

Authentic Leadership Development

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2014

## Abstract

This research paper was written as part of a Management for the Future program, hosted by the Missouri Department of Corrections and taught by the U.S. Department of Justice National Institute of Corrections. The focus of this paper will be on authentic leadership and the characteristics of an authentic leader. The intent of this paper is to describe what is meant by authenticity as used in the term authentic leadership and identify a few of the characteristics associated with an authentic leader. In my conclusion, I will discuss how authentic leadership relates to me as an Assistant Warden in the Missouri Department of Corrections.

### **Authentic Leadership Development**

Mention the word leader to me and I think of World War II and the great courage and strength of such leaders as Franklin D. Roosevelt (“It’s a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead – and to find no one there”), Winston Churchill (“It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further that you can see”), Dwight D. Eisenhower (“The supreme quality for leadership is unquestionably integrity. Without it, no real success is possible, no matter whether it is on a section gang, a football field, in an army, or in an office”), George S. Patton (“I don’t measure a man’s success by how high he climbs, but how high he bounces when he hits bottom”), and Bernard L. Montgomery (“Discipline strengthens the mind so that it becomes impervious to the corroding influence of fear”)

Since I was a young man, I have read books, watched movies, television shows, and visited museums to learn what made these men such great leaders during World War II. I have been amazed at their popularity and respect among their countrymen, fellow leaders, and the troops they led. I was awestruck at how these men could have such a command presence and inspire their troops prior to an invasion or battle.

As I matured and expanded my knowledge of these men in their personal and professional lives, each of them seemed to have one thing in common, authenticity. By possessing self awareness, solid values, and the ability to lead with their heart, these men had the ability to bring people together for a common cause. By exerting great influence and instilling confidence, troops were inspired and willing to face an enemy knowing they could be maimed or mortally wounded

during battle. Many pictures show these leaders meeting with troops prior to a battle speaking with them, thanking them for the selfless sacrifice they were about to make. When the leader(s) would walk away, the soldiers would smile in admiration knowing they had been recognized for their service to their country and being appreciated by someone they respected and wanted to follow. The leaders in turn would walk away with heavy hearts, but knew they had instilled a vision and purpose for what needed to be done for the good of all. Although we cannot mimic these leaders to become effective leaders ourselves, we can only hope that we can develop the characteristics of these men and combine it with our own authenticity.

### **What Does it Mean to be Authentic**

Through time there has been much scholarly study done in regard to understanding leadership. For more than two decades, transactional/transformational leadership has been the poster child of the “new paradigm” theories (Beyer, 1999) and has occupied center stage (Klenke, 2007). Among the new emerging perspectives of leadership, authentic leadership (Avolio, et al., 2004; Gardner & Avolio, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003; Mitchie & Gooty, 2005), is gaining increased attention in the scholarly and practitioner communities (Klenke, 2007).

When researching the concept of authentic leadership, one must understand what is meant by being authentic as opposed to being sincere. Although definitions of authenticity abound, many suffer from the common mistake of confusing authenticity with sincerity (Erickson, 1995). In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling defines sincerity as “a congruence between avowal

and actual feeling”; this is, sincerity refers to the extent to which one’s outward expression of feelings and thoughts are aligned with the reality experienced by the self. This definition implies that one is interacting with an “other” besides one self. (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 320).

Most definitions of authenticity start with the underlying root construct of authenticity (Klenke, 2007). The construct of authenticity; captured by the injunctions of ancient Greek philosophy to *know thyself*; refer to accepting, being oneself and remaining true to one’s self (Klenke, 2007).

Behaving authentically means acting in accord with one’s values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments through acting ‘falsely.’ ...Authenticity is not reflected in a compulsion to be one’s true self, but rather in the free expression of core feelings, motives, and inclinations. Instead authenticity is “the unobstructed operation of one’s true self or core self in one’s daily enterprise (Kernis, 2003, p. 1 & 14). Knowing oneself and being one self, then, are essential qualities of authentic leadership (May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003). It is believed that authentic leaders have a heightened sense of self awareness in regard to their values, identity and beliefs, which drives them to do what is right.

In the humanistic psychological realm of identifying authenticity, we can look at the writings of Carl Rogers (1959, 1963) and Maslow (1968, 1971). Rogers and Maslow focused attention on the development of fully functioning or self actualized persons, i.e., individuals who are “in tune” with their basic nature and clearly and accurately see themselves and their lives. It is thought that since fully functioning persons are not impeded by others’ expectations of them; they can make sound personal decisions and choices (Avolio, W. L. Gardner, 2005).

Recognition of the self-referential nature of authenticity is critical to understanding the construct. That is, in contrast to sincerity, authenticity does not involve any explicit consideration of “others” besides oneself. One’s sincerity is therefore judged by the extent to which the self is represented accurately and honestly to others, rather than the extent to which one is true to the self (Erickson, 1995, p. 124).

Avolio, et al. (2004) defined authentic leaders as those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others’ values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strength; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character. In the field of positive psychology, authenticity is defined as “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, need preferences or beliefs, processes captured by the injunction to know oneself” and “behaving in accordance with the true self” (Harter, 2002 p. 382). Gardner et al. (2005) proposed a self-based model of the processes undergirding authentic leadership and followership.

The model posits that a key factor contributing to the development of authentic leadership is the self-awareness of the leader which includes his or her values, emotions, identity, and goals. The second theoretical cornerstone of this model is self-regulation including internalized regulation, balanced processing of information referring to the unbiased collection and interpretation of self-related information, authentic behavior, and relational transparency which means that the leader displays high levels of openness, self-disclosure, and trust in close relationships. This model postulates that the leader’s personal history (family influences, early challenges, educational and

work experiences) and key trigger events (including crisis as well as positive trigger events such as a promotion or stretch assignment) serve as antecedents for authentic leadership. As positive role models, authentic leaders demonstrate integrity and a commitment to core ethical values and contribute to a positive organizational climate. Positive outcomes for authentic leader-follower relationships, according to Gardner, et al.(2005), include heightened levels of follower trust in the leader; workplace well being; and veritable, sustainable performance (Klenke, 2007, p. 3).

### **Authentic Leadership Characteristics**

Authentic Leadership goes beyond what we tend to think of as the skills and knowledge required for leadership. Every leader must know how to influence, motivate, organize, manage, and communicate effectively, and so on. These traits, for the most part, can be acquired through a typical MBA program as well as on-the-job training. They have been described endlessly in the literature and are the focus of most leadership development programs (Adams, n.d., p. 1). Many people have written on what it means to be a leader. Almost everyone identifies influence as the primary characteristic. By definition, this means that leadership and position are two different things. You can have a title, and a position of power, but this does not mean that you are a leader. Even people with these things can exert influence and thus leadership (Hyatt, 2011, p. 1).

It is evident there is traits or characteristics that is common in all authentic leaders that is above and beyond what can be learned. Authentic leaders know how to lead from a place beyond the intellectual mind. They operate from the heart and are always in line with their purpose in life. They are simply and genuinely themselves in all situations (Adams, n.d., p. 1).

Theorist have varying ideas as to what characteristics authentic leaders possess, there are however, two characteristics that seems to be acknowledged by all of them which I will summarize.

Authentic leaders are genuine. They are true to themselves, however that may manifest. They feel at home in their own skin, and aren't afraid to let others see them as they are, including whatever shortcoming they may have (Adams, n.d., p. 1). Authentic leaders are self-aware and genuine. Authentic leaders are self-actualized individuals who are aware of their strengths, their limitations, and their emotions (Kruse, 2013, p. 1). These leaders are themselves no matter where they are or who they may be interacting with. They are the true "what you see is what you get" personalities.

Authentic leaders have insight. They need to be able to look at complex situations, gain clarity, and determine a course of action. Insight as a leader dates back to biblical times. In the Bible, "[The] men of Issachar ... understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). This is what is meant by insight (Hyatt, 2011, p. 2). Authentic leaders lead their organization with purpose and vision. They are not in business for purely financial reasons; rather, they and their organization exist to provide a service to society. Their vision comes first, and they set goals to achieve that vision (Adams, n.d., p. 1). A key tenet in Bill George's model is the company leaders are focused on long-term shareholder value, not in just beating quarterly estimates (Kruse, 2013, p. 2). Authentic leaders are mission driven and focused on results. They are able to put the mission and the goals of the organization ahead of their own self-interest. They do the job in pursuit of results, not for their own power, money or ego (Kruse, 2013, p. 1).

### **Authentic Leadership as it Relates of My Position as an Assistant Warden**

As I researched information for this paper, I reflected on my ability to be authentic at work and whether or not I possessed some of the common characteristics of an authentic leader. What I discovered was that I don't always approach my work obligations with authenticity although I do possess many of the characteristics. This lack of authenticity at work may be contributed by my distain for conflict with supervisors and past work experiences that has negatively affected me by skewing my ability to embrace reality and in adopting strategies. History is full of examples of people in leadership roles who have and have not been able to embrace reality and, in turn, generate astonishing results or abject failures (Elash, 2004, p. 1). One of the most telling contrasts is apparent by considering the leadership of Churchill and Hitler during World War II. In the darkest of circumstances, Churchill embraced painful realities and literally grew psychologically in the face of adversity, while Hitler, unable to do the same embarked on a frantic denial of truths that ultimately led to defeat and sealed his doom (Elash, 2004, p. 1). Unlike Churchill who had grown psychologically during painful realities, I have allowed the adversities that I have faced at work to psychologically scar me causing me to become guarded as a leader.

For me to be successful as an authentic leader, I must first regain my confidence, overcome my fears, and build endurance. The only way to overcome these deficiencies is preparation and practice. "You have only the focus, strength and stamina that you have painstakingly built, no more and no less. You can think of your mind and body as your production facilities. No matter how you have dreamed of being a winner, in the heat of competition, you are only as good as your preparation had made you" (Elash, 2004, p. 2).

In an article by Dan Rockwell, he indicates that he has interviewed many high profile leaders. He goes on to explain that during the interview of these leaders, their authenticity appears quickly by what they say. He noted the following ten things mentioned or said by the interviewee that helped identify them as a leader: “I hadn’t thought of that”; speak tough truths comfortably; share what they are learning; ask “dumb” questions; explore-with rather than conclude-for; invite feedback; honor others, profusely; know and acknowledge frailties, and weaknesses; and empathize without compromise (Rockwell, 2012, p. 1).

There is no doubt that I need to change before I can help others change. Through continued reading on authentic leadership along with further training opportunities I can become more self aware at work and be authentic. Like a marathon runner preparing for a 5K run builds physical endurance, I must prepare myself and build psychological endurance to maintain authenticity. As a former endurance athlete, Jose Diaz developed four working assumptions that have served him well in his new role as a business leader (Elash, 2004).

1. You can fool your mind but you can’t fool your body.
2. Success requires focused, considered work to build and sustain your capabilities.
3. You must evolve your strategy to apply those capabilities in calculated ways.
4. Events will necessitate continual changes and adjustment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, get on your marks and let the preparation and training for authentic leadership begin.

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