

The Journey of Authenticity 5 Myths about being an Authentic Leader



Disillusioned. Cautious. Skeptical. Discouraged.

These are all words you've likely heard used to describe American voters in recent weeks, but you may be surprised to learn they often hold true for those craving more authentic leadership in the workplace as well.

A recent study released by Ernst & Young found that less than half of full-time workers surveyed globally place "a great deal of trust" in their employer, boss, or colleagues, and if you take one look at recent headlines, it's easy to understand why.

Just last month, for example, Wells Fargo dominated the news when 5,300 employees and managers were fired for opening millions of unauthorized bank accounts. Worse yet, Carrie Tolstedt, the executive who led their division, attempted to dodge responsibility by retiring, and might still walk away with \$77 million. Carrie may be the most recent business leader to reveal her true colors in the wake of a scandal, but unfortunately, she isn't the first and she certainly won't be the last.

Luckily, at the same time, there are many leaders in the workforce today striving hard to achieve the very level of authenticity that employees are so desperately seeking. After all, they know that being an authentic leader not only allows you the freedom to be your true self, but also enables you to build more trusting relationships, and ultimately achieve greater employee engagement and loyalty.

That said, with countless definitions of authenticity floating around, it can still be challenging to determine where to focus your efforts. To assist, below are 5 myths we are dispelling to prove that authenticity is much more of a journey than a destination—and often the most critical component in achieving it is an honest desire to get started:

Myth #1: To be an authentic leader, you have to know exactly who you are.

It's often said that being authentic means being true to one's self, but it's important to acknowledge that the journey to self-discovery can literally last a lifetime. Luckily, being authentic does not require you to know with 100% certainty who you are or how you'll feel about every situation you'll encounter. As it turns out, one of the best ways to

develop a personal leadership style is to let go of the pressure to have all of the answers, and instead allow yourself to learn through experience and experimentation.

Myth #2: To be an authentic leader, you must be completely consistent.

Authentic leaders should never bend on their core morals or values, but that doesn't mean there isn't flexibility when it comes to adapting behavior in response to changing times and circumstances. Part of being both an effective and an authentic leader is trusting your gut, and if you force rigid rules upon yourself, you'll strip away your ability to act on what you feel is right in the moment, as well your ability to make adjustments based on past learnings.

Myth #3: To be an authentic leader, you have to be 100% original.

While it's true that authentic leaders tend to draw their values from their individual life experiences, that doesn't mean you should walk around with blinders on for fear of borrowing inspiration from those you admire. Allow your own life story to serve as your primary guide, but also feel empowered to use learnings from your role models and mentors as yet another tool in your leadership arsenal. There's nothing about studying someone else's footsteps that can prevent you from creating your own path.

Myth #4: To be an authentic leader, you have to be 100% transparent.

It's true that the digital age has completely transformed the level of transparency expected of both companies and their leaders, but before you go about disclosing all of your vulnerabilities and weaknesses in the name of being genuine, it's important to understand there is still a healthy balance to be found. Because it's unrealistic to share every single thought and feeling with those around you, it's perfectly acceptable to project the pieces of your genuine self that you believe will have the most positive and productive effect on others.

Myth #5: To be an authentic leader, you can't misstep.

It's easy to label leaders who purposefully betray trust as being inauthentic, but that doesn't mean those who *are* authentic can't make honest mistakes. As long as your intentions remain pure, errors and missteps should always be embraced as an essential part of the learning process. If you can own up to your shortcomings with candor and apply the lessons learned moving forward, you'll not only emerge as a stronger leader, but also inspire those around you to follow suit.

So what does this all mean?

Almost ten years ago, Harvard Business School professor Bill George and several of his colleagues set out on the largest leadership development study ever undertaken to understand how leaders become and remain authentic. After analyzing 3,000 pages of transcripts, they came to this conclusion: "You do not have to be born with specific characteristics or traits of a leader. Leadership emerges from your life story."

By thinking of authenticity as a journey rather than a finish line, we are reminded that there is no short cut to get there. Instead, we must open our hearts and our minds to

the concept of lifelong learning, allowing ourselves to organically develop the passions and values that will guide us in building meaningful relationships, and ultimately successful businesses.

Are you striving to become a more authentic leader, but struggling with how to get there? If you need help getting started, give us a call today at #708-738-5040, or visit our website at RRGExec.com