

# Authentic Leadership

*Excite others to exceptional performance.*



by Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones

**N**EARLY 10 YEARS AGO IN OUR RESEARCH we asked executives the question “Why should anyone be led by you?” It created a stir then and has silenced countless rooms as we have continued our work with hundreds of leaders or organizations.

Now, as then, leader-heroes make headlines. Executives at all levels try to follow prescriptive recipes for imitating Jack Welch, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson or even, as we write, Barack Obama. What’s the problem with this approach? It’s all about leaders, not leadership. Well-intentioned executives worldwide are obsessed with only one half of the equation. They overlook the fact that *leadership* is a relationship. Without followers it doesn’t exist. This is an important distinction. Great *leadership* excites people to exceptional performance.

## Three Tenets

*There are three things you need to know about leadership:*

First, it is *relational*—that is, it is something you do *with* people, not *to* them. Put simply again, you cannot be a leader without followers. Like all relationships, leadership is a rather fragile state. You need to carefully monitor and cultivate it. Leadership is also *nonhierarchical*. Formal authority or a title doesn’t make you a leader. Leaders can be found—and for the sake of your organization, should be found—at all levels. Finally, leadership is *contextual*. The circumstances that you inherit or inhabit as a leader are your starting point. You need to size up and tap into what exists *and* bring more to the party.

Authentic leaders modify their behavior to respond to the needs of their followers and the situations they encounter while simultaneously remaining true to who they are. They produce results—and meaning—by

being crystal clear on their unique differentiators and by addressing the four critical needs of their followers.

## The CASE Framework

You build a case for your leadership by providing your followers with these four things.

- **Community:** Humans are hardwired for sociability. They also desire solidarity. As a result, followers long for a sense of belonging and want to feel part of something bigger. Help them connect to others (not just to you) as well as to the overarching purpose of your organization. Are you helping them answer the questions “Why are we here?” and “What are we part of?”



- **Authenticity:** Followers choose to be led by humans not titles, credentials or manufactured management clones. Identify and deploy your personal differences, foibles and strengths to remind people you’re human—and to inspire them to apply their energy and talents to help you. Who are you and where do you come from? What is different about you that will rouse others to follow?

- **Significance:** Followers want to believe their efforts matter. Recognize their role and contributions in a meaningful way, with highly personalized feedback. When was the last time you paid attention to the recognition needs of those you wish to lead? How can you ennoble their efforts? How specific is the recognition you provide?

- **Excitement:** Followers need to be inspired to higher levels of effort and achievement. Articulate your personal passion, values and vision to provide

the energy and enthusiasm employees hunger for. Are you actually in touch with your own values and motivators? A dead battery cannot spark another. And how can you display an edgy intensity at times to raise the bar on performance?

## Four Essential Practices

Authentic leadership contains inherent tensions: You must stay true to who you are and at the same time adapt or conform to a particular culture or situation . . . all the while considering your followers’ needs. In the leadership development consulting that we and our partner, consulting firm BlessingWhite, have completed with executives worldwide the following leadership practices matter most.

1. **Become a situational sensor.** To be successful you need to hone your context-reading skills and your ability to rewrite that context. Begin by tuning into your organization’s “frequency,” by collecting and interpreting soft data. Listen. Observe. Pick up on non-verbals. Pay particular attention to the emotions and motivations of the people who influence your work. Only then can you react as an “authentic chameleon,” adapting effectively to the context without losing your sense of self. Only then can you begin to transform the situation with symbolic actions and decisive behavior to create an alternative, inspiring reality for your followers.

2. **Know and show yourself—enough.** Authentic leadership requires *some* self-knowledge, not years of therapy. You need to determine what is special about you that works with others. What core values fuel you? How have your origins shaped you? What strengths differentiate you? What weaknesses (stopping short of fatal flaws) demonstrate that you need others? Then, using your understanding of your followers and the particular situations you encounter, determine which parts of yourself to disclose to strengthen your relationships and inspire the action of others. The key is *enough*. A bit of mystery keeps you interesting.

3. **Get close but keep your distance.** This is leadership, not friendship. Successful leaders manage relationships by knowing when to empathize or get personal and when to step back to keep people focused on the organization’s goals. To fully understand what makes followers tick you need to get close, to ask questions that go beyond professional aspirations to

learn their interests, dreams and goals outside of work. (Of course, the prerequisite here is sharing some of that yourself.) When you need to address performance issues or difficult situations, however, you might choose to *create distance* by reminding people of the job at hand and the larger purpose of the team or organization.

#### 4. Communicate with care.

Successful communication requires an appreciation of the message, the context, your followers and your personal strengths and weaknesses as a communicator. Choose your channel carefully. Is it a small informal meeting or

a dramatic speech in a larger setting? Will email do or is personal connection essential for success? Create a clear and compelling vision—one that articulates your personal values and vision, one that creates a vivid picture of where your followers fit in (thus making your “case”). To ensure that they translate their energy into an output other than applause, include clear, actionable steps on what needs to be done and why.

#### “With,” not “To”

The truth remains: Leadership is not something you do *to* other people.

Rather you do it *with* others. As a result, there are tensions inherent in leadership, as in all relationships, which you need to manage. You must be yourself, but authenticity alone is insufficient.

As you improve your ability to read context, understand your followers’ needs and adapt accordingly you’ll be able to answer the question “Why should anyone be led by you?” **LE**

*Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones are authors of several books, including Why Should Anyone Be Led by You? and Clever: Leading Your Smartest, Most Creative People (available August 2009). Visit [www.whysouldanyonebeledbyyou.com](http://www.whysouldanyonebeledbyyou.com).*

**ACTION:** Be yourself—more—with skill.

## Your Leadership

*Build a CASE for it with followers.*



by Tom Barry

As Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones emphasize in *Why*

*Should Anyone Be Led by You?* leadership is a relationship between leaders and followers.

To successfully deliver desired results, you need to understand your team members’ needs and provide what they’re looking for in that relationship. Only then will they in turn be compelled to follow your lead and apply their talents and discretionary energy to accomplish the tasks that you define as mission-critical.

#### Four Basic Needs

The four basic needs of followers are: Community, Authenticity, Significance, and Excitement (CASE).

**Think about your team.** How well are you building a CASE for your leadership with each team member? The questions at right can provide insights.

**Reminder:** Self-assessment is a useful exercise. Ultimately, however, what you think is only part of the story.

You may be consciously trying to exhibit the behaviors at right, but your followers ultimately decide whether your good intentions actually succeed. **LE**

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**ACTION:** Solicit your followers’ feedback.

### CASE SELF-ASSESSMENT

Think about your behavior and consider the extent to which you agree with each statement below ...

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

#### COMMUNITY

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I make sure employees know they are valued members of the team.         | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 2. I establish traditions that bring team members together.                | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 3. I build a strong team identity without creating silos.                  | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 4. I build our team’s strength by leveraging each person’s unique talents. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

#### AUTHENTICITY

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. My actions align with my stated values.                            | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 6. I share personal shortcomings.                                     | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 7. I “show up” consistently and appropriately in different situations | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 8. I let myself be known on a personal level beyond title or role.    | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

#### SIGNIFICANCE

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. I help individuals see how their work connects to larger goals.                              | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 10. I often ask for—and act on—input from team members.   | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 11. I recognize individuals’ contributions to our team’s success.                               | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 12. I provide specific, personalized feedback to team members on how to maximize their talents. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

#### EXCITEMENT

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 13. I convey my personal passion about team projects and the work we do.            | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 14. I display an intensity that spurs team members to higher levels of achievement. | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 15. I celebrate significant individual and team accomplishments.                    | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |
| 16. I demonstrate expert knowledge of our business/industry.                        | ① | ② | ③ | ④ | ⑤ |

**SCORING:** Count your 4s and 5s above. Don’t add them up; just count how many you have.

# OF 4s AND 5s	GRADE
12 or more	<b>Congratulations.</b> Don’t sit on your laurels. Leadership is a relationship that needs constant attention. You need to build your CASE every day.
7 to 11	<b>Take a look at trends.</b> Are you better at satisfying some needs more than others? How can you address your team’s needs while driving the organization’s priorities?
6 or fewer	<b>Take stock.</b> Are you a leader known for results but also the wreckage of burnt out employees? Are you struggling to deliver the results expected of you? Do you really want to be a leader? What’s getting in the way of the leadership behaviors above? If you fail to nurture your relationship with your followers, you are more likely to fail yourself.