Chapter 4
Authentic Leadership: Applications in Academic Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

Authentic leadership is used to describe a leadership style that is moral, inclusive, transparent, and original. Authentic leadership is believed to translate to a healthy work environment by engaging employees and demonstrating genuineness. This genuineness is seen first in the leadership and transfers throughout the organization. This is true in healthcare, in the business setting, and in the academic environment. This chapter will explore what an authentic leader is, how their attributes affect the workplace environment and the employees in that environment. Further, the chapter will examine decision-making and problem-solving through the lens of authentic leadership, with considerable focus on the academic setting. The academic leader is responsible for not only subject matter education (the ‘hard’ information), but also an emotional education for teachers (the ‘soft’ lessons) that is further shared with the students.

INTRODUCTION

When a leader is “authentic”, they are able to reconcile their emotion and their logic (their inward and outward selves). The authentic leader is better equipped to empathize with others. This empathy is not seen as a weak trait; rather, it is the basis of a leader who is unafraid to demonstrate their vulnerabilities (their “humanness”) to others. Because authentic leaders are more approachable, their employees feel empowered. They sense they are working WITH the authentic leader, not FOR them. This creates an atmosphere of team and a feeling of “belonging” among employees. These employees tend to be happier and more productive, leading to a healthy work environment, including:

- Better work outcomes,
- Increased commitment to the organization (and to others), and
- Job satisfaction.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1968-3.ch004
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They are doing more than showing up for a paycheck; they are invested in the meaning of the organization and being a part of that influence. In this chapter, the concept of authentic leadership will be explored. Further, a focus on the authentic leader in the academic setting will be considered. When students are taught by an authentic leader, their education includes not only the subject matter of interest (history, math, etc…) but includes ‘life lessons’ (morality, emotional intelligence, and empathy for example) beyond the subject at hand. Applications of the authentic leadership model in decision-making and problem-solving will be further examined.

Chapter Objectives

1. Define Authentic Leadership,
2. Explore Authentic Leadership in the academic setting,
3. Apply Authentic Leadership in problem-solving and decision-making in the academic setting.

BACKGROUND

As the role of the leader in the workplace has moved from activity controller to encourager and mentor, leaders have sought the balance of meeting the requirements of their role while maintaining morale and creating an empowered workforce (Kanter, 2001). Authentic leadership is a modality to meet this balance.

According to Waite, McKinney, Smith-Glasgow, and Meloy (2014), authentic leaders are those leaders who execute justice for others, model fairness, and remain true to the convictions in their heart. As authentic leaders have an astute awareness of their thoughts and behaviors, others perceive that they are aware of their moral perspectives and values, the environment in which they function, and their strengths and weaknesses. They are viewed as confident, hopeful, and as having high moral character (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004).

Authentic leaders behave authentically. Erickson (as cited in Avolio & Gardner, 2005) notes the self-referential nature of the authenticity concept and believes it is critical to understanding the concept. The basis of authentic leadership is from humanistic philosophy, Greek philosophy, and from positive psychology (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). The word “authentic” comes from the word “authentes” (Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011; Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005), which refers to being self-made. Through authenticity, one “owns” their personal experiences. Personal experiences include:

- Emotions,
- Beliefs,
- Thoughts,
- Preferences, and
- Values.

Those with authenticity also act in accordance to their ‘true self’ by expressing what they honestly believe as they think (introspection) and act (outward expression) accordingly (Harter as cited in Gardner et al., 2005).
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