

Leaders frequently face an internal tug of war between 'Me the Person' and 'The Expected Role of Leader'. Authentic leadership is the art of weaving these two sometimes-conflicting manifestations into 'Me the Leader'. Most leaders want to leave a legacy that reflects the authenticity they brought to their role. But that means that their intentions as an authentic leader must match their behaviours and results.

The very deep question of 'who am I?' is not an easy one for many to answer. Really understanding ourselves, deeply working through our own value system and continually reframing what is important to us, is key. Truly appreciating and reconnecting with our internal beliefs and values to form our own purpose barometer is essential – in life generally – but especially in leading others.

As leaders we are faced with myriad of decisions that to a lesser or greater extent draw directly on this value system. Difficult decisions are, by definition difficult because they invariably butt right up against (or are even in outright conflict with) one or more of our own core values. Leaders wrestle with this dilemma internally as they work through what to tolerate, what to trade off or what to sacrifice of themselves in order to fulfil their role as leader whilst still honouring and respecting themselves.

Authentic leadership requires the person to be genuine – to bring their whole self to work. If we were to brutally ask ourselves how integrated our own compartments of our lives are – how consistent are we across those various compartments – work, partner, parent, social, community, private? Do we function honestly, openly and consistently across each and all of these different zones of our lives? From the outside looking in would we look and behave the same in each? How much do we consistently honour our core values?

## Going against your values as an authentic leader

Have you had a leader who communicates something to you and you do not genuinely feel that they believe in what they are communicating? They may have even openly stated that they do not believe in it. Does this make them an unauthentic leader?

If the leader is not engaged, does not understand or does not agree with the 'why', they cannot genuinely engage their people to do the same. Even authentic leaders must sometimes make decisions that go against their internal value system, despite their best efforts to remain true to themselves in their role. Leaders cannot be expected to believe in every decision, however if a leader finds this to be the case frequently or even occasionally on particularly important issues, then it is perhaps not their authentic leadership that is in question but whether they are the right leaders for that organisation.

As an authentic leader, you must define your own values and decide which ones simply cannot be compromised. You may be surprised to find that you are willing to compromise them in certain situations, but be honest and transparent to your team about why you make those decisions. Your team will no doubt understand that nothing is black and white, so concessions will be made but the genuine intent behind those decisions should not disappear.



## Do you judge leaders by their intentions or behaviours?

There is a useful perspective to gain by examining the judgements we make about ourselves and of others as leaders. Our expectations of leaders can often be quite different with the expectations of ourselves. How easy is it to judge ourselves on our **intentions** ('what we are trying to do') but then to judge others simply on their actual **behaviours** ('what they actually do'). Authenticity challenges this disconnect, attempts to examine these manifestations as a whole and aims to get real congruence between them.

As leaders we bring our 'personal me' into our leadership roles all of the time. Our actions, what we do, how we say it and especially our decisions are revealed through all of interactions. But it is often in those knife-edge situations – those 'finally-balanced' deep and intensive, potentially high impact situations that our true test of authenticity is brought to the fore. This was very much the case when Tony Blair reflected on his decisions made during the Invasion of Iraq...

"So, of course, the vision is painted in the colours of the rainbow, and the reality is sketched in the duller tones of black, white and grey. But I ask you to accept one thing – hand on heart, I did what I thought was right".

## A leader's legacy

Most leaders want to be remembered for their contributions to their team, organisation and society as a whole. This will be different for every person – while some want to be remembered for their business results, others would prefer to leave a legacy of caring, compassionate leadership and mentoring.

If someone asks me this in 20 years' time I would like people to say that I was true to myself in the leadership decisions I made and that through every mistake I made I learned and I learned fast. I have used the benefit of hindsight and analysis to understand the implications of my leadership – both positive and negative. I have truly understood those who work with me and I have represented them well. I am trusted as well as being true to myself and my values system – the start and continuation of which is self-awareness.

Every authentic leader has good intentions. The key to leaving a legacy as an authentic leader is turning those intentions into results, while keeping true to your core values, and exhibiting the behaviours of an authentic leader every day.

## About the authors

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Steve is an experienced business leader and consultant with a highly diverse and successful background in multi-disciplined leadership. As owner and CEO of Si Consulting, he works with leaders and teams in developing and sustaining their

performance and impact. Steve adds a powerful mix of useable and sustainable approaches that will see individuals, teams and organisations achieving greater performance.

Steve brings 25 years of first hand commercial experience, including a Board appointment and senior positions with Specsavers and Fitness First, built on the foundation of a successful career in corporate finance and banking. Steve is also a licensed practitioner of Insights Discovery, a coach, group facilitator, trained trainer and speaker at business events and seminars.

### Victoria O'Dea, Client Relationship Manager, Insights



Victoria is a Client Relationship Manager at Insights and manages a wide range of accounts. Prior to joining Insights Victoria had 10 years+ experience in Sales and Learning and Development within large FMCG Blue Chips

Organisations. Victoria prides herself on understanding clients' business needs and drivers, and developing measurable solutions which help them provide the required deliverables for the individuals, teams and organisation.

Victoria first got introduced to Insights in 1999 when she was a delegate on an Insights Discovery Workshop and received her first Insights Discovery Personal Profile. It was at this moment that Victoria realised the true potential that Discovery could bring for enhancing relationships and in turn enhancing sales with clients. This realisation soon evolved into a genuine passion and enthusiasm for learning and development and developing people in order to help them maximise their potential.