



Authentic Leadership: 4 Ways to Make Your Passion Purposeful

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Leadership is derived from trust. Career goals are terrific, but the surest way to truly serve your company and your colleagues – and to find fulfillment yourself – is to become the most authentic person and leader you know.

As healthcare continues to experience volatility, your team needs a leader who stands his or her ground, with calmness in crisis and empathy for others. There will always be changing dynamics that impact the way we do business and the skills needed to be effective as a leader. But remaining focused on your core values helps to prime the soil in which leadership can flourish.

The term “authentic leadership” has been experiencing a resurgence recently after initially being popularized by author Bill George and others over the last two

decades. But, like any catchphrase, nuance is important, and it helps to understand what is packed into the term. We’d like to suggest some components of what makes leadership truly authentic today in healthcare.

Leadership will not necessarily look the same in all individuals in all organizations in all markets. It was Steve Jobs who said, “Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.”

If you’re reading this, we believe

that you want to make a difference in people’s lives – that is why most of us choose to work in healthcare. It’s not as much about the biggest paycheck or the corner office. So, who is it that you want to become and how do you want to impact others?

Answering that question may take some time and reflection. But once you have sorted that out, here are four ways to become, and remain, the truest version of yourself:

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Remain emotionally available.

Strive to lead with your heart, not just your mind. The employees who report to you are human beings. In an age where we are electronically connected more than ever before, psychologists and sociologists tell us that we are, paradoxically, more isolated. A leader who truly cares for the people under his or her wing will find employee engagement and productivity rising, by taking the time to know those around you.

George has this to say on the topic: “Empathy is not a weakness. It is a strength and skill that allows authentic leadership through trust, encouragement and communication.”

Next steps: Build a strong reputation as a leader with the competence and compassion to develop other leaders. Ensure your open-door policy is not just lip service, and genuinely ask for feedback. Plan time with your team to get to know them – take them to lunch, find time for team-building exercises, and pull them aside for impromptu check-ins to show them you are available and interested in them.

Practice self-awareness.

Get real – with yourself. You don’t have to know all the answers. Self-awareness is a critical component in growing as a leader. What are your strengths? What areas do you need to develop? Where are your blind spots? What makes you uncomfortable?

Is there a mentor you trust to tell you the truth? This could be a leader higher up in your organization or someone outside of the healthcare field. Even better is having a sponsor within your organization, someone who will

champion your leadership and give you opportunities, not merely advice, as you explore your goals.

The best leaders network strategically, as well. Many people look up the organizational ladder too often and not across the aisle or down the hall as they think through career development. The executives at the top don’t have all the answers; utilize your peers.

Next steps: In this area, it can be beneficial to talk with people who have ongoing dialogues with leaders from many organizations, such as executive recruiters. Most leaders find a season of executive coaching to be helpful as well. This is also a good time to remind ourselves that leadership is becoming increasingly collaborative. As younger generations enter and advance in the workforce, this trend looks like it has staying power. Are there colleagues you can team up with?

Be flexible.

Not everything will fall in line just as you planned it. It was Bill George who said, “Plans change. Authentic leadership is knowing that the plan changing does not change you.”

This is particularly true in an industry as heavily dependent on evolving technology as healthcare. Many aspects of your career may change in the next 5 to 10 years – the pace of innovation and disruption accelerates every year.

With all that change, having some depth and breadth of experience will allow for more opportunities and easier pivots in your career. As you take on additional responsibilities, consider their impact on your long-term goals. Be thoughtful about balancing commitments,

and remain intentional about how you spend your time and talents. Beware of what some call “invisible promotions” – many extra responsibilities without a title change or additional income.

Next steps: One way to prepare yourself for the twists and turns of the healthcare industry is to maintain the posture of a continuous learner throughout your career and surround yourself with like-minded people. The best leaders are lifelong learners who can adapt and grow – professor and author Margarita Mayo calls this “behavioral authenticity.” So, find leadership books and articles that resonate with you. Join professional associations and serve on committees as time permits.

Tell your story.

A growing number of healthcare organizations start their key meetings with stories of colleagues doing a great job or patients expressing appreciation to their team of caregivers. The power of storytelling is a vital skill in marketing these days as well. Have you ever thought of how technology can help you tell your own story? Social media levels the playing field and allows everyone to publish content that’s meaningful to them, whether it’s on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram or blogs.

Leverage these platforms – especially LinkedIn for professional goals – while being mindful of how your interactions will build your “brand” for better or worse (who you are as a leader, colleague and person). What you share and “like,” and how you comment on others’ posts, lives forever online, so use discretion and err on the side of encouraging others.

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Next steps: Early careerists often find these online outlets are great for soliciting feedback and sharing their volunteer epiphanies. Mid-careerists can establish themselves as subject-matter experts, something every organization needs. Senior leaders can utilize this technology to embrace their roles as thought leaders and lend their support to legacy endeavors (e.g., leadership organizations, boards and conferences). In all these things, be mindful of your organization's guidelines and policies for social media.

Conclusion

What part of your career makes you come alive? What aspects of your job make it a joy to get ready in the morning? Let your team see the real you, and encourage them to define their own authenticity.

After all, "there is little disagreement in what the constitutional principles of a company should be when enough people get together," Stephen Covey reminds us. "I find a universal belief in: fairness, kindness, dignity, charity, integrity, honesty, quality, service, and patience."

Let these qualities be seen in you and your leadership. **MPI**



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