



Focus

A publication of Wagner Consulting Group

October 2009



Five Hallmarks of Authentic Leaders

There is never an oversupply of authentic leaders.

Authentic leaders are recognizable as *The Real McCoy*, the genuine article, the real deal. In a world full of posturing and pretense, authentic leaders are immensely more powerful. They achieve results and change people's lives for the better.

Leaders may be born with personality traits, and made through the crucible of challenge, but they also spring from people who *choose*. You can choose to improve your leadership skills by mirroring five hallmarks of authentic leadership. Be warned, however, that in this arena you can't fake it until you make it. Authentic leaders are transparent and honest and sincere.

A humble confidence is the first hallmark of authentic leaders. Comfortable in their own skin, authentic leaders are not condescending; instead, they are open and approachable. They are ambitious and determined, but feel "complete" and don't need to put down others to gain stature.

Authentic leaders also keep their promises. They honor small promises as well as the big, visible commitments. When you see a leader who keeps commitments few people know about, often regarding small matters, you gain confidence that person will also live up to big promises.

Open, clear, transparent communication is the third hallmark of authentic leadership. There is no gap between what they say and the absolute, unvarnished truth. One author called transparent communication the Holy Grail of leadership, and I agree. Authentic leaders choose simple words over jargon or other inflated speech. Learn from Winston Churchill who said, "Speak in short, homely words of common usage."

Authentic leaders proactively create an environment that fosters the free flow of bad news. They value courage, honesty, and the judgments of conventional wisdom, the plan, or expected results. "Shooting the messenger" is a common response to hearing bad tidings, so people are understandably reluctant to put their jobs at risk by reporting bad news. A great example of leadership that encourages transparent communication is the "Giraffe Award." This recognition encourages people to stick their necks out for the good of the organization, even when the message

is unpopular.

For example, in December 1996, the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) began a Giraffe Award program. The award is a replica of a giraffe approximately seven inches tall on a wooden base that recipients can place on their desks.

Finally, authentic leaders are consistent in the way they treat people. They don't have separate standards for kindness, candor, and concern. A person's behavior still counts, of course, but everyone is held to the same standards.

In the end, a person's authenticity is about more than just leadership. It's a reflection of one's inner spirit. When you're at peace with yourself, you have more to offer the world, and can freely share your own perceptions, ideas, and beliefs. Life's better and easier that way, too.

Tom Wagner

We help our clients find and profit from opportunities - especially in turbulent times - with Executive coaching, Strategic planning, & Employee development

www.wagnercg.com

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, reply to this e-mail with REMOVE in the Subject field.