

Authenticity in the Workplace

From *The Yoga of Leadership: A Conversation with the Sarleys*, by Grace Welker

One of the key efforts in our leadership is to provide space and tolerance for authenticity and full expression...the more authentic you are, the more alive you are. Warren Bennis, a pioneer in researching leadership, states in his book *On Becoming a Leader* that a “leader is one who is fully expressed.”

Authenticity is really nothing more than making sure that people are fully expressing what they think and feel. Jack Welch, the CEO of General Electric, always said that candor was the most important of all corporate behaviors.

This is because if people are not authentic, that is, if they are not expressing themselves fully in what they think and feel *within the context of the work they are accountable to produce*, then the enterprise or organization is editing out data. This impairs good decision-making and follow-through -- and ultimately undermines success.

“When you have a group that is authentic and rigorous in their dialogue, you will have a high-performing team.”

We believe feelings are indicators that something is awry in either the gathering or the interpretation of information. When someone on our team gets emotional, we immediately become curious about the source of that emotion. We ask ‘what is missing or being thwarted in our process of dialogue?’ People don’t get upset for no reason, and invariably when the reason is explored, a key piece of information comes to light that conditions the business plan for greater success.

Have you ever been in a meeting where what was going on just didn’t make sense to you but you felt you couldn’t express it? If full expression and rigor are not present, then the flow of energy gets distorted and thwarted. This is why so many organizations think they know what to do, but can’t seem to do it. People sit around accessing the process as not being sufficient for the problems needing to be solved, but they sit silently, figuratively or literally rolling their eyes, then talking about the stupidity of the proposed action around the water cooler.

When you have a group that is authentic and rigorous in its dialogue, you will have a high-performing team. Lose either and over time you forfeit the ability to adequately respond to the challenges that life brings to your organization.

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Authenticity in the workplace, continued

As a leader, you cannot generate authenticity around you if you are not authentic yourself. This means you have to practice courage and trust in yourself. This means you have to practice courage and trust in yourself to say what you think and feel. ... As a leader, I often don't know if what I am thinking or feeling is going to carry the day or not, but I can't find this out if I don't say what I think and feel.

...Being authentic takes self-trust and courage, and submitting to rigor takes humility and self-awareness. Humor and being able to laugh at your self helps, too.

Being authentic yourself and submitting to the discipline of rigor goes a long way toward creating that culture around you, but you must also have what we call an unconditional positive regard for the other... no matter your differences. This is sometimes known as "tough love," If the only kind of love you have access to is 'being nice,' and you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings or have your staff, co-workers, and bosses not like you, then you miss the authenticity and rigor that is necessary for good decision-making and organizational development.

We have studied very widely in the area of organizational development. In all cases, what we are promoting correlates closely with the leading-edge thinking of the most astute organizational development and leadership experts. ... We believe that all humans want to be fully expressed and to make a difference to those around them. Organizations succeed in the long run to the degree that they can harvest this innate human desire in the service of the corporation. The principles and values we have studied and practiced over the last 35 years have proven effective in bottom-line results, despite being applied in different milieus and in different business cycles. The basic practices can be adopted anywhere, and if done correctly will reliably produce better decision making and follow-through, the keystones of any business or organizational enterprise.

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