



## Giving permission: The future of leadership begins within

By Alaina Love

“You can’t give something that you don’t have.”

It was a profound statement during a mic-drop moment at a leadership forum I recently facilitated. One panelist was imparting wisdom to a group of young women about navigating the challenges of a career while still trying to have a life. The forum was focused on developing women leaders, but the message was universal for anyone intent on leading well, especially during challenging times.

“You can’t give something that you don’t have,” the panelist repeated. “If you’re not giving yourself a chance, you can’t give that to someone else. If you’re not forgiving yourself for your mistakes, you can’t forgive others for theirs. If you’re not giving yourself some grace, you don’t have grace to give to others.”

Her words rang true to me. How many times in my past leadership roles was I not giving myself a chance to try something risky or giving permission to fail? How many times was I my own worst critic for making a mistake? How often did I not allow myself a moment to pause and take in the world, rather than rushing forward to accomplish the next goal? And what impact did my failure to give myself what I most needed have on my team? Plenty.

How to lead by giving permission

Today's leaders are operating in a world without a playbook. The consistencies you could once count on have evaporated as employees now seek a different contract with their employers. More money is no longer a singularly sufficient motivator. More perks don't work well enough to retain and motivate your most talented people.

Today's workers are looking for more meaning and purpose in their daily experience, and leaders are expected to deliver it. If you think about that leadership challenge for a moment, you'll realize that it's a massive undertaking. You must deliver business results to the organization while also delivering the experience of purpose to your team. What's the secret of successfully accomplishing both tasks? Lead with authenticity so you're in a better position to give to others what they most need for success.

As a leader, your own degree of authenticity often predicts how much others will want to follow you. This is especially true as employees themselves are wrestling with their own self-determination. They're struggling to uncover what they want in life and how work contributes to achieving it. As your people seek to bring the whole of who they are to their work, they are also counting on support from you, the kind that you can only deliver when you are being truly authentic.

Give yourself grace to fuel your ability to give it to others

A core tenet of leadership authenticity is giving yourself permission, so you are able to give the same to others:

Permission to be imperfect. When you do that for yourself, you give your team permission to come to you with their mistakes before they become unresolvable.

Permission to gain clarity when trying to solve a problem. When you do, you give your team permission to engage in the question before rushing to the solution. They become partners in making the right decision rather than bystanders having it dictated to them.

Permission to dream. When you do, you give your team a chance to innovate. Remember, rigidity and narrow thinking crushes innovation. Bold thinking inspires it.

Permission to work with autonomy. When you do, you empower your team to deliver their best work because they know that you trust them to do so.

Permission to listen. When you do, you invite your team to share ideas and encourage diverse voices to be heard. By fostering inclusiveness, you co-create a better future.

Permission to relax. When you do, you give your team a chance to recharge and experience fewer stressful days. You learn to laugh together and celebrate more often, making the experience of work more meaningful.

What permissions do you need to give yourself today? And how will doing so engage the team you are charged to lead?

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