders believe they are superior or special, they have fallen into a trap of the ego. Respecting the soul of each individual is a fundamental principle of authentic leadership. Seeing the equity in all people with unique and various talents is the cornerstone of powerful leadership. Understanding that each person is part of a synergistic whole is the basis of teamwork and cooperation. Authentic leaders know that all people are equal and they, therefore, operate from a genuine level of humility.

2. Give up the need for external validation and accolades.

Too often business owners and managers are more interested in drawing attention to themselves and their accomplishments than those they are leading. This most surely comes from insecurity and a need to bolster their own ego at the expense of their employees. At a recent workshop that I conducted for a very successful company, the owner, founder and chairman of the board described how he discovered a magical formula early on in his career. He said he learned to never take credit for success or accomplishments of his company, and instead, always gave recognition to the managers and employees. When he did that, he said his financial success soared.

Unfortunately, I often see leaders of companies using dishonorable strategies to produce business and increase profits: i.e. high pressure marketing, slick campaigns, fear and intimidation with employees, tricky gimmicks that confuse customers, false claims, padding fees, etc. Long-lasting success will never be achieved by these methods, as Enron, Imclone, etc. have demonstrated to us so loudly.

3. Invite contribution and even criticism.

Most people actually want to do a good job at their workplace. Part of job satisfaction is the inner knowledge that one is contributing and making a difference. I have seen all kinds of ego-driven leaders squelch the enthusiasm of the employees by not listening to them or even discouraging feedback from employees.

The source of this arrogance is actually a lack of self worth. Often leaders are afraid someone will outperform them and show them up in the workplace. When they limit the contribution of the employees they inhibit the full potential and unlimited source of new ideas that would truly benefit the company.

Being defensive to new ideas or suggestions is the tell tale sign of artificial leaders. Their egos are so fragile that they cannot receive information without feeling it says something about them and their inadequacies. Ego-driven management is hurting employees but is also limiting the success of companies.

Receiving feedback and even criticism can lead to positive changes that will create greater success. Being able to be wrong and to be open to new and better ways to do things are characteristics of authentic leaders.

4. Delegate in the true spirit of recognizing the inherent abilities of others.

Delegating is not giving others duties that you don't want to do (or that are beneath you.) It is giving responsibility to others and then trusting their innate capacity to perform the tasks, not only as well as you, but perhaps even better than you. Consider the possibility that when you judge someone as less than you, that you are actually limiting their potential, especially if you hold a position of perceived power over them.

Teachers understand that what you expect is often what you get from students. Studies have shown that underachievers excelled when the teachers were told that the students were high achievers. The teachers, unconsciously expected better results from the students, and those students met their expectations.

5. Be courageous enough to practice self-reflection.

Self reflection is a process of following the inner path to one's deepest self. It means facing your own fears and weaknesses. It also means accepting yourself and having compassion and respect for your humanness. When you can accept your own inadequacies instead of denying or resisting them, you open the door to self-improvement. You are also able to feel compassion for others when you practice having compassion for your self.

Introspection leads to strength of character and gentleness of heart. Leading with integrity requires alignment with your inner soul. It means taking the high road even when it is difficult. Do you take the time to truly look within? Taking quiet time and small mental retreats with yourself can help expel negative energy and clarify your thinking. Great leaders take time to listen to the voice of their own inner counsel.

6. Be fully and completely responsible for your own actions and feelings.

People wear masks and play roles to hide their inner fears. The ego is like an actor, playing out an image that it believes is necessary to be safe. Fearing exposure, people then use strategies such as blame to take the focus off themselves. Lack of acceptance and feelings of unworthiness lurk beneath the surface of all ego strategies. Projecting and accusing others of wrong doing temporarily relieves the individual of pain but intensifies the drama in the workplace.

I have seen so called powerful leaders berate and humiliate others, often even throwing childish temper tantrums. This acting out is not only demoralizing for

employees; it inhibits everyone's inspiration, ingenuity, productivity and the company's success. Projection and claims of self-righteousness are the biggest problems in organizations. When leaders blame and discount others, these behaviors and attitudes filtrate through the organization and onto the customers.

To observe glaring examples of artificial leadership, just watch a political campaign or public discussion by government leaders where behaviors such as finger pointing, false accusations, scapegoating, justifications and power struggles are clearly depicted.

Accepting responsibility without excuses, denial or blaming others is the hallmark of great leadership. Only authentically powerful leaders are able to do this.

7. Make Decisions that Benefit All People

Collaboration and teamwork produce unlimited possibilities. This "group will" is very powerful and creates opportunities that no one person could possibly achieve. As an authentic leader, it is important to guide a team and arrive at decisions that are for the common good of the organization.

I have had CEOs ask me, "How can I get people to buy into my vision?" Employees will fully support a vision that rewards all employees, not just those at the top. The question to ask, when making any decision is "Who benefits from this decision?" If only a select few benefit, then it is a decision based on meeting the ego needs of a special group. The power of a common vision is that it bonds individuals and inspires and motivates the employees. "Group will" is a force that can achieve incredible results.

These steps are part of a "Personal Restoration Plan"—that of restoring ourselves to our inner spiritual greatness. Following this plan will guide you to the highest levels of personal evolution, as well as enlightened leadership. Enlightened leaders create opportunities that are boundless for themselves and those they lead.

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