**Truly Authentic Leadership**

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If ever there was a time when America needs leaders, it’s now. The litany of problems is all too familiar— Afghanistan, healthcare, schools, energy, the seemingly endless series of corporate scandals. What’s nowhere to be found, however—or almost nowhere—is the leadership needed to fix things. The problem isn’t the lack of potential leaders, however, but a wrongheaded notion of what exactly a leader is. This misguided notion of leadership often results in the wrong people attaining critical leadership roles. Search committees and voters alike fall into the trap of choosing leaders for their style rather than their substance, for their image instead of their integrity. Given this way of doing business, why should we be surprised when our leaders come up short?

The only valid test of a leader is his or her ability to bring people together to achieve sustainable results over time. There’s no such thing as the “One-Minute Leader” because real leadership requires years of development and hard work.

The good news is that there is no shortage of people with the capacity to lead. There are leaders throughout organizations just waiting for the opportunity. In too many organizations, however, people don’t feel empowered to take charge, nor are they rewarded for doing so. Young & Rubicam Brand’s CEO, Ann Fudge, says, “All of us have the spark of leadership in us, whether it is in business, in government, or as a nonprofit volunteer. The challenge is to understand ourselves well enough to discover where we can use our leadership gifts to serve others.”

How do we recognize authentic leaders? Usually, they demonstrate these five traits:

1. Pursuing their purpose with passion

2. Practicing solid values

3. Leading with their hearts as well as their heads

4. Establishing connected relationships

5. Demonstrating self-discipline

To be effective leaders of people, authentic leaders must first discover the purpose of their leadership. If they don't, they are at the mercy of their egos and narcissistic impulses. To discover their purpose, authentic leaders have to understand themselves and the passions that animate their life stories.

**Greater purpose.** The time is ripe to redefine leadership for the 21st century. The military-manufacturing model of leadership that worked so well 50 years ago doesn't get the best out of people today. People are too well informed to adhere to a set of rules or to simply follow a leader over a distant hill. They want to be inspired by a greater purpose. As Fudge concludes, "We're here for something. Life is about giving and living fully."

What, then, is the 21st-century leader all about? It is being authentic, uniquely yourself, the genuine article. Authentic leaders know who they are. They are "good in their skin," so good they don't feel a need to impress or please others. They not only inspire those around them, they bring people together around a shared purpose and a common set of values and motivate them to create value for everyone involved.

"America's Best Leaders" are the best of the new breed of authentic leaders. Reading about them, you will discern a dramatic shift in caliber and character. These men and women have stepped boldly into the nation's leadership vacuum, with a passion to unite others in addressing the toughest problems we face. From Justice Sandra Day O'Connor's thoughtful guidance of the Supreme Court to Eric Lander's towering leadership in the scientific community to Don Berwick's practical approaches to improving healthcare, these leaders have defied convention to lead in their authentic way. In so doing, they have set a new standard for the rest of us.

**Passion and compassion.** Leading with heart may sound soft, as if authentic leaders can't make tough choices involving pain and loss; it is anything but. Leading with heart means having passion for your work, compassion for the people you serve, empathy for your teammates, and the courage to make tough calls.

There are few better examples of leading with heart than Marilyn Carlson Nelson. When she took over the Carlson companies from her 84-year-old father, Marilyn inherited a demoralized organization suffering from decades of top-down rule. She immediately set about changing things, expressing empathy for her employees and compassion for her customers. The result: a remarkable turnaround with record levels of growth and new heights in employee and customer satisfaction.

When Wendy Kopp was a senior at Princeton, she was saddened by the inequities in public education. It wasn't fair, she thought, that so many kids were deprived of a sound education. At a national conference she organized on education reform, an idea suddenly came to her: "Why doesn't America have a national teacher corps of recent college graduates who commit two years to teach in public schools?" Her question inspired her to found Teach For America, the most successful secondary educational program of the past 25 years.

After working a hundred hours a week for five years to build Teach For America, Kopp faced a crisis: declining applications for teaching positions, reductions in funding, and a blistering critique of her efforts in the educational journal *Phi Beta Kappan* . Stung, Kopp considered resigning or even shutting down her organization. Then she refocused on her purpose and redoubled her efforts. A decade later, Teach For America has grown 10-fold, to 4,400 teachers a year.

The values of authentic leaders are shaped by their personal beliefs and developed through introspection, consultation with others, and years of experience. The test of authentic leaders’ values is not what they say but how they act under pressure. If leaders aren’t true to the values they profess, the trust is broken and not easily regained.

Authentic leaders also know that competing successfully takes a consistently high level of self-discipline. It would be hard to find someone who illustrates the positive effects of self-discipline better than Warren Buffett. For over 40 years, he has followed a basic set of principles that have made him the most successful investor in America. By avoiding debt and high-risk investments and concentrating on value companies and long-term positions, Buffett has been an absolute model of self-discipline-also reflected in his personal life. Buffett lives in the house he bought in 1956 for $31,500, drives an old car, and washes his meals down with a Cherry Coke at Gorat's, his favorite Omaha steakhouse.

The challenges of leadership are so great these days that many ask whether nit's worth taking on a leadership role. This issue of "America's Best Leaders" tells the stories of people who said yes. They are, as Teddy Roosevelt said, "in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood ... who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions ... knows in the end the triumph of high achievement" that can come only by "daring greatly."

No individual achievement can equal the pleasure of leading a group of people to achieve a worthy goal. When you cross the finish line together, there's a deep satisfaction that it was your leadership that made the difference. There's simply nothing that can compare with that.

What are the attributes of an EFFECTIVE leader…

1. According to the article?
2. According to you?
3. Three examples of effective leaders FROM YOUR LIFE? What makes them effective?