



WHAT EXACTLY IS AN AUTHENTIC LEADER?

Recently, a colleague of mine and I investigated the topic of what we called "socially-centered leadership". We are certainly not alone in being interested in this subject. Debra Logan, Vice-President at Gartner.

A recent article in the Harvard Business Review by Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, 'Creating the Best Workplace on Earth' investigates the relationship between authenticity and effective leadership. Their research summed it up as: "People want to work for authentic organisations and authentic leaders". So far so good and furthermore, well... DUH! We all want 'authentic leaders' who lead 'engaged employees' onward and upward to greater success. But the research does not tell us how.

So we investigated the notion of socially-centered leadership in a series of interviews with people that we felt displayed the characteristics of authentic leadership. These were with a diverse crew; two former U.S. Navy officers, three CEOs, entrepreneurs, men and women. Conventional success, measured in dollars or pounds, or rank or status, was not the main thing we were looking for. We were looking for leaders whose professional raison d'être was to improve the lives of the people who worked for them. What we found was, that these people set out to create workplaces with a sense of mission and personal accomplishment, that came before conventional success.

We found that these leaders are characterised by personal authenticity, community connectedness and daily

expression. They foster the trust of a committed and self-propelled workforce of engaged employees. The leaders that we interviewed had arrived where they were, by a combination of personal characteristics and deliberate action. The striking theme was that they were all 'naturals' and in fact though several had been to Harvard Business School or the U.S. Naval Academy, world-class leadership training academies, they all reported that they had not learned to lead in those places. So the question becomes, can leadership be taught? Our initial research says that it can, but not in conventional ways.

I am involved in two ongoing efforts to understand leadership and to train people to be socially centered leaders. The source of inspiration for both of these programmes is both scientific-based and deeply spiritual. New research in neuroscience is giving us insight into the intellectual and emotional workings of the human brain, the re-introduction of emotional understanding and motivation is taking hold in many fields, including ones you would expect, like cognitive science as well as economics. We are developing training that is bringing this understanding of how our brains, and bodies, actually work as interconnected systems into the classroom.

I am currently involved in a programme that will pair

executives with veterans facing reintegration into civilian life. It's a pilot programme but we believe that both sets of participants will gain valuable insights into how they work and how they lead. These insights will be gained through a series of experiential exercises and the participants will work with each other and with equine facilitators to gain more insight into themselves and their leadership styles. This is science that can be experienced through exercises that, for example, allow an individual to 'use emotion as information'. We are even able to learn and use different and unconventional techniques, from body awareness to inter-species communication, to help our current and future leaders tap into their other sources of wisdom, and accelerate their growth paths, to true authentic leadership. It is this combination of training the intellect, accessing the emotions and focussing the will, that leads to socially centered authentic leaders. ●



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