

Authenticity: The New Leadership Standard

- BY **MANAVI PATHAK**

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It's about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen” - **Brene Brown**

Authenticity is synonymous with reliability, trustworthiness and credibility. In a recent Leadership Forecast survey conducted by a global consulting firm, it was reported that more than half the people in organizations are unhappy with the people who lead them. Only 18% reported high quality leadership in their organizations. In today's culture, where so much emphasis is placed on the superficial, people crave for authenticity. There is a clear cut need for Authentic Leadership.

Authentic leadership is not a new concept and several factors have led to the upsurge of interest in this area. A perceived lack of ethical decision-making from political and business leaders is a problem that is globally acknowledged, and has led to a breakdown in trust. This is a matter of grave concern because trust is a primary virtue that followers apparently seek from their leaders. A recent CIPD research into Trust and why Trust matters, suggests that in order to build effective organizations, leaders need to display personal integrity and humanity, allow followers to get acquainted with them, and be fundamentally trustworthy. CIPD research also indicates that organizations need to redesign their

leadership development processes, to identify, select and develop the new kind of leader - self-aware, compassionate, honourable, ethical and authentic.

Bill George, Professor at the Harvard University and the author of Discover Your True North, Being an Authentic Leader, has in 2010 elaborated on the concept of Authentic Leadership for both new and

experienced leaders. According to Bill George, authentic leaders demonstrate five qualities-

- Understanding their Purpose
- Practicing solid values
- Leading with Heart
- Establishing connected relationships
- Demonstrating self-discipline

The ABC of Authentic Leadership

What is the ABC of Authentic Leadership?

A is Authenticity being true to yourself and your values.

B is for bravery, which essentially means having the courage to lead and to do the right thing

C is Compassion, which stands for leading with empathy and a concern for the physical and emotional well-being of others

Authentic leadership links together who you are as a person, your beliefs and values, how you lead and manage, your personality, thinking and behaviour. In modern organizations when it comes to building a diverse workforce, there are few things as important as the need for authentic leadership.

Charisma Vs Authenticity

What is the difference in Leadership Style of Napoleon Bonaparte and



Nelson Mandela? While Napoleon was known for his charismatic leadership style, he let success go into his head and ultimately failed in his quest for glory. Nelson Mandela, alternatively, was able to influence, mobilize and inspire others with a common aspiration. This reinforces that leadership is not merely about holding a formal position, it is about behaviour. Authenticity is not a matter of being the most charismatic or dynamic person in the room. It is about being comfortable with who you are. Also, authentic leaders adopt a flexible style that fits the situation and capabilities of their team.

There is a difference between someone who is seen as "authentic" and someone who is actually authentic. When one finds peace in who he really is deep down, and lead from that place becomes ready to be an authentic leader. The key is to develop a leadership style that is consistent with your character and personality. If you try to be something that you are not, sooner or later, others will realize the fact. Bill George adds, "Anyone who follows their internal compass can become an authentic leader."

Authentic leaders lead from the heart and the head. They do not try to hide who they really are. They are not afraid to be themselves or express their fears, their feelings, their vulnerability, their failures. They know all of these experiences are a lesson to grow from in a lifelong leadership journey. They also can be themselves without pretence, because they do not have to prove anything to anyone but themselves, and because they are confident in their own skin. Steve Jobs said, "It is not about charisma and personality, it's about results and products and those very bedrock things that are why people at Apple and outside of Apple are getting more excited about the company and what Apple stands for and what its potential is to contribute to the country." These are leaders who work for the greater good than a myopic or a narrow self-interest. For them, there is a higher purpose at stake.

A leader of the stature of Martin Luther King believed in and worked for the greater cause of equality of all men everywhere, more than just

solving a problem of civil rights for the time and place he was living in. These are leaders who inspire their followers to be more and do more than they would have thought possible for themselves. They are willing to do all it takes to achieve the big vision, without compromising on their integrity or risking the people who follow them.

Bill George in his book has mentioned about Alan Mullaly at Ford as one of the leaders who made mistakes and always owned them. He would bring people around him to say, who can help solve this problem? It requires a lot of courage and determination to do this. "We connect not just through heads but also through hearts", adds Bill George. Citing another example of Volkswagen falsification of emission tests, the CEO of Volkswagen went out and said, "well, these are just rogue engineers", but never owned responsibility to the problem. Bill George calls this



"Inauthentic ". This demonstrates that authentic leaders have both integrity and vulnerability. Integrity, to tell the whole truth and vulnerability, to share your whole self.

The advantages of authentic leadership

It creates a trusting environment - where employees can be the best versions of themselves. This can have a real impact on a company's bottom line and goes back to the idea that authenticity will become crucial in driving performance. Studies have shown that if employees are able to be their whole selves and demonstrate who they clearly are, there can be an increase in productivity by over 30 %. This type of leadership can also drive



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greater engagement with individuals, teams and wider business. It can break down barriers and make it easy for employees to challenge the status quo - often causing a positive ripple effect and driving cultural change from bottom up. It will give people the freedom to learn, experiment and grow in a supportive environment.

Authenticity has become the new gold standard of leadership. Traditional approaches to leadership which focused on developing charisma, looking good externally has given way to the concept that leadership is about empowering and inspiring those whom you lead. If done properly, authentic leadership can help organizations have diverse and engaged workforce, and have a real impact on business performance. But, to demonstrate authentic leadership, organizations must put more effort to creating an environment that lets people be themselves. The key to success is to walk the talk. Becoming an authentic leader requires a lot of inner work and transformation, working on problems that matter, have a growth mindset with a moral compass based on your beliefs and values.

Bill George succinctly puts it "When you look back at your life it may not be perfect, but it will be authentically yours".

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