



# Authentic Leadership

Being authentic is about self awareness, and one of the most impactful leadership skills to learn. How do we do this?

**IN MY PREVIOUS ARTICLE,** I mentioned bringing my 'real' or authentic self to meetings, which helped me lead cross-cultural teams and cross-cultural interactions. What does this mean?

Being authentic is about self awareness. It is one of the most important leadership skills to learn as it has the most impact. It is about understanding and being comfortable with 'who' you are, flaws and all. It requires humility and there is no room for deception. It also requires an openness and quest for self learning and using this knowledge to evolve. This is what makes you stand out from the rest of the corporate pack. This is also the key component of your personal brand.

Can authenticity be nurtured or does it have to be in your nature? I believe it is the combination of the two. We all have an innate potential (nature) which can then be nurtured, provided there is openness and the quest for self awareness. The openness is to help us get out of the old patterns and habits. The self awareness is to encourage deeper levels of learning. The result of this process is 'presence'.

What is 'presence'?

## Presence

All our interactions on a daily basis integrate two things:

- Perception – the information we gather from our surroundings using our sensory skills, and
- Action – our outcome based on our perception.

Between perception and action, occurs a 'process' which determines the quality of our action. The quality of our action is based on the depth of our self awareness. The deepest level of this self awareness is called 'presence'. It is 'presence' that gives us our authenticity.

When our self awareness never reaches beyond the superficial, our actions are reactions. On the other hand, when we penetrate the information more deeply, the effectiveness of our actions increases dramatically.

Organisations are aware of this and are focusing on it to help them stand out. Two articles ago, I mentioned the current Prudential advertisement and tagline – 'Always listening, always understanding'. The voice over states – 'only by listening, can we truly understand'.

Listening is a perception skill and to 'truly understand' requires the Customer Relationship Manager (CRM) to have 'presence' when dealing with the client. This requires a tremendous level of self awareness on the part of the



CRM. It requires the CRM to be flexible in suspending judgement, including old thinking patterns and habits and 'open' to learning about the client.

Long-lasting relationships that most organisations aim to have with their clients actually depend on the 'presence' or authenticity of the individual who is responsible for the client.

So how do we develop this 'presence'?

## Developing 'presence'

'Presence' starts with perception. In my last article, I stated that perception is the source of all our subsequent

actions and that it is a pivotal place. More importantly, it is an active process and in our control. Let me explain this further.

Perception, the information gathered through our multiple senses, passes through templates based on our past thinking, patterns, habits and learning to deliver an action. This is the basis of our self awareness. This is the 'process' I define above.

To develop 'presence', we need to be able to stretch these templates. It can be done. We are all capable of it but it requires effort. What stands in the way is resistance. Resistance usually comes

in the form of our own judgement, cynicism and fear.


When I work with leadership teams, I often start with asking them what is unique about each of them. I want to hear their stories, their obsessions, fears etc. I also want to know about their successes, their 'failures' – as this is how we learn the most. This is to help them discern, for themselves, possible barriers that may stop them 'stretching' their templates.

One key component of the 'stretching' process is about gaining new perspectives. This can be achieved by doing something different, for example, learning a new skill – language, swimming, gardening. My time abroad during my childhood and adult life had my templates stretched continuously. In addition, I learned a new skill on a regular basis and still do. I picked up squash, skiing, scuba diving and recently mountain biking as part of my stretching process. Every new skill gave me a new perspective, on my abilities, which in turn stretched my templates.

The culmination of these 'stretches', which is an ongoing process, enables the individual to bring 'dynamism' to every client or team interaction through a sense of 'knowing' what is required of the moment – 'truly understanding'. This is 'presence'. It is a position of deep but altered state of awareness – the source of your authentic self!

## Reflection and authenticity

It is the end of another year – a time when most people reflect on the past 12 months. Reflecting is another key component of the 'stretching' process. It helps us turn our experiences into learning. We learn what we are capable of, what we do well, what requires attention, and it should help us remain grounded.

Here's wishing you a Happy and Authentic New Year! 

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