Authentic Leaders

Adapted from Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, “Managing Authenticity: The paradox of Great Leadership”, in HBR, December 2005, p.87-94
INTRODUCTION
To attract followers, a leader has to be many things to many people.

The trick is to pull that off, while remaining true to yourself.
Leadership

- Demands the expression of the authentic self
- People want to be led by someone “real”
Authenticity

- Associated with sincerity, honesty and integrity
- The attribute that uniquely defines great leaders
- Often misunderstood, not least by the leaders themselves
- Not an innate quality but one others attribute to you
• A person cannot be authentic on his or her own
• Largely defined by what others see in you and as such to a great extent controlled by you
• Not a product of pure manipulation
• Accurately reflects aspects of the leader’s inner self and so it cannot be an act
Great Leaders

• Like chameleons adapting to the situation and yet do not lose their identities
• Know which personality traits they should reveal to whom and when
• Focused on where they are going but never lose sight of where they come from
• Rely on their intuitions to understand the expectations and concerns of people they want to influence
• Retain their distinctiveness as individuals, but able to adapt to the corporate and social cultures and influence change
The study of authenticity

- A better understanding of the relationship between the expression of self and the exercise of leadership
- Leaders who manage their authenticity will be more effective and able to energize and retain loyal followers
MANAGING THE PERCEPTION
Establishing your authenticity as a leader

• A two-part challenge

1. Ensure that your words are consistent with your deeds – *being consistent and practicing what you preach*

2. Getting people to relate to you by finding common ground with your followers – *presenting different faces to different audiences without faking it or being insincere*
Playing Multiple Roles

• “All the world’s a stage … and one man in his time plays many parts.” Shakespeare

• Role playing doesn’t have to be fake or insincere

• Demands a lot of thought and work

• “I want to be me, but I am channelling parts of me to context. What you get is a segment of me. It is not a fabrication or a facade – just the bits that are relevant for that situation.”
Steps to take to help others perceive you as a authentic leader

Involve building up knowledge about your true self and learning more about others.
Establishing Your Authenticity (1)

Get to know yourself and your origins better by:

- **Explore your autobiography:** Familiarize yourself with your identity anchors – the people, places and events that shape you; share them with others who have similar experience.
- **Return to your roots:** Meet old friends; spend time away from the normal trappings of the office.
- **Avoiding comfort zones:** Step out of your routines, seek new adventures, and take some risks.
- **Getting honest feedback:** Ask for 360 degree feedback from close friends, colleagues, friends, and family.
Establishing Your Authenticity (2)

Get to know others better by:

- **Building a rich picture of your environment**: Find out more about people’s background, biographies, families; don’t have a one-dimensional view

- **Removing barriers between yourself and others**: Selectively show a weakness or vulnerability that reveals your approachability to your co-workers

- **Empathising passionately with your people**: Care deeply about the work your people do

- **Letting other know what’s unique (and authentic) about them**: Give people feedback that acknowledges and validates their origins
Establish Your Authenticity (3)

Getting to the organizational context better by:

- **Getting the right distance:** Beware of creating the wrong first impression; use both your sense of self and your understanding of your origins to connect with or separate yourself from others.
- **Sharpening your social antenna:** Seek new experiences to help you detect subtle social clues to attract followers.
- **Honouring deeply held values and social mores:** Make connections by honouring other cultures’ strongly held beliefs.
- **Developing your resilience:** Prepare yourself by learning about and understanding your own values.
Know Yourself and Others
Complexity of Leadership

- Exercise of leadership requires both skills and practice
- A leader develops an extensive repertoire of roles which make him/her seem very different to different people in different situations
- Without this, a leader recruits only those with whom he/she already share some common ground
Wielding complexity effectively

• Requires a degree of self-knowledge and the willingness and ability to share the self-knowledge with others

• Engaged in self-expression and self-disclosure
How authentic leaders acquire the attributes
1. Keeping their goals simple

- Try to accomplish no more than 3 or 4 big goals at a time
- Unwavering about them – doesn’t question them anymore than he/she question himself/herself
- Goals are connected in some way to one or another of the leader’s authentic self
- The pursuit of goals and how they are communicated to the followers is intense, promoting self-disclosure
2. Keep people who give honest feedback close to them

- Leaders more open to truths about themselves and their relationships with others
- Sharpening their skills in disclosing their Emotional Intelligence (EQ) they already have
3. Recognize which aspects of their authentic selves particular groups of followers are looking for

- Great leaders have highly developed social antennas
- They use a complex web of cognitive and observational skills to recognize what followers are consciously and unconsciously signalling to them

[Imagery of eyes and the word 'LOOK']
Skills

- Some or born with them and others can learn them
- People with a great deal of occupational mobility possess these skills to a higher degree than those who stayed mostly in one place
- Exposure to a wide range of experiences enhances ability to read and empathize with different people and situation
- Experiences outside of an individual’s comfort zone can also sharpen social awareness
USE WHERE YOU COME FROM
Origins

- Oxford English Dictionary defines authenticity in part as “of undisputed origin”
- A leader’s authenticity is closely linked to his/her origins
- A leader establishes authenticity by effectively managing the relationship with his/her past and his/her followers’ connections to their roots
Personal Histories

• Authentic leaders use them to establish common ground with their followers by displaying something of their origins.

• Pride in one’s roots must be handled with care - a leader’s heritage might be intimidating or offensive to staff.

• Authentic leaders stay curious and open to their followers’ origins and make them feel comfortable with their roots.
Cultural Differences

- People frame their backgrounds in different ways.
- There are differences among and within cultures.
- People define themselves in terms of gender, class, race, status and geography and expressed through dress, speech, food and even different styles of walking.
- We need to be cautious about making simple generalizations about status and societies.
Status in societies

- Ascribed status – *attributes innate to particular individuals*
- Achieved status – *attributes and roles that individuals attain through their own efforts*
- American society places greater emphasis in achieved status, while in other societies liked the French and the Chinese, elite status remains fixed
The variability of social status

- Important implications for authentic leaders
- George W. Bush, a Yale-educated Yankee aristocrat, can pose as a regular guy from Texas and be believed because Americans will accept that he can transform himself and they will respect his aspiration to do so.

- This metamorphosis wouldn’t seem authentic in Britain – for the working class voter, once an aristocrat, always an aristocrat.
A Man For All Seasons

- Critics of Tony Blair often contend that he moves between different, contradictory selves without any central personal beliefs because of his desire to maximize his personal appeal.
- In fact it is his consummate skill in managing his authenticity.
- His behaviour in a single dramatic week in early July exemplified how well he does this.
- The week began with Bob Geldof inspired Live 8 pop concert to raise awareness of poverty in Africa.
- Followed by a trip to Singapore to lobby the IOC which ended up with the successful 2012 Olympic Games bid.
- Attended the G8 Summit in Scotland.
- Dealt with terrorist bombings in London.
• In each instance, Blair played different roles to attract followers in different ways
• Despite the different behaviours Blair communicated a core self – he always connected with his known personal passions – for pop music, sporty, elimination of poverty in Africa and the defeat of terrorism
• “People turn admiring when they observe (Blair) capacity to lead, articulate, and mould critical political moments.”
Authentic Leaders

- Comfortable with their skins
- Know where they come from and who they are
- Know how to use their backgrounds to build a rapport with their followers
- Not threatened by people with other origins – they welcome them
- Sensitive in communicating their origins and are aware of the differences in cultural attitudes toward their backgrounds
“I speak to everyone in the same way, whether he the garbage man or the president of the university.”

Albert Einstein
CONFORM – BUT ONLY JUST ENOUGH
Authentic Leaders

• Must judge just how much they need to conform to social and organizational norms
• Create just enough distance from the norms so followers perceive their leaders as special and attractive
• Too much conformity can render the leaders ineffective; too little can isolate them
• Know how to strike a balance between their distinctiveness and the cultures in which they operate
• Do not immediately seek out head-on confrontations – try to first gain minimal acceptance as members of their organizations
Women Leaders

• Universal challenge
• Unless female leaders acknowledge and validate some of the prevailing organizational norms surrounding gender roles, they will find it hard to obtain acceptance from male followers
In complex organizations

- Authentic leaders select the specific norms and elements they want to be identified with and those they need to reject.
Conclusion

• Authenticity is not the opposite of artifice – *something that is straightforward, sincere and uncomplicated*

• Managers who assume that authenticity stems from an uncontrolled expression of their inner selves will never become authentic leaders

• Great leaders understand that their reputation for authenticity needs to be painstakingly earned and carefully managed
• “If you can fake it, you’ve got it made” said George Burns about honesty

• It is equally relevant with authenticity

• Authentic leaders don’t really fake it to make it but expression of one’s authentic self is complicated and a contrived act

• All authentic leaders are complicated and contrived