

## Leading authentically

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**B**eing authentic can not only improve the quality of your interpersonal relationships but also your performance as a leader. Someone who is authentic is open and honest, transparent in one's intentions and expectations and practices his/her values consistently. Authentic leaders are genuine and true, and have a vision of success that is wholesome and optimistic. They also understand the importance of leading through demonstration and collaboration, rather than barking orders and demanding results. Truly authentic leaders translate words into actions – they stick to their convictions and set forth an operational plan to achieve better business results.

Authentic leadership is a relatively new theory of leadership that originally stemmed from the four cardinal virtues of ancient Greek philosophy. These virtues are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude, and have molded the modern theory of authentic leadership to comprise four key elements:

1. *Balanced processing (prudence)*: Authentic leaders keep an open mind to all possible courses of action so as to be fair-minded when making decisions, and lead open

discussions with others to choose the best possible option.

2. *Self-awareness (temperance)*: To be an authentic leader, it is important to be emotionally balanced and in control, and to know one's own strengths and limitations.
3. *Relational transparency (justice)*: Authentic leaders do not have hidden agendas, and are fair in their dealings with others.
4. *Internalized moral perspective (fortitude)*: Simply put, authentic leaders place great attention on ethical consideration and have the courage to do the right thing (Table I).

These virtues of authentic leaders lead to concrete business results because they enable a relationship between leaders and team members built on trust. The role of the authentic leader is to encourage and motivate others, and keep team members on track with operational goals by instilling a shared mission, and outlining marginal steps to achieving success. When team leaders are authentic and true, the rest of the team is willing and eager to go the extra mile.

### How to become an authentic leader?

Start with work on your emotional intelligence (EI) and self-awareness.

**Table 1** Below are some “do’s” and “don’ts” of authentic leaders, for your reference

<i>Do</i>	<i>Don't</i>
Speak the truth	Use their words to hurt the feelings of others
Care about others	Put their own needs before the needs of others
Have a rich moral fiber	Cut corners to get ahead
Treat people with respect and dignity	Treat others as inferior
Build teams and create communities	Work independently of others
Focus on results, and are mission-driven	Put their own self-interest ahead of the goals of the organization
Own up to their mistakes	Use defensive strategies to protect their ego

Psychologist Goleman’s (2004) decades of research on the topic of EI has revealed that EI is of greater importance than cognitive skills, intelligence or technical abilities in driving the success of top performers. EI enables leaders to self-monitor and develop key leadership characteristics such as leading authentically.

Unlike intelligence, which remains generally stable over a person’s lifetime, EI can be developed with practice:

- Beginning with self-awareness, start by outlining your strengths, weaknesses, needs, goals, values, etc., to gain an understanding of who you truly are and why you behave in a particular manner. Painting this clear picture of yourself helps you to understand what drives your behavior, and as a result,

it becomes easier to recognize when your emotions are growing to unreasonable proportions.

- Practice self-regulation to prevent yourself from acting reactively or impulsively. The simplest way to practice self-regulation is to engage yourself in reflection, particularly in difficult or stressful situations where you may have the propensity to fly off the handle. Identify the cause of the emotional reaction, and brainstorm more adaptive ways to respond than allowing your emotions to get the better of you. If the source of your frustration is external, put yourself in the perspective of others and recognize how over-reacting may negatively influence the overall outcome of the situation.

Over time and with concerted effort, these self-awareness and regulation strategies can be applied to any intra- or inter-personal situation in which proper control of one’s emotions and an understanding of others will enable you to demonstrate your authenticity.

**References**

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**Further reading**

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