

What is Authentic Leadership?

Authentic Leadership links who you are as a person, the sum total of your experience, your personality, your beliefs and your values, with how you lead and manage, i.e. how you relate to colleagues and followers in terms of your thinking and your subsequent actions.

Authentic Leadership is particularly relevant in modern business where corporate and political scandals such as the demise of the Clinton Presidency, Enron and Arthur Anderson have shaken followers' faith in the moral and ethical integrity of their leaders.

Authentic Leaders are highly self aware; before you can truly lead others you must know how to lead yourself. You can only do this when you know who you are. Authentic Leaders understand what has made them the person and the leader that they have become today and they use everything that happens around them as an opportunity to learn more about themselves and others.

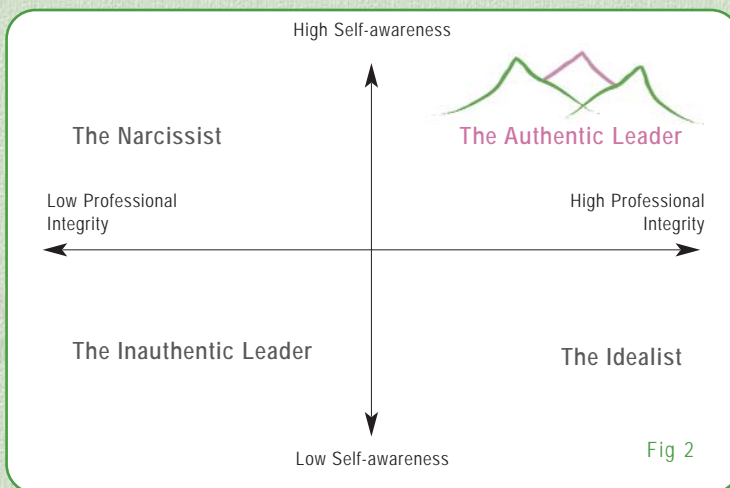
Self-aware leaders are undoubtedly more successful than their less aware counterparts. But self-awareness on its own is not enough. Self-awareness is no guarantee of fairness, honesty, integrity or ethical decision making. Authentic leaders are characterised by their integrity; they have a higher ethical and moral capacity than other leaders. They do what is right because it is the right thing to do, not for any personal, political or operational gain. These aspects of Authentic Leadership are shown in Fig.1



Fig 1

Not only are Authentic Leaders characterized by their moral and ethical integrity, they also have an ability to look at situations from all angles, taking everyone's perspective into account. Taking all parties' needs into account in decision-making processes, both in terms of problem solving and with regard to moral and ethical dilemmas, relates directly to being Cognitively Fit. This multi-perspective approach makes all parties feel valued and engenders the trust and respect of colleagues and followers.

The relationship between Authentic Leaders and their followers is a particularly special one; they wholeheartedly support their followers, they trust them and are trusted by them in return. Fig. 2 shows how leaders who are trusted but not respected become perceived as Idealists; nice people to be around, but as leaders they don't deliver operational results. Whereas Narcissistic Leaders may be respected as they do deliver results, (at least in the short term), they are ethically and morally corrupt as leaders; because they always put themselves first, they are therefore neither liked nor trusted by colleagues or followers.



Truly Authentic Leaders who are ethically and morally sound, self-aware enough to understand themselves, to understand others and perhaps even more importantly, to understand the impact that they have on the lives of others, are rare. Organisations that are led by authentic leaders consistently out-perform the competition.

Finally, Authentic Leaders want to make a difference. They want to make a positive contribution to their organizations and the people within them. They want to play their role in society and in their community and to leave the world a better place than they found it. That is their legacy.

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This short article is a very simplified explanation of Authentic Leadership. For further information and to receive updates on Authentic Leadership please subscribe to the Cognitive Fitness newsletter via our website.

The principles of Authentic Leadership underpin all aspects of the 3 Peaks Leadership Development Programme.

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