

Achieving Results

A Black Diamond Associates Publication

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Authentic Leadership

Are Leaders Born or Made? This is a question I often pose to my clients and to audiences when I have the opportunity to speak to groups. Some will respond that they believe true leaders are born that way. Others believe that great leaders have developed their leadership skills. Still others think that it depends.

My follow-up question is: “What are the qualities or characteristics of a great leader?” The answers are many—like visionary, results-oriented, good communicator, charismatic—and sometimes appear to conflict with each other—like driven and humble. But I’ve never heard anyone respond that great leaders are 6’3” or have big noses or curly hair—qualities that are inherited at the moment of conception.

This is good news for leaders and potential leaders everywhere. Each person has been blessed with God-given leadership talents and skills that are nurtured and developed through life experiences. Some are dominant traits and others recessive but no one set of leadership traits define a great leader. The key to success is for leaders to develop their own leadership style that leverages their natural strengths. This is authentic leadership.

Authentic Leaders are true to their own personality, spirit, or character. Their success is based on getting results by developing their strengths and modifying the weaknesses that are getting in their way. They know who they are and they surround themselves with others who can complement their skills. (That’s complement – to complete – not compliment – to flatter!) So, Authentic Leaders are both “born” and “made.”

How can you develop your Authentic Leadership style? There are three essential elements: 1) Know who you are; 2) Know what you want to accomplish; and 3) Know what is getting in your way.



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A S S O C I A T E S

When I worked for a Fortune 500 Company, our annual performance evaluation included an assessment of how well the employee measured up to a prescribed set of leadership qualities. The idea was that if they developed the leadership qualities they wanted, then the company would achieve its objectives. Although there may be some merit in that line of thinking, the correlation between a set list of leadership qualities and goal achievement is questionable. A better approach is to clearly define the goals and then develop the leadership qualities present in each individual to achieve the goals.

Whether it is gaining clarity of your organizations goals or developing your leadership, Black Diamond Associates can help. We work with businesses and individuals to identify and develop strengths and overcome obstacles. Give us a call.

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Know who you are

Although most people look in a mirror at least once a day, many do not have a very accurate picture of who they are. Assessments are effective tools that help leaders recognize their areas of strength and potential weakness. Whether the tool measures your behavior style, talents and skills, emotional quotient, or how others view your effectiveness, taking an objective step back to reflect on who you are is a healthy exercise.

Know what you want

Leadership is “organizing a group of people to achieve a common goal”. Therefore the first role of the leader is to achieve clarity of the common goal. Without focus on where you are going, the leader has nowhere to lead. The same is true of self-leadership. Knowing who/what/where you want to be in the future is essential to personal growth. It may sound simple, but a lack of clarity of direction is a major stumbling block for individuals and organizations everywhere. They spend enormous amounts of time, money and energy moving “away” from an undesired current state rather than “toward” a desired future state.

Know what’s in the way

Obstacles are real and present between you and anything that is worth having. If they weren’t, we’d all

be discussing something else right now. Identifying the obstacles to developing your authentic leadership ability is not always so obvious. Too often they hide within early conditioning, attitudes and habits. Understanding why you do, what you do, how you do it and whether it is getting you the results you want is essential to the continuous process of self-improvement.

The authentic leader lives a life that is consistent with his/her values, strengths and dreams and their work is in alignment with who they truly are. When this happens, the success of the team they lead is enhanced.

An authentic life is the most personal form of worship. Everyday life has become my prayer.

~ Sarah Ban Breathnach, American Author

When I am finishing a picture, I hold some God-made object up to it - a rock, a flower, the branch of a tree or my hand - as a final test. If the painting stands up beside a thing man cannot make, the painting is authentic. If there’s a clash between the two, it’s bad art.

~ Marc Chagall, French Artist

Authentic Leadership Checklist

True or False?

1. I have a clearly defined list of personal core values the guide my decision making.
2. When I reflect on the decisions I’ve made in the past year, I was influenced by my core values.
3. I never attempt to justify violating my core values when the ends justify the means.
4. My personal and professional goals reflect what is most important.
5. My values and the values of the organization I work for are in alignment.
6. I hold others accountable to our organization’s core values.
7. I have an accountability partner to hold me accountable to our organization’s core values.
8. I love my work; it uses the best of my talents and abilities.
9. My life’s work is helping me accomplish my dreams.
10. My work brings me personal satisfaction.