

## What It Means to Be an Authentic Leader & Why It Matters.

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



We read a lot about how an effective leader is also an authentic leader. But what does that mean, exactly, and why does authenticity matter? Bill George, who pioneered the research on authentic leadership and wrote his [seminal book on the subject](#) in 2003, explains that over the past decade, authenticity has become the gold standard of leadership—it's the coloration of character that has the most influence on the people you lead.

Being an authentic leader does matter, and here's why. In an age of increased skepticism throughout all business functions, authenticity becomes the foundation for trust with your staff and your customers. As a leader, are you looking to inspire your staff to be committed to a cause greater than oneself while also being highly productive? Are you trying to move your organization forward to reach your goals and vision? They're looking to you for that needed guidance.

Turning to research studies on the subject, we find that a worker's perception of the leader is the strongest predictor of their job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and overall happiness in the workplace. A trusting, open and happy workforce is a productive workforce—one more likely to be aligned with the organization's purpose and vision. As an authentic leader, you are the one who builds this atmosphere.

Being able to show up as your true self and share your true personality allows others to feel more comfortable in sharing both the good news and bad news. Being authentic often becomes a purposeful work in progress because there are times when you find it's easier playing the positional authority role and spewing the company line. Yet being able to self-disclose your own vulnerability or trepidations with assorted situations, can result in strengthened relationships with your workers. If you take your leadership development process seriously, you have the opportunity to develop an authentic leadership style that is based on your unique competencies and personality traits.

Being an authentic leader means that you stay true to who you are, what you do, and whom you serve, while consistently having a clear understanding of your work's purpose. According



to [Simon Sinek](#), the things we say and the things we do are things we believe. Here are 3 questions to ask yourself with accompanying suggestions to improve your authentic leadership style and positive workplace engagement.

### Are you approachable? Leadership is not about you.

Approachability is all about heart—the ability to show compassion, kindness and understanding of others. Being approachable allows other people to feel comfortable bringing concerns to you, and being able to listen to them, before pronouncing any judgement. Approachability includes a strong dose of flexibility—it provides the ability to accommodate each staff member's needs in a unique way that strengthens their ability to perform.

Take a look around your workplace. How receptive are you to others' points of view, including your workers and your customers? Are you listening intently to what they have to say and really hearing the messages they share? How are you allowing their perspectives to inform your decisions and make improvements in the organization?

People will go the extra mile when they know their leader cares. This includes taking time to learn about the whole person who works with you and engaging in meaningful conversations. This includes learning about Each individual's talents and utilizing these strengths to the benefit of the organization. No leader wants to be viewed as intimidating. That's a lonely place to be. Opening your office door and opening your heart will bring satisfaction to both you and your team.

### Do you embrace transparency? Leadership is all about you.

To improve your ability to be authentic, start with open communication. The image you project in public should not be drastically different from how you are in private. Transparency require you to admit mistakes and learn from them. When you show up as who you are, you are able to show vulnerability which leads others to develop respect, trust and honesty.

Stop and think of the personality traits you utilize at work that are also present in your private life. Curiosity, cheerleading for others, willingness to self-disclose when you don't know something—shows transparency.

Transparency also includes the information you are willing to share with your staff. Information needs to be shared through good times, in which you can celebrate, and in

lean times, in which you might need to have some difficult conversations. Regardless, being honest in your actions and your words brings the best results. As you craft your authentic leadership style, think about how you can maintain consistent transparency in all actions and decisions.

### Do you know what you believe? On what hill are you willing to die?

Authentic leaders know what principles they stand for and why they stand for those principles. Clarifying your principle values and beliefs that shape your perspective in life is a must for any leader. It is these guiding principles which become the tools you use for analyzing all situations. These principles form the guide rails for any decisions you make.

People want to do business with people who are aligned in values, character and beliefs. One way to clarify your principle values and beliefs is to write them down. Writing belief statements documents a true indication of who you are. As the late [Charles Krauthammer](#) stated, "You're betraying your whole life if you don't say what you think, and you don't say it honestly and bluntly."

So how can you, as an authentic leader, harness the power of values and beliefs to engage your workforce and their customers? Lead with what you believe! It answers why you do what you do. Simon Sinek reminds us that it's not what you do but why you do it that inspires your team and your customers.

For example, if you are a leader of an HR consulting firm, and you have developed an employee evaluation program that takes a pulse reading of your workers on a continual basis, your belief statement might be something like, "We believe that traditional performance reviews are old and outdated." If you are leading an IT business development firm, you might have a statement that says, "We believe you should be able to run your business from your phone." And if you are a mid-level manager working with a product development team, you might craft a belief statement that says, "We believe that the status quo is always worth challenging."

Keep your belief statements centered around the hearts of the people who work with you rather than the soulless goals described with P & L numbers. More concisely, belief statements describe the hill you are willing to die on.

In summary, being an authentic leader and exercising effective leadership requires a natural self-expression that you can access through a blending of the competency strengths you own. People will follow and will be eager to achieve the purpose you describe because there is trust,



honesty and respect. Authentic leadership is much needed in our world today. In a digital age where information and conversations are shared through rapid fire, being able to engage in meaningful dialogue where divergent points of view are acknowledged for their merit allows for a healthier organization and a thriving workforce.

### About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business development strategist. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. Dr. Gatty is a frequent writer and contributor [www.AllBusiness.com](http://www.AllBusiness.com), [www.MarketingInsiders.com](http://www.MarketingInsiders.com), and [www.WomenOnBusiness.com](http://www.WomenOnBusiness.com). Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.

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