



Effective Leaders Are Authentic Leaders

By John Rex

Corporate value statements have long been part of building and guiding organizational culture. We often see words like teamwork, respect, innovation, integrity, and accountability. But what makes concepts like these a recurring theme?

I believe it's because they answer two key questions about a workplace:

What is enduringly important to the organization?

What does it take to be successful at the organization?

In other words, these core values inform how individuals act and define what matters most within an organization.

For senior leaders, this means you must do more than be able to recite the values and guiding principles of your organization. You must lead with authenticity, transparency, and integrity—in addition to knowing your values, you must be willing to live them out.

Walk the Talk: Congruency Between Our Values and Behaviors is Key

The majority of us have heard the saying, “if you’re going to talk the talk, you’ve got to walk the walk.” In other words, it’s an admonition to practice what you preach. Or to put it yet another way, actions speak louder than words.

We can condense this even further to “walk the talk.” That is, make sure your actions resonate with your speech. If the values we claim to espouse don’t align with our actions, we lose trust and support from our teams.

Many leaders adopt a persona at the office—a way of speaking or behaving that might reflect who you are at work, but doesn’t align with your values and who you are outside the office. But when there is a gap between your “walk” and your “talk,” your team will notice that at best, you’re acting.

They may not be able to call out this behavior specifically or explicitly, but they may perceive it as insincerity—which in turn arouses suspicion, strains the relationship, and puts you out of alignment with your team.

Frankly, limiting yourself to a persona also means you’re leaving elements of yourself at the door. You’re not bringing all of your gifts, abilities, passions, and potential to the table. Imagine it is like trying to race a sports car in just one gear. It would get boring really quickly.

You can break free from the need to utilize a persona by naming what truly matters to you. What would help you embody your values and live them out in an authentic way—at your workplace and beyond?

Define and Clarify Your Unique Values

Over the years, I've found that many of my clients have never identified and developed their core values and guiding principles. If this is the case, one of the first exercises I do with these clients is focused on gaining clarity on their values.

Here are three tips to define and clarify your own unique values:

Think about a time in your life when you were “in the flow”: a time when the place, your actions, and your mindset harmonized almost effortlessly, producing a pinnacle experience. What were the ingredients that produced that experience? The context, the conversations, even the people you were with. The elements that converged to create that magical moment can be vital clues to your values.

Name what matters most to you. Think about the organizations, activities, philosophies, books, places, causes and ideas that you are most passionate about. What do they have in common? What makes them important?

Reflect on your upbringing, your faith tradition, your formal and informal education, your heroes, role models, and mentors. Are there teachings and characteristics that you admire to this day?

Take notes—actually write them down—as you think through each of these. Refine and revisit until you feel clear about your core values.

As senior leaders, we frequently must lean on our personal set of values to guide us. Consequently, if you want to lead your team with authenticity, you have to be in tune with your own moral compass. Once you name your unique values, you can lead with greater peace of mind, satisfaction, and confidence—regardless of the decision in front of you.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnrex/2023/04/03/effective-leaders-are-authentic-leaders/?sh=2bbef2dc4cb2>