

Article: The New Leadership Paradigm: Leading Consciously & Authentically

Over the past 15 years I have been involved in working with senior leaders to become better at what they do, to become more successful in their organizations and to be more skilled at leading all those who happen to be there working with them. I've met all kinds of leaders and at different stages of their careers; some first time managers, others experienced running large divisions and some at the very top. Each individual has been unique in their own way and I can remember their stories clearly in my mind. At the same time I try to think about what actions and behaviours have made some stand out more than others. Time after time, the answer that comes to me is their authenticity: their ability to know themselves well, to embody their values, to be consistent in their approach and to be courageous in their behaviours.

Self-Knowledge:

As Socrates said, "Know thyself", self-knowledge is one of the core principles of leadership. By knowing yourself I am talking about more than just being aware of your thoughts. I am talking about really understanding your personal values, your core beliefs, your fears and reactions as well as how you relate to the world and what your beliefs are spiritually. In order to truly take a stand in what we do in this world we need to be crystal clear about who we are and what we are ready to represent. If you look at some leaders in our world and in the past, such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Lee Kuan Yew, they are people who were willing to look at themselves honestly and make a stand for their values and beliefs.

A weak leader is someone who is not clear about who they are and what they really believe in. This shows in their inconsistent behaviours and actions.

Embody Your Values:

When I am coaching executives I often take them through a value exercise where they are asked to identify their personal values. After that I will often ask them to list the values that their organization represents. Strangely enough, these can very often be quite different. But the impact of this can be quite significant in terms of an individual's ability to be successful. If their own personal values are constantly coming into conflict with the work they are being asked to represent, the inconsistency will show up. I worked with an executive who had strong values about transparency and direct communication yet the organization he worked for had so many layers of networks which made the system extremely vague and deals done were often anything but transparent. This create what I call a 'leadership breakdown', where an individual is unable to be true to themselves in the work they do and can erode their internal sense of commitment as well as their ability to be authentic and true in other's perceptions. Exemplary leaders live by their values.

Consistent Behaviour:

When I choose people I want to have in my life, personally and professionally, I want people that I can trust and who hold similar values to myself. This goes the same for people we want to have as our leaders. We naturally look for someone who shows with their actions consistently that they will stand by what they say. Actions maintain integrity with what we say. We have all heard the quote, 'It's not what you say but what you do'. Your actions and behaviours indicate to others who you are and what you represent. I remember hearing criticisms about Al Gore owning a huge house after the release of his movie about global warming. The human brain is amazingly competent at finding associations and inconsistencies so when people look to follow someone they want someone they can believe in and this means someone who shows integrity in their beliefs, their words and their actions.

"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." Dwight D. Eisenhower

Courageous:

Stepping up to be an authentic leader needs courage. It needs courage because as an authentic leader you need to be willing to stand up for your beliefs, your values and confront issues directly when necessary. When you are committed to integrity you are making the choice to engage and confront whatever is necessary. So when that colleague or boss is acting against what you believe is right you are willing to have that conversation and stand up for it. You will not shy away from the difficult conversations with direct reports who are acting against the values of the organization even if they are still making their numbers. This courage I am speaking about is linked to your commitment to being true to yourself and everything that you represent as a human being. When you are courageous you are willing to do what is necessary to add meaning to your life and to the life of others, you have purpose to what you do, you have a calling or mission in life and an important legacy you want to leave behind.

When we address courageous conversations we have clear leadership presence. When we avoid them we are inauthentic, seen as dishonest and you can be sure that whatever we are not facing up to will somehow be reflected in how we are in our work.

Passion

Leading from passion is something rarely seen. When you look around and ask yourself, how many people I know are truly doing something they are passionate about? Can you think of a few individuals like this? It is pretty difficult actually. Very few people follow their passions and embody passion in what they do. But

when you do see this, the experience is magnetic. It creates the environment where people want to be there, give their time and effort because they can feel the passion and energy that is being put into it by the leader or leaders.

So , I would like to ask you to take a look at yourself and the topics above and give yourself an honest rating. How are you doing? Can you imagine where you would be if you scored 100%?