



Leading with Authenticity.

Purposeful Actions.

By Jennifer Van Vleet, CPSM

Leaders are made, not born. That was a session I attended at a National SMPS Conference in Portland, Oregon in 1999. The session was led by Ted Sive, FSMPS and Bill Strong, FSMPS, two amazingly talented marketers in the Seattle area. They handed out little cards they had made all about developing leaders and I hung that card by my desk for years. For someone fresh in the industry at the time, who possessed loads of energy, it resonated with me.

But how to lead? What is a leader anyway? There are so many ways to approach the answers to these questions. Mine has always been: Be authentic.

Authenticity is bringing your whole self to work; your behavior matches your intentions. Researchers have found that when an individual is authentic and feels authentic at their workplace that it is linked to higher engagement, higher workplace satisfaction, better performance, and better overall wellbeing.

Living authentically and leading in this fashion is about operating in line with your core values which guide your choices and decisions. For example, is family a core value? If so, how does that show up in your work? Do you know the names of your colleagues' spouses and children? Do you ask after them? If you are leading a team, do you support and advocate for family friendly policies?

Many successful leaders, hold continuous self-development and learning as their central values.

It isn't just learning from a book, but also from experiences—recognizing mistakes, acknowledging, and learning from them. They understand their core and so they can see how actions either resonant or are dissonant with their person. Once an individual can do this, there is a transparency to them. This transparency is at the core of trust, and trust is the foundation to all strong, high functioning teams.

Patrick Lencioni is a well-known business leadership author and his book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* suggests that the foundation of a well-performing team starts with trust. Teams that trust ask for help, admit weaknesses and mistakes, accept questioning of ideas, take risks, offer the benefit of the doubt, tap into one another's skills and experiences, and offer and accept apologies. Trust then leads to unfiltered conflict around ideas. This means conversations are lively and meetings are more interesting when the ideas of all team members are extracted and exploited. This passionate debate

ushers in broad commitment. Commitment brings clarity and alignment with a focus on common objectives allowing teams to take advantages of opportunities and move forward without hesitation. This commitment brings with it an acceptance of accountability. Being accountable means identifying potential problems quickly through the questioning of other approaches without hesitation and the avoidance of excessive bureaucracy around performance and corrective actions. Finally leading to a focus on collective results which brings about shared success and the retention of achievement-oriented employees.

Being authentic, having our values, knowing who we are helps us to find purpose and it's purpose that drives us. It provides us clarity, and to those who may choose to follow us. And we all choose to follow different people which is why organizations form the way they do.

Having a purpose doesn't necessarily mean leading big teams or hundreds of people. But having a clear purpose does attract people together and authentic understanding of self, allows for greater clarity and discovery of purpose. Strong purpose does lead ... and leading happens at all levels.

You may value creativity, which is in everything you do. You may have a purpose to bring creativity to every assignment you receive and to share how doing so has an opportunity to engage people with you or your firm. You may be leading people to an appreciation around how embracing a creative element can bring success and one day be leading a creative group in marketing campaigns.

Perhaps you place great value on facts and figures giving you a purpose to research intently any initiative you undertake, from buying a shirt to starting a social media campaign to promote building projects with a low carbon footprint. This will attract others to seek you out for validation of ideas or concepts grounded in analysis.

Leading doesn't have to be only about managing groups of teams. It can be about leading to understanding and appreciation of something. But leading with purpose is important and the way to finding purpose is to understand yourself and your values. Doing this allows you to be transparent and authentic with others. It attracts the people you want to be with and the organizations of which you want to be a part.

It goes back to higher engagement, satisfaction, performance, and wellbeing. All things that help drive successful business.

It goes back to leaders being made and not born.

Focus on learning to be more authentic by taking a personal inventory. Ask yourself what type of people, activities or situations make you feel most alive and conversely what drains you. Work to be present—practice taking a time out to breath and check in with yourself during the day. Did you really enjoy designing that brochure or writing a great piece of content? Build a social support system, find people who encourage you. Practice being assertive in your communication and improving how you communicate—it can have a big impact on your ability to be authentic. Commit to finding your authentic self every day—actualize it with small steps. If you find yourself in a rut, step back to gain perspective—take a day off, do something fun. Be aware of your influences both internal (desires, dreams) and external (recognition, money) and ask how this steers you. Be patient with yourself.

Finding your authenticity will lead you and you will lead others ... whether that's developing a high functioning team like Lencioni describes, infusing charitable giving in your firm, creating a new brand voice, building a marketing mentorship program, or starting your own consulting practice. It will be your best you and your best you is best for business. ■



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