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Authentic leadership: Improving outcomes one person at a time

by Jessica L. Hampton

Effective leadership is the ability of a leader to see and understand others' points of view while knowing when it is appropriate to express thoughts and opinions.^[1] The style of leadership impressed upon employees impacts employees' attitudes toward performance and their attitudes toward change and productivity.^[2] Leaders' behaviors are largely focused on goal attainment through proper people management. Thus, leadership requires developing relationships and mutual trust with employees.

As the workforce changes, organizations look to newer leadership styles to improve the completion of assignments and tasks by encouraging self-efficacy.^[3] The most frequently researched newer types of leadership include ideological, pragmatic, servant, authentic, ethical, and spiritual leadership.^[4] Of these newer styles, authentic leadership has far-reaching impacts outside a leader's direct reports or employees; it can create and promote a healthy work environment. Authentic leadership is "a pattern of leader behavior that draws on and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development."^[5] Creating a healthy work environment in the field of healthcare can, in turn, help to improve its overall delivery through enhanced employee engagement and productivity—and authentic leadership as a pathway to encouraging and achieving improved outcomes.

Authentic leadership

Studies have demonstrated that authentic leadership increases positive affective tone, influencing an organization's performance.^[6] In addition, authentic leadership has been positively associated with various follower outcomes, including identification with the leader and leader trustworthiness. These positive associations resulted from the direct effects on followers of authentic leaders and through indirect effects of leadership on followers' coworkers.^[7] Authentic leaders share four common characteristics key to developing this particular leadership style: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective.^[8] The process through which authentic leaders achieve these specific characteristics is through the alignment of their values with their intentions and actions. The alignment sets a foundation for the leader to achieve self-regulation, with a call to attention to the expectation of authentic leaders' behaviors to be driven mainly by regulatory processes.^[9]

Authentic leaders influence people at various levels and not only have a profound effect on followers but on the organizations they direct.^[10] There are several positive outcomes specifically proposed to result from authentic

leadership. Authentic leaders support their followers for the employee to explore intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, and creativity,^[11] and encourage trust, engagement, and well-being.^[12] This support and encouragement have helped findings on the impacts of organizational citizenship behaviors and performance.^[13] The most discussed and confirmed variables often seen as a result of positive forms of leadership, and of authentic leadership in particular, are commitment, job satisfaction, and extra effort.^[14]

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