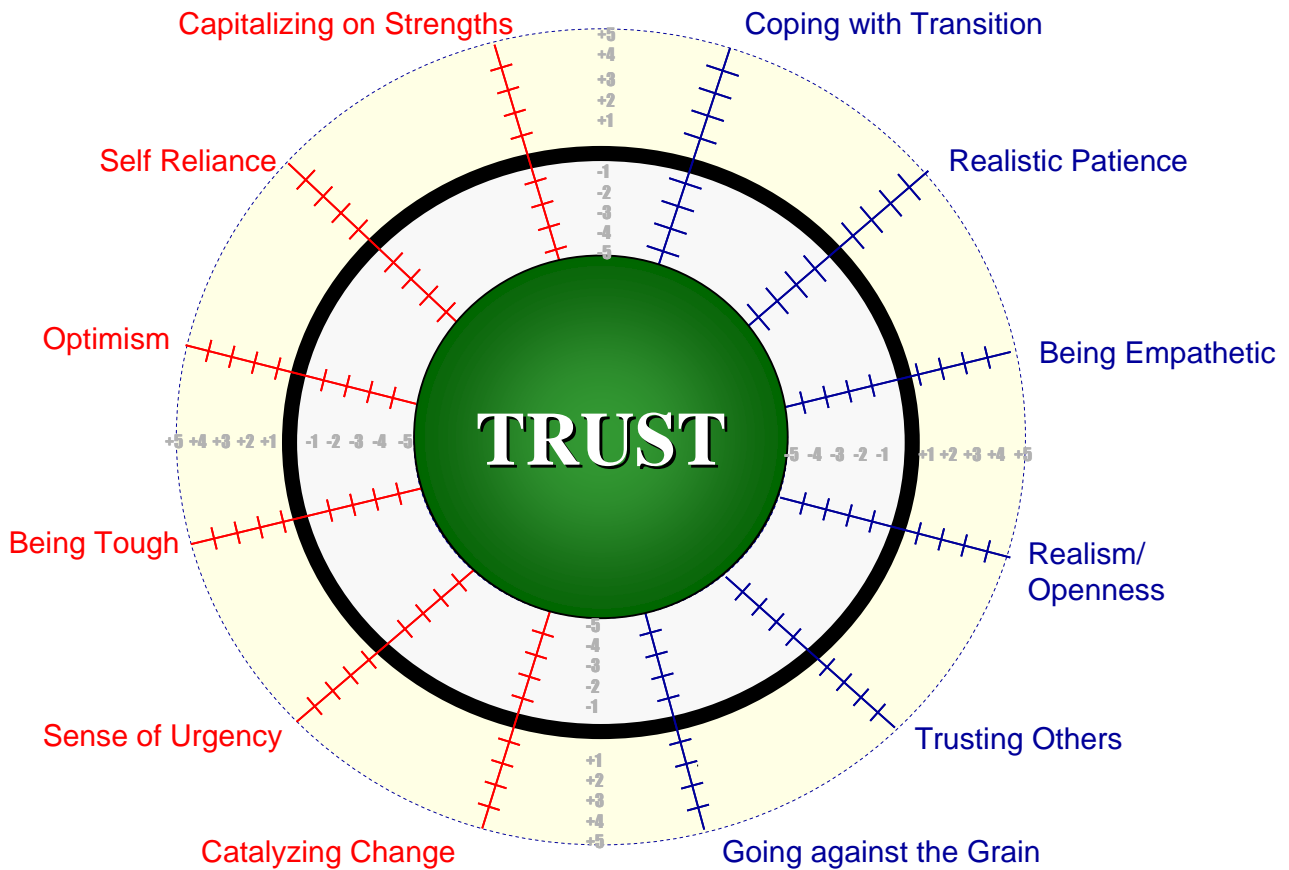
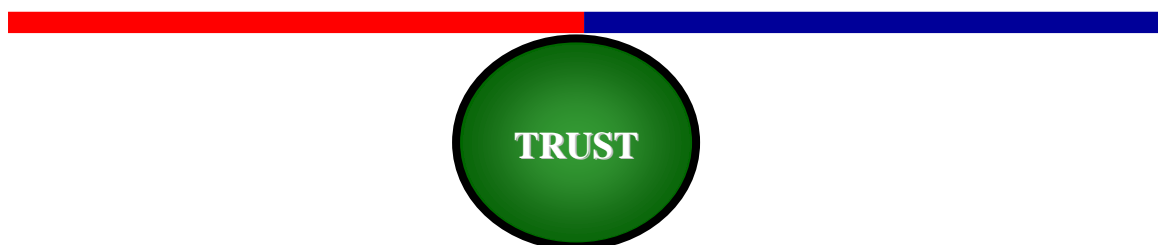


# AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP



## TIPS FOR BALANCING LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES



Optimism



Realism/  
Openness

### OPTIMISM versus REALISM/OPENNESS

Leadership has a key role to play in maintaining hope and commitment in the face of difficult transitions. When people are stressed by a crisis or major upheaval, they look to their leaders for positive energy and confidence. But this hopefulness and optimism must be grounded in reality and validated by openness, candor and credibility. It is critically important to be honest and trustworthy. Trust can be undermined by a failure to be realistic, genuine and candid. Consider the following:

- Energy and optimism are contagious. Rather than *telling* people that they should be positive and optimistic about the future, strive to be open and visible in *modeling* optimism for them. Walking the talk speaks more powerfully than setting policy or making pronouncements. If you are honest and sincere in your commitment to the future, people will read it on your face and observe it in your approach. Unfortunately you can't fake it. If you aren't truly committed to where you are going, people will most likely read *that* from your face and your behavior – and – they may not share that feedback with you.
- Maintain open channels of communication. Although your instinct may be to retreat with your trusted advisors to devise a recovery plan, you need to make a conscious effort to stay visibly connected to a broader circle of people. Make it clear that you want employees to share their concerns as well as their constructive ideas with you.
- Trust people to be capable of handling the truth. Tell them what you know and own up to what you don't know. Most people understand that complex challenges don't come wrapped in simple solutions. They don't expect their leaders to be superhuman, emotionless or infallible. Indeed, they will be skeptical and cynical if you wear a mask and try to pretend to be something that you are not.
- Be realistic. Don't overdo optimism and self-confidence to the point of not recognizing or not sharing genuine barriers, obstacles, limitations, or mistakes. Use candor and honesty as vehicles for cultivating a higher level of trust and respect. Sharing the truth often provides a springboard for generating creative strategies and renewed energy.
- Don't try to bury or deny your own human reactions to ongoing events. Powerful transitions trigger real emotions and feelings of loss and grieving in all of us. People pay close attention to their leaders in such times and are looking for indications that they are *real people* who are capable of having human emotions like their own. They also look to you for validation that these emotional reactions are normal and acceptable. While people cannot wallow in their discomfort, it is quite normal for them to start there. Sharing honestly and from the heart will allow the grieving process to proceed in a more predictable fashion that will facilitate organizational healing in the longer term.
- Be generous in crafting time in your schedule to simply dialogue with people. Make those times meaningful and special by being fully present as a listener, even if only for a few moments. Sharing some of *you* can go a long way toward stimulating the healing process.
- Do as much of your communication *face to face* as possible. In times of transition, people are sensitive to the loss of the human touch. Small investments in face time can yield enormous benefits in renewing trust and commitment.
- Avoid *blowing smoke* or *putting a false positive spin* on decisions or events that are inherently negative or difficult to handle. People will see through these attempts and add personal resentment to the dislike they may already be feeling about the transition process.

Self  
Reliance



Trusting  
Others

### SELF-RELIANCE versus TRUSTING OTHERS

This pair of leadership competencies is among the most difficult to balance. Our historical image of leadership tends to reinforce the notion of the mythical heroic leader who is always strong, courageous and self-reliant in the face of extraordinary challenges. The stereotypical hero is often the strong silent type with superhuman skills and a capacity to stand alone in the face of demands that might overwhelm us mere mortals. In truth, however, leadership rises to new heights when we confront the complexities and demands of the modern world with a team of strong and committed allies. Consider the following:

- The expression of true self-reliance is contingent upon knowing and owning your personal strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities. You won't know when and how much to trust your own judgment unless you are working from a healthy base of self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance. Coming to terms with your own assets and liabilities will give you the courage to be more open in accepting the value-added input of others.
- Create an environment in which others feel safe to offer guidance, input and support. The higher you go in leadership roles, the less likely people will be to offer suggestions, reactions and feedback to you. This is particularly true if their input conflicts with opinions you have expressed publicly. It's part of your job to create the space for others to make meaningful contributions. They must know that you value and trust them.
- Being a leader in extraordinary times can be a lonely journey. It is the rare person who doesn't feel some degree of discomfort and anxiety in the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and transition. As leaders, many of us have been taught to *suck it up* and *put on a positive space* when guiding others through change. It is hard to argue with the power of positive thinking or the value of being strong and self-reliant. At the same time, however, you can supplement these personal strengths by drawing on the reservoir of support that resides in the experience and talents of others. Learning to trust those around us to provide meaningful input and just-in-time feedback is critical to the revitalization and recovery process.
- Seek out a few trusted colleagues whom you feel safe opening up to about the unresolved challenges in your role. Build a network of peers with whom it is comfortable and safe to *go offline* and dialogue. Use these connections to raise unresolved issues or to vent some of your personal frustrations. There is power and strength in learning to be *situationally vulnerable* about fears, concerns, and mistakes. People expect their leaders to be strong, but they are also on the alert to determine whether or not they are playing the role of a Superman wannabe, who pretends to be invincible while acting clueless about what he/she doesn't know.
- Cultivate diversity. In times of stress and uncertainty it is natural to gravitate toward those who share our strengths and see the world through the same lenses that we do. However, this is a time when you need to provide others with the opportunity to add value in ways that fall outside of your own experience and comfort zone. Trust the good intentions of others until they give you cause to do otherwise.
- Create a safe place for others to *speak truth to power*. Leading during difficult times demands an open flow of both positive and negative feedback. Regular open forums can provide you with one vehicle for receiving honest input. Cultivating the informal channels may be even more effective. Block out some time each day to simply pause and listen to those out on the front lines.
- Learn to recognize when your own natural tendencies toward perfectionism or simply *doing it yourself* might be getting in the way of arriving at the best outcome. You are generally held accountable for getting things done right, but you are rarely charged with achieving those results single-handedly. Trusting others to carry a share of the load is a core element of effective transitional leadership.



### SENSE OF URGENCY versus REALISTIC PATIENCE

One of your more critical responsibilities as a transition leader involves maintaining energy, momentum, and productivity in the face of change. Having a sense of urgency or need to *get on with it* is an important element of the revitalization process both for you as a leader, and for the other members of the group. In addition, you are likely to receive pressure from above to *hurry up* and get people moving toward the desired outcomes. Equally important but less often addressed is the need to have enough patience with the transition process to allow others to reconnect and reinvest in the changing dynamic. There is a natural cycle to the process of letting go of the old and reconnecting with the new, which must be honored if the transition effort is to be successful. Failure to have patience with people can actually slow down their ability to adapt. Consider the following:

- If you want to lead people somewhere new, you need to meet them where they are. It is important to remember that your role in the leadership process probably puts you in a position of having more input, more control, more information, and earlier warnings than those who are looking to you for guidance. In those moments when you are frustrated by the hesitancy and reluctance of people to change, remember that, unlike you, they are probably just learning about some of the changes for the first time. It will require patience on your part to allow people the time and space to go through the natural stages of letting go before they will be ready to catch up with you. Try as you might, you can't shake people hard enough to put them on your timetable for acceptance and recovery.
- Prioritize the important activities and events that will build to the new reality in stages. While there is always much to do, everything event cannot be urgent and every task cannot be a number one priority. Transition and change are demanding experiences, which can exhaust the most committed of employees. Set stretch targets that are achievable. Whenever possible create interim milestones that will allow people to achieve "success along the way." Acknowledge and celebrate those interim successes.
- Spend some of your time and energy in coaching, teaching, and modeling the adaptive process for others. If you can honor the past and model the present and future, you will encourage others by your example. Take the time to listen to the *gripes and complaints* of others. Some of what you will hear grows out of the pain of having to learn new methods and strategies. On the other hand, some of it may reflect valid evaluations of the gaps and discontinuities in the evolving design. In either case, it is important to allow people the time and space to vent their concerns and voice their alternative strategies – even if nothing can be done to alter the overall plans.
- Don't *dismiss* or *write-off* employees too easily or too quickly. People differ in many ways that can impact their degree of readiness and rate of response to transition. These may include personality, past experience, non-work life challenges, and organizational expectations. Remember that the initial stages of the normal transition response pattern will often include denial, withdrawal and depression. Even a more evolved reaction will often include various forms of resistance, anger and rejection. Displaying the patience that encourages people to work their way to a more healthy commitment can pay huge dividends in the end.
- Establish a climate that *processes* resistance rather than attempting to squash it. Generally there is useful information in the way people resist change and transition. All change involves loss. The nature of resistance can inform you about what people value and what they are afraid of losing. At a minimum, that sense of loss needs to be acknowledged. Perhaps more importantly, there may be imbedded information about aspects of the environment that should not be swept aside or lost in the course of change. There may be wisdom in maintaining some things as they were.



## CATALYZING CHANGE versus COPING WITH TRANSITION

Successfully balancing these two capacities provides the foundation for establishing your authenticity and trustworthiness as a leader. Part of your agenda involves convincing others to get onboard for a change initiative, but you need to sell and reassure without “selling out” yourself. Integrity demands that you remain true to your personal values, beliefs and feelings - even as you promote change. To implement a significant change into an organization’s culture there is a good bit of explaining involved. You want people to understand the importance of the changes and you hope that they agree with the rationale and the process. The level of understanding and agreement you stimulate can impact the degree of enthusiasm people bring to their individual roles in the change. Part of the inherent challenge is that people often respond with healthy skepticism. This is not uncommon nor even a bad sign. During such periods people have an enhanced thirst for information. They need some reassurance that this is actually a good thing for the organization - and for them. However, simply bombarding them with cognitive information has limitations, if not liabilities. A critical complement to the information is to see the leaders living the changes that they are advocating. They must *walk the talk!* Failure to do so reinforces existing skepticism and enhances the likelihood of overt resistance. You need to model both the acceptance and integration of the change initiative and the coping and resiliency process that takes one through a transition experience. Inconsistency between what is said and what is done only fuels doubt and resistance - and most damaging, erodes your integrity. Consider the following:

- Make yourself more visible and accessible. People simply can’t be influenced by behavior they don’t see. You must find ways to interact with all of your stakeholder groups. Although this seems fairly obvious, there are several reasons why executives are less visible during difficult times. The most obvious legitimate reason is that you have little extra time. But a subtler culprit may be that you are uncomfortable or worn out from facing employees who feel threatened and defensive. Most of us would prefer to avoid putting ourselves out there as a target for negative feedback. However, if we are serious about authentic leadership - we must.
- Make yourself available, part II. Here we are talking about making more of your *self* available. Others want to know that you are genuine in what you say, feel and do before they invest their trust in you. What’s more, people under stress have a heightened sensitivity for assessing who is being genuine and who isn’t. To be genuine means *being you* more than *acting like* an executive. If you succeed in this endeavor you will probably feel a bit vulnerable - not a comfortable feeling for most of us. It takes strength and courage to expose your inner self, knowing that people will be able to see some of the imperfections you have been trying to keep hidden behind the safety of your *leader’s mask*. Masking rarely fools people and your self-protective efforts will only serve to erode your trustworthiness.
- Accept, but don’t find comfort in, the fact that not everyone will interpret your behavior as you intend it. People will occasionally see an inconsistency between your walk and talk. Both your behavior and your words might be reported out of context. That’s part of leader’s life! But don’t let that become an excuse. Work hard at modeling what you are selling. Being intentional will increase the likelihood of congruence between your walk and talk.
- Learn to recognize and reinforce authentic behavior patterns in others. Keep your *antenna* up to spot the kind of behavior that can build an open community with high integrity. This accomplishes two things; first, it helps keep your intention in mind, and second, it sends a signal that these genuine behaviors are noticed and rewarded. This will help spread your intention throughout the organization.
- Adopt a quote, parable, cliché or other symbol to remind you to pay attention to modeling what you want others to do. Some examples might include: *Walk the talk; Practice what you preach; Trust is earned by the penny and spent by the dollar; what you do is so loud, I can’t hear what you are saying.*

Being  
Tough



Being  
Empathetic

### BEING TOUGH versus BEING EMPATHETIC

As a leader, you must be tough enough to make difficult, bottom-line decisions that serve the overall needs of the organization. There can be no doubt that this is an essential part of the role. But - such decisions must be made with sensitivity to the impact and consequences for those further down the hierarchy. Failure to do so can erode loyalty and trust and undermine morale and motivation. Conversely, the presence of such ingredients can facilitate the implementation of tough decisions. To strike a balance on toughness and empathy, consider the following:

- Always ask, “What are the *unintended* consequences of this decision?” This question is particularly important if the decision threatens the security of some of the workforce. It is good practice to consider as many consequences as possible. These consequences have to be weighed against the positive long-term impact of the decision at hand. Invariably you are forced to consider *tradeoffs*. Dilemmas rein supreme during transitions because no single answer can satisfy all of the complexities of organizational problems. Exploring the less obvious consequences will at least allow you to make informed choices that will be better understood by the affected stakeholders.
- Review your decisions from time to time to see if the tradeoffs continue to make sense. Is there a pattern to your actions? Do you have a tendency to be too tough? Too empathetic? We are all prone to falling into patterns of reasoning owing to our personalities and our past experience. These patterns of reasoning can creep into our evaluative process and shape our behavior. Taking the time to reflect on these actions, or better yet to seek out external feedback, can reduce the likelihood that emerging patterns might slip into rigid dysfunctional habits.
- Where is the toughness *line* for you? Make a list of escalating indicators of *being tough*. Start with behaviors that you would consider a little tough (e.g. requiring a meeting with someone), and then add descriptors of increasingly tough behaviors. Add items all the way to behaviors that are well beyond what would be an acceptable level of toughness for you (such as expressing your dissatisfaction physically). Once you have drafted your list, draw a line indicating the level you would not wish to cross in being tough with people. How broad is your range? What might your boss or direct reports say about where you drew your line? Is it appropriate? Accurate? Honest?
- Repeat the above exercise relative to empathy. Where would you draw your empathy line?
- Do you believe different people require different doses of challenge and support to be most effective? You are probably thinking, “of course!” Think of a few people who look to you for leadership. How do you balance challenge (toughness) with support (empathy) with each of them? Are you taking individual differences into account? Do you have a predictable process (a recipe or formula) that you may inadvertently apply to most people regardless of their individual needs? Do you carry around any clichés or quotes that might reflect your preferred pattern of responding and your expectations of others? Examples might include: *Only needy people ask for help or reassurance*; or *Adults need to take care of themselves*. Beyond self-reflection, consider what others might say in private about your *philosophy* of applying toughness and empathy.
- Explore what people two levels away from you (subordinates or superiors) actually know about your ability to be empathetic. These people form opinions about you even though they experience little direct contact. What do you do to show those who are more removed that you genuinely understand what they are experiencing and how they are feeling? Consider getting out among the masses at a variety of levels and functions. Practice *listening to understand*. Ask questions with the intent of *learning about* the perspectives of others - rather than testing and rebutting their positions.

CAPITALIZING ON STRENGTHS versus GOING AGAINST THE GRAIN

Managing the tension between current success and future challenge has always been one of leadership's essential dilemmas. Utilizing strengths provides efficiencies, common process, uniformity, consistency and predictability. Proactively searching for the next breakthrough product, process or perspective requires leaving your comfort zone behind and doing some things differently. In times of crisis, people have a tendency to lock onto the strengths that forged their success in the past. While it is always important to leverage one's natural strengths, failing to recognize conditions that demand different capacities and new learning can be disastrous. We define learning strategies that challenge our preferred problem-solving patterns as, "going against the grain." Over-relying on our strengths may only serve to cement individuals, groups, and organizations in the very behavior patterns that helped create the crisis in the first place. Locking people into roles or situations that only call for use of their strengths can inhibit their resiliency and ability to learn in the future, while reducing their capacity to contribute in the present. As a leader, you should strive to engage each individual's passion while simultaneously challenging his or her comfortable old habits and patterns. Consider the following:

- Take the time to systematically reflect on your lifelong learning history. Your goal is to gain a better understanding of who you are and how you came to be that way. What are your key strengths? How applicable are they to your emerging environment? Which are most likely to be obsolete? What new strengths will you need in the changing marketplace? Pay attention as well to established flaws or weaknesses. You most likely have developed ways to compensate for these weaknesses in the present, but shifts in the demands of your environment could suddenly expose your vulnerability.
- Be purposeful in providing stretch assignments to team members. Too little stretch and people won't be challenged to go against the grain; too much and they will seek comfort and confidence by reverting to prior strengths. Pair a new learner with a mentor/coach who is more expert in his or her challenge area. Establish realistic deadlines for demonstrating that a new skill or behavior pattern has been implemented.
- Honor established practices but seek out incremental improvement to the process. Never allow yourself or those around you to become complacent enough to believe that they have fully *arrived*. Reward managers for developing others and supporting continuous learning. At a certain point, people will realize that the *ability to learn* is a core competency, and that new strengths will always be required in a changing world.
- Create an environment where people sense that it is safe to debrief their failures as well as their successes. Focus more on *how things are done* rather than simply *what was done*. Understanding the learning strategy and thought process behind our actions can be far more educational than dwelling on *the outcomes*.
- Seek out diversity, but be careful not to stereotype or pigeonhole people based on ethnicity, gender, field of study, etc. Encourage group members to challenge and defend opposing points of view and take stands on major decisions. Rotate these roles so that no one individual is stigmatized with labels such as, *devil's advocate*, *naysayer*, or *Pollyanna*.
- Be respectful and sensitive when altering established practices. Establish a pattern of reviewing such practices regularly and as a general matter of practice, as this reduces the threat over time. The questioning process should never appear to be motivated by bias, personal agendas, or argumentative tendencies.
- Honor and reward those who are willing to put time and energy into exploring novel problem solutions - even when their attempts might be viewed as incremental, expansive, tried before, rule challenging, or just plain stupid. Question people respectfully with the goal of mining any and all aspects of their ideas. Are there pieces, concepts, or perspectives that may shed new light on the current subject or other issues?