

The Heart and Art of Leadership Today by William Peterson

But the person who, undaunted, sets foot on the “inward way” and, overcoming its perils, courageously follows it to the end, will be able to take the “outward way” equally fearlessly, the way into the world of external reality. They will master the challenges of life in the collective with the bewildering profusion of tools given into their hand for the conquest of nature, neither losing himself in the labyrinth of the inward way nor vanishing in the anonymity of the mass, but preserving in both adventures the unique value of the individual personality.

Carl Gustav Jung

I’m sure you must have heard it said that people don’t leave organisations, they leave managers. In Kouzes & Posner’s now famous book, “The Leadership Challenge” they explore through ongoing empirical research which characteristics people most admire about their leaders.

As you look at the top **four** characteristics and the rest which follows, you will come to realise that all of these are traits/qualities of authentic leadership behaviour.

Percentage of respondents selecting each characteristic

Characteristic	2007 edition	2002 edition	1995 edition	1987 edition
Honest	89	88	88	83
Forward-Looking	71	71	75	62
Inspiring	69	65	68	58
Competent	68	66	63	67
Intelligent	48	47	40	43
Fair-minded	39	42	49	40
Straightforward	36	34	33	34
Broad-minded	35	40	40	37
Supportive	35	35	41	32
Dependable	34	33	32	33
Cooperative	25	28	28	25
Courageous	25	20	29	27
Determined	25	23	17	17
Caring	22	20	23	26
Imaginative	17	23	28	34
Mature	15	21	13	23
Ambitious	16	17	13	21
Loyal	18	14	11	11
Self-Controlled	10	8	5	13
Independent	4	6	5	10

Note: These percentages represent respondents from six continents: Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Europe and Australia. The majority of respondents are from the United States. Since people were asked to select seven characteristics, the total adds to more than 100 percent.

I have read many definitions of leadership over the years in my work as an Industrial Psychologist. Many of these definitions speak about the leader exerting influence over others to get them to do something, or to direct their efforts toward a particular goal. This is all part of what leaders do. The concern I have with many of these definitions is that they seldom focus on the inner qualities required by the leader to lead and inspire willing followership.

Current literature about leadership recognises that leadership is about having qualities based on character and personal authenticity. Leaders can no longer claim to have all of the knowledge and information as in previous generations. The workplace and impacts of globalisation has made leading organisations or teams a lot more complex and sophisticated. Also, people are becoming a lot more self-aware not only about their rights but confident and assertive about how they wish to be treated and who they want to follow. They have far more power these days to withhold their commitment and

participation if the leader in their mind is not credible. In many ways therefore, the leader's "knowledge powerbase" has been significantly diminished. This is because there is just so many layers of information, skill sets and areas of specialisation across the organisation. They now have to encourage and facilitate to operate from a previously silo mentality to the ability to collaborate in a seamless integrated fashion. This approach is the currency for organisational success. Leaders who do not pursue this approach leave the organisation vulnerable and not competitive. This does call for a new set of leadership behaviours. This applies whether you are the CEO or one of the leaders sitting in one of the areas of specialisation, division, department or team within your organisation.

Today many organisations have hired the best talent and skills. The leader therefore has to hone his capability in the area of personal power as opposed to the almost previously exclusive focus of knowledge and positional power. A leader must inspire and harness the organisation's talent pools in a collaborative way. In other words, leadership must find its credibility outside of the almost exclusive knowledge and positional arena. A leader must from time to time when appropriate use their knowledge and positional power to get things done. But in today's modern world of doing business the leader needs much more than that.

There is a commonly held belief that leadership is something which exclusively originates between the ears i.e. a wholly cerebral experience. There has been too much emphasis around the head and very little around the heart. In this article I would like us to consider the **heart of leadership**, the qualities that make for authentic leadership.

It appears that leadership in every sphere of our current human endeavour is involved in a Herculean battle to remain credible. Instead of offering praise and admiration the followership are heaping scorn, apathy and scepticism upon the role of leaders. Why? Read the newspapers, watch television, and listen to the talk amongst the community. They talk about the bankers, teachers, politicians, industrialists, clergy, business leaders, etc. They all seem to be in a credibility crisis. The world is losing hope and faith in the idea of leadership and the question remains why?

As the old cliché says, "when you point a finger at others, be aware of the three fingers pointing right back at you". We are all leaders and therefore responsible and accountable for the patch we are called to lead no matter how large or small that patch.

It is extremely dangerous to hand over **all** leadership to one person, party, group or system without fiercely holding them accountable, otherwise we deserve the leadership we get.

We have become lazy even in the way we discern who is to lead and seldom interrogate what they promise as leaders. We don't really hold them accountable. Partly, it's that modern day individualistic middle class mantra, "as long as it does not affect me". Now, it has affected you! Some leaders have become tyrants, bullies and social psychopaths at almost every level in our social discourse.

You have to accept the fact that you are a leader and have the inalienable right to talk to, challenge, praise, redirect and recall other leaders into their best and

golden promise – their potential. We are all called to be leaders and must show the courage to act accordingly.

Leonard Ravenhill in "The Last Days Newsletter" tells about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man sitting beside a fence, one tourist asked in a patronising way, "Were any great people born in this village?" The old man replied, "Nope, only babies."

As leaders we all hold both personal and collective responsibility. This let me add, would include those who have the extraordinary and sacred task of managing the home and taking care of the family. "The hand that rocks the cradle is often the first teacher of all future leaders." Of course leadership is not only limited to our external roles, it is essentially and fundamentally firstly about how we lead ourselves. Who you are as a leader is not defined by your role, rather it is defined by what you value. Your role only becomes an expression of those values.

"The man that conquers himself is superior to the one who conquers a thousand men in a battle."

The Buddha (Siddhartha Gotama)

So how do we show leadership in a world that has changed so rapidly and where the call to leadership at every level in our society is crucial and almost desperate? What is required of all people in leadership positions therefore, is to explore how much of their authentic or inauthentic self is at play when they lead themselves and

others. So what is to be understood by the term authentic character-based leadership?

It is those positive qualities built on those enduring values aimed at the benefit and good of self and others. Its intention and energy source comes from the delicate interplay of courage and vulnerability as opposed to fear and the need to dominate and control.

It is the place from which the true self with all of its creative potential for love and service resides. To live in authentic character calls for self-awareness, courage, self-discipline, compassion and openness to feedback.

Needless to say, much of our true self and therefore real character is often buried in much of the muck and real painful experiences of our past, no one is exempt!

Our unresolved past experiences often causes us to live our leadership from a place of fear and insecurity. So we show the world a side of us which is often a mask or a false appearance. While this coping strategy offers temporary relief and comfort the cost is often a life lived in fear and mediocrity. The true self remains buried under the dominion of the mask.

I'm sure you have experienced yourself or other leaders as being total control freaks to a point where they stifle all creativity or innovation. Everyone around them is petrified to experiment or make mistakes. This leader in all probability fears being open, maybe even fears the idea that they may be wrong and cannot deal with the feelings and thoughts that come with that.

You may also have experienced leaders who hate receiving constructive feedback from their staff and shut down any suggestion which might entertain it. So, everyone walks around with massive blind spots and no smiles. The potential of the organisation, group or team is suppressed to placate the fears and insecurities of the leader. These leaders struggle to build trust in their teams and relationships. Unwittingly, they create a culture of exclusion and cloning because their followership quickly learn to say the right things and to stroke their egos. Everybody walks around with an entire arsenal of beautifully decorated masks and masterfully slips one off for another. All become actors at a masquerade ball.

These examples are all indications of a leader who has an **over reliance on security, control, self-interest, avoidance, winning at all cost and, exclusion**. I am not for one moment suggesting that as a leader one should not have a reliance on some of these elements. However, when the reliance becomes absolute and lacking in awareness then the leader has indeed moved to the destructive side.

It is part of our human condition that we do certain things or invest in certain behavioural patterns because there is a pay-off.

So what's the pay-off when we invest so heavily in the absolute reliance of this destructive leadership behaviour? Well, amongst many reasons it helps us to cope, it protects us, it shields us from our deepest fears, we don't have to acknowledge our limitations and inadequacies and the list continues. We need to do a cost benefit analysis here.

As self-aware leaders, we need to question what we get out of practising these behaviours and what it actually costs us. How does it limit us and how does it impact others? These questions challenge and push us out of the comfort zones of our inauthentic leadership patterns. So right now, if you are feeling despair about your leadership, stop trudging through that sticky mud of mental self-flagellation that leads to the belief that you will never be a good leader. You can and you will if you really want to.

Character Counts

Be careful of your thoughts, for your thoughts become your words;

Be careful of your words, for your words become your deeds;

Be careful of your deeds, for your deeds become your habits;

Be careful of your habits; for your habits become your character;

Be careful of your character, for your character becomes your destiny.

A good leader is not necessarily a perfect person. A good leader is one who recognises their shortcomings and has committed themselves to a path of self-awareness and self-actualisation. For a leader to continuously walk the path from the inauthentic self towards authentic self requires an enormous amount of courage. We fear what we might have to face in order for us to lead from our real self. Just think about it, what might it take for you to be more compassionate, courageous and open? Clearly, the pathway to authentic leadership will stretch and force us to look into the mirror and ask ourselves some

really tough questions. We should not be discouraged by this.

“We cannot see our reflection in running water; it is only in still water that we can”

Taoist Proverb

A Life Lesson in Authentic Leadership

A man, who works in my garden has taught me a very powerful lesson about myself and his leadership. A more recent life lesson encounter that I had with this man was through an SMS which he sent me requesting that I ask my wife to bake him a cake to celebrate his birthday with his family. I was initially taken aback by the audacity of his familiarity and pluck to make such a request. Then I thought back to a couple of days prior to the SMS to a conversation we both had while sitting around the pool during one of his breaks. He spoke so freely about his dreams and aspirations for his family and reminded me how I could help him achieve this. As he looked away deeply entranced by his dreams, I wondered what the two of us had in common and harboured the arrogant thought of how I could possibly relate on a friendship level to this “gardener”. Right in that moment I realised that if my heart is not open to the possibility of the friendship then what have I put in its way – our material differences? our intellectual differences? our life experience differences? I then realised how artificial these differences really are. What kind of leader am I if I cannot relate at the level of the heart towards those who seek my support and friendship. Will I ever have the vulnerability to ask someone to bake me a birthday cake so that I can celebrate and be happy about my life in this world because it matters? And it matters, not because of what I own, or

have achieved but just because my life matters and it is worth it. I suddenly felt jealous about how my gardener friend felt about his life – enough to borrow a cake and celebrate his happiness. He felt so connected and aligned with what really matters. He hasn’t caught the modern disease of successful people living disconnected lives filled with vacant stares.

Can I be this authentic and this happy with so little, I asked?

I now look forward to sitting around the pool when my gardener takes his break and eagerly wait to be invited into “his world” where the lessons of leadership are profound and rich.

Do not be afraid to welcome the lessons of leadership from whence it comes.

Leadership is about connection and relationship, first with self and then with others.

In Newsweek magazine from the president of Hyatt Hotels: “If there is anything I have learned in my 27 years in the service industry, it is this:

99 percent of all “employees want to do a good job. How they perform is simply a reflection of the one for whom they work.”

Practices in Authentic leadership:

- Take 100% responsibility for yourself and what you create – good or bad.
- Be accountable and do not pass the buck by becoming a “scapegoat farmer”.
- Always be honest with others even at the risk of losing their approval – do not compromise your integrity!
- Take off your “blind spot” and listen to feedback.
- Be humble enough to ask for help and support. Find yourself a wise person, mentor or coach.
- Remain agile and flexible. Keep being open to trying new ideas and make space for opinions that are different from yours.
- Revel in the successes of your leadership. Make time to celebrate and reward yourself.
- Before going to bed at night, make some quiet time and ask yourself always, “what is the one thing I can do differently tomorrow and what are the three things I am most grateful for today?”