

# Authentic Leadership

The modern corporate world is not without its examples of wrongdoing and creed-based behavior. Not all leaders are good and acknowledgement of this can often be the first step towards better leadership. In order to lead better, leaders and academics have turned to the idea of authentic leadership. A leadership model, which believes that genuine leadership that basis its decisions on values can guide people towards the greater good.

## UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENT CONTEXTS OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Authentic leadership is a rather new theory, yet the core ideas of the leadership model can be traced back to Ancient Greece. In this section, we'll explore the historical ideas behind the theory, before examining the modern theoretical approach to the leadership style and the implications of it being a young theory.

### The Historical Context

Authentic leadership is another concept with roots in Ancient Greek philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophers concurred authenticity to be an important state of being, as it emphasized being in control of your own destiny and who you truly are as a person. The word authentic comes from the Greek word, *authentikos*, which means principal or genuine. Authentic persons were true themselves and their surroundings.

Furthermore, authenticity was closely linked to the Ancient Greek model of [cardinal virtues](#). To the Greeks, there were four key virtues to follow: *prudence*, *temperance*, *justice* and *fortitude*. The virtues called the person to:

- **Consider all the possible courses of action and acting in a fair-minded manner** (prudence)
- **Stay emotionally balanced and in control at all times** (temperance)
- **Deal with other people in a fair manner** (justice)
- **Have enough courage to do the right thing** (fortitude)

By developing these virtues, people were thought to improve their inner self and the relationships they had with other people. An authentic leader, therefore, needed the four virtues in order to lead in a just and good manner. To the Ancient Greeks, ***authentic leadership was moral and selfless to a degree.***

Ancient Greek philosophers weren't the last to explore the concept of authenticity. Throughout the human history, philosophers, musicians and artists have explored this concept. In the Western world, some of the most famous minds have talked about authenticity and authentic behavior. Descartes [suggested](#) authenticity is the following of your inner voice, which calls for responsible behavior. Identity was the thing that shaped Descartes' individual morality and this identity came from external sources and social

status. Authentic behavior was therefore often a natural existence, which was available for us all.

Yet, authentic leadership wasn't part of the conversation of leadership theories until much later. **In the 1960s, authentic leadership entered the discussion** and its inclusion was mostly driven by the need to reflect on certain negative elements the rising corporate culture had brought about.

In the early stages of the theorizing, authenticity became attached as a reflection of organizations as well as individuals. An organization could start highlighting its authenticity by acting in a responsible manner, reacting to uncertainty and being creative. Authentic behavior moved away from the idea it's only the individual leaders, who define authenticity within an organization.

### The Modern Context

Although the conversation around authenticity within the corporate culture began in the 1960s, it took a while before the concept was fully explored as a leadership model. **Warren Bennis' On Becoming a Leader explored certain elements of the authentic leadership model in 1989.** The book has been re-printed several times since and in his latest introduction to the newest version in 2009, Bennis wrote, "*Authentic leaders embrace those who speak valuable truths, however hard they are to hear*". He saw the problems of organizations often stemming from doing the opposite of that – hiding the truth, in order to avoid having to deal with problems. **To Bennis, leaders were made and not born, suggesting that authentic leadership is at the grasp of everyone.**

While Bennis' original book did touch on the ideas of modern authentic leadership theory, the father of the idea is often considered **Bill George, Harvard professor and CEO of Medtronic.**

George published a book called Authentic Leadership in 2003 and later refined his ideas further in True North. George's inspiration for writing the book had been the increasing negative corporate examples, such as Enron and Tyco. He wanted to restore people's faith in corporations and show young leaders another way to lead. **Peter Northouse's** 2007 book Leadership: Theory and Practice wrote about the scandals and their influence on leadership theories. According to Northouse,

*“People feel apprehensive and insecure about what is going on around them, and as a result, they long for bona fide leadership they can trust and for leaders who are honest and good”.*

In *Authentic Leadership*, George described authentic leaders as:

*“People of the highest integrity, committed to building organizations...who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values who have the courage to build their companies to meet the needs of all their stakeholders, and who recognize the importance of their service to society.”*

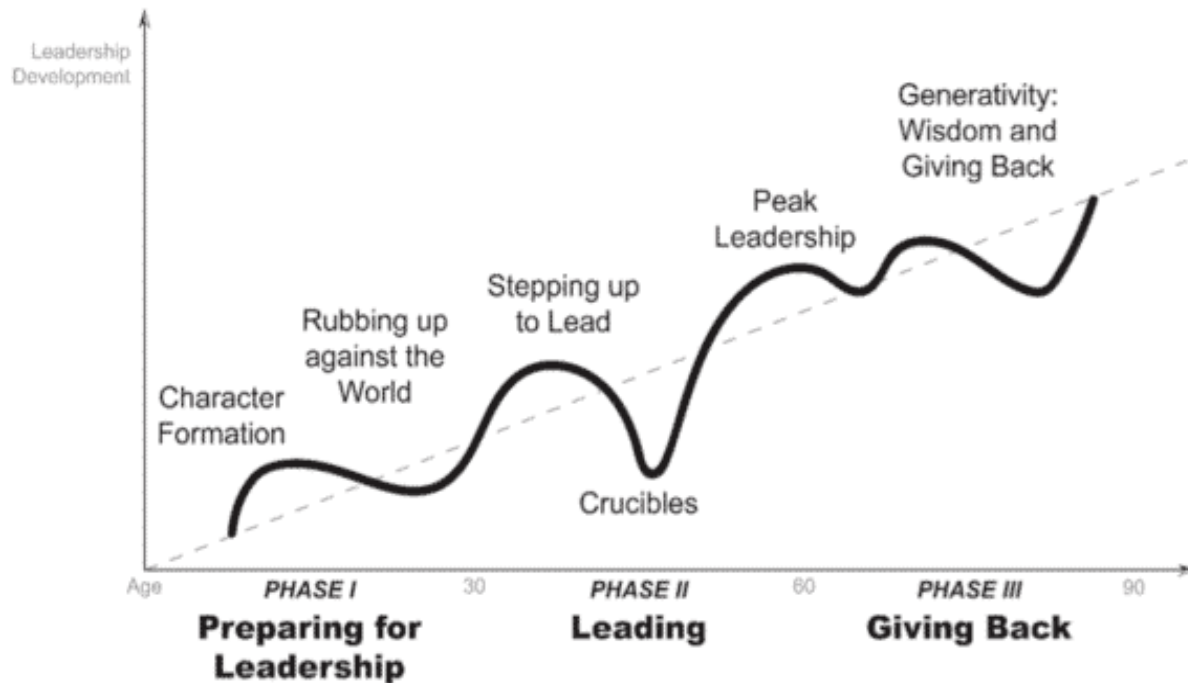
A year after *Authentic Leadership* was published, the conversation got busier and the Gallup Leadership Institute of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln held its inaugural summit on Authentic Leadership Development. In 2007, *George's True North* went further to explain who's an authentic leader and what leaders can do to be more authentic, creating a concept that could be further refined, but also tested.

The book restated the idea that leadership is not something you are born with, but that ***authentic leadership, especially, requires constant development and growth.*** George developed an idea of leadership as a journey, with three distinct phases:

### Leadership Development

- **Phase 1:** In the first part of your journey, you prepare yourself for the leadership.
- **Phase 2:** In the second phase, you start leading by taking on new challenges until you reach the 'peak' of leadership.
- **Phase 3:** In the final part of the leadership journey, you start seeking opportunities to spread your leadership wisdom to others and give back to the community, even though the learning process continues.

You can see what the journey looks like in the below chart:



## Theory in Its Infancy

Authentic leadership is in its infancy, which means the concept still lacks certain universal answers or theories to specific questions. As we will explore in the section about the advantages and disadvantages of the theory, the lack of proper theory or model is sometimes criticized as the biggest flaw of the idea.

But the core ideas of authentic leadership have evolved and academics are continuously researching the theory and its validity further. The emphasis of the theory is on the leader's legitimacy and how this can be strengthened through an honest relationship with subordinates. The theory values opinions and the theory has a strong ethical foundation, just as the concept of authenticity has had throughout history.

Before we start examining the core elements of authentic relationship, it's auspicious to point out the current three theoretical foundations. **Authentic leadership can be viewed through three different ideas:**

- **Intrapersonal definition** – In this model, the leader and the leader's characteristics are about nurturing the inner qualities of yourself.
- **Developmental definition** – The model, which is the most prevalent, notes that the leader might not have set inner traits, but that these characteristics are developed and trained.
- **Interpersonal definition** – In the third model, the authentic style is not dependent on the leader's actions, but also the group's response.

Interestingly, authentic leadership is not always seen inconclusive of other leadership theories. Bruce J. Avolio and Fred Luthans explored the idea of **authentic leadership as the root construct of other leadership theories** in *The High Impact Leader*. According to Avolio and Luthans, authentic leadership can manifest as **directive, participative or even transformational leadership**.

## THE CORE ELEMENTS OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Let's turn our attention to the core elements of the leadership style. First, we'll briefly explore the concept of authenticity, before outlining the four core components of authentic leadership. Later in this section, we'll also explain some of the different ways authenticity can be measured.

### What is authenticity?

To understand authentic leadership, you must naturally define authenticity. The word *authentic* can be rather difficult, as it has become a fad. **Self-proclamations of authenticity tend to take place in the world of politics, entertainment and business**. In her New York Times [article](#), Stephanie Rosenbloom gave examples of celebrities claiming their authenticity. For instance, Duchess of York, Sarah Ferguson, had told another newspaper, "*If you fear what people think about you, then you are not being authentic*".

But authentic leadership isn't about self-proclamation, but rather showing authenticity through one's actions and behaviors. Instead of stating "*I'm always true to myself*", authentic leadership questions at every step what behavior they are presenting – **not by trying to be authentic, but being self-aware**. In order for you to become an authentic leader, you need to first achieve clarity about your inner self and then start showcasing the actual self through your actions.

Furthermore, as you'll see later in this section, self-assessment of your authenticity isn't often at the core of authentic leadership, but instead subordinates get to voice how they perceive the leader's authenticity levels.

There are essentially **three cornerstones of authenticity** in terms of authentic leadership. These are:

- Being true to yourself and your values.
- Being open with other people.
- Doing the right thing, in operational and moral terms, not in terms of what is good for you as a leader.

The important point to remember about authenticity and authentic leadership is how it's not a free pass to behave however you want or even make the leadership about you. Brooke Vuckovic, adjunct lecturer of leadership coaching at the Kellogg School, said in [an interview](#), "*Authenticity is not a license to be excessively focused on the self. It's about being aligned with your character and values in order to lead effectively.*"

# The four components

There are four core components of authentic leadership: *self-awareness*, *internalized moral perspective*, *balanced processing* and *relational transparency*. F.O. Walumba et al discussed these four elements in their research paper *Authentic Leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure* in 2008.

Authentic leadership relies on the four elements and these components are ultimately the aspects, which strengthen this model for operational use.

## Component #1: Self-awareness

Self-awareness relates closely to the Ancient Greek's idea of "knowing thyself". It's about understanding your own inner and outer qualities and how these relate to your being a leader. Furthermore, the component is crucial if you want to develop the other three areas of authentic leadership.

Self-awareness in authentic leadership can be manifested in a number of ways such as:

- Knowing your strengths and weaknesses
  - Understanding the self is a multi-layered concept
  - Learning about your impact on other people and vice versa
  - Developing a continuous self-exposure and development process
- Authentic leadership is not about creating a façade, but it asks for the leader, as well as the follower, to be genuine. In an authentic leadership environment, mistakes are not hidden or shrugged away. Weaknesses are life lessons to be learned and the self-actualization is a constant struggle, which will manifest in mistakes and successes.

Bruce J. Avolio and Tara S. Wernsing highlighted in the 2008 essay *Practicing Authentic Leadership* three ways authentic leaders practice self-awareness:

- Actively seeking feedback from the environment
- Using self-reflection as a way to understand their behavior
- Engaging in self-observation to stay aware of feelings at all times  
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## Component #2: Internalized moral perspective

The second core component of authentic leadership relates to doing the right thing. As mentioned earlier, authentic leadership is closely related to ethics and especially the concern of fairness. The theory has always had a strong psychological and moral component.

Furthermore, the moral perspective on leadership and the different behaviors it brings about is not based on external factors. The moral perspective is not something the authentic leader finds imposed upon him or her by the organization or even society. Instead, the self-regulatory behavior is self-imposed and comes from the leaders' internalized moral values.

### **Component #3: Balanced processing**

The authentic leadership doesn't just seek to make morally correct decisions, but to be fair-minded during the process. The leadership is based on openness and fairness; on an environment where opinions are not just welcomed but also encouraged. The idea is to ensure opposing viewpoints will be voiced before the leader, sometimes together with subordinates, considers the actions.

According to Kevin Kruse, self-claimed serial entrepreneur, the ability to listen and consider different viewpoints does not make authentic leadership "soft". In his [Forbes article](#), Kruse said authentic leaders "*are able to put the mission and the goals of the organization ahead of their own self-interest*". Therefore, authentic leadership focuses on the collective objectives and understands common knowledge and diversity in opinion can help achieve these more clearly.

The key to balanced processing is the understanding of bias. To authentic leaders, people's opinions are based on biased processing of information. This doesn't mean anything negative per se, but just reinforces the leaders need to understand two things. First, that his or her own ideas are responses to certain triggers, and second, that seeking multiple opinions can provide better understanding of an issue in question. Competing perspectives can yield better results than focusing on cohesion of opinions.

### **Component #4: Relational transparency**

Finally, authentic leadership rests on the concept of genuineness. When authentic leaders communicate and act, they do it honestly. There is no room for hidden agendas or mind-games in authentic leadership. It seeks to create an environment where everyone knows where he or she stands in terms of his or her relations with the leader.

Transparency won't mean the leader should necessarily let his or her emotions take control. As a leader, you can't always say the first things that come to your mind. Nonetheless, you need to share your thought processes with your subordinates and the decisions that are made, must not be shrouded in mystery.

But what is enough transparency? [According to](#) Avolio and Luthans,

## **Different ways to measure authenticity**

Since authentic leadership is closely tied to behaviors and positive psychology, it's drawn attention for qualitative research and measurement. Academics and proponents



of the theory have sought to measure the levels of authenticity leaders highlight. Four distinct measurements and scales have appeared out of these experiments.

### **Way 1: Leader Authenticity Scale (LAS)**

The first attempt at measuring authenticity came in the form of the Leader Authenticity Scale (LAS). The 32-item questionnaire measures tendencies such as:

- Genuine behavior in the face of job titles
- Acknowledgement of accountability when mistakes are made
- Ability to avoid manipulation of subordinates

The scale has mainly been used in educational environment, measuring how schools are organized. The scale's validity has later been criticized for generalization.

### **Way 2: Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ)**

The Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) surveys the subordinates in order to find the authenticity levels of the leader. The measure is specifically designed with the authentic leadership theory in mind and therefore it focuses on the major four core elements of the theory: *self-awareness*, *relational transparency*, *internalized moral perspective* and *balanced processing*.

In terms of academic research of the theory, ALQ is the most commonly used and preferred scale. The survey can be bought and used either as a self-assessment tool or for measuring multiple leaders or supervisors at once. You can find it online at [Mind Garden](#), for example.

### **Way 3: Authentic Leadership Inventory (ALI)**

A relatively recent scale, the Authentic Leadership Inventory, came out in 2011. Like ALQ, ALI surveys subordinates in order to measure the authentic leadership behaviours of the leader. The measure builds on the research done with ALQ and the findings it has made in terms of authenticity.

Nonetheless, [research](#) has shown problems with the technique and the reliability of the results. As the measurement is free for everyone, the scale has received plenty of attention, despite this criticism.

### **Way 4: Authenticity Inventory (AI:3)**



The final way to measure is not entirely a leadership measure, but more of a survey to test individual authenticity. It can therefore be a helpful addition to testing your authenticity levels.

Different to the above measures, the AI:3 tends to also [emphasize](#) the link between well-being and authenticity. It pays more attention to the philosophical aspect of authenticity and self-awareness, rather than just measuring your approach to tasks and leadership.

## THE QUALITIES OF AN AUTHENTIC LEADER

The above section highlighted the core components of authentic leadership and explained the different ways authenticity can be measured. But what makes a leader authentic? What are the qualities you should aim to strengthen if you want to be more authentic?

In this section, we'll explore the core characteristics of authentic leader and the principles that should guide your leadership as an authentic leader.

Authenticity manifests in different ways, but there are a few essential characteristics and qualities authentic leaders should focus on. While the following five characteristics are often essential for authentic leadership, the key to being a leader with authenticity is proper understanding of yourself. You must also recognize that personal development, just like authentic leadership, is an on-going journey.

### Self-aware

As mentioned above, self-awareness is the ultimate key to authentic leadership. If you want to become an authentic leader then you must know your personal traits and values inside out. You can't be true to yourself if you don't know who you are.

Self-awareness sounds easier than it is. [Studies](#) have highlighted how the human mind is capable of self-deception. Denial and narcissistic qualities are not just odd phenomena; they occur in most of us. But for authentic leader, the objective is to limit the behavior and to be aware of the moments when you might be 'cheating yourself'.

Self-awareness can be enhanced by understanding your strengths and weaknesses and by studying your behavioral patterns. In most cases, this means looking at your individual circumstances and the past events that might have led to you to develop certain negative or positive patterns of behavior. As George stated in his blog post, "*people are not born as jerks*".

Authentic leaders are able to understand the negative behaviors and reframe the experiences into a positive format. For instance, being defensive doesn't have to be a negative characteristic, but you can turn it into a positive by understanding why you are defensive, noticing the situations that make you defensive, and examining the impact of your defensiveness.

Brenda Booth, a clinical professor of management at the Kellogg School, put it well, when she said,

*“[authentic leadership] is about being comfortable in your own skin so you can lead the organization in a way where you do not feel ethically compromised or like a charlatan”.*

## **Genuine**

Self-awareness also requires a level of honesty from the leader. As a leader, you shouldn't be trying to change your behavior or hiding your true self. People can pick up quite quickly when someone is being honest and when they are not. As a leader, you must ensure your subordinates trust you and if you aren't genuine, then building this trust might be harder.

In *True North*, George points out an important distinction between being genuine and being perfect. Authentic leadership isn't about perfection or “*letting the expectations of other people guide them*”, but the genuine approach to trusting one's inner capabilities and vision in guiding the group. A genuine leader will acknowledge mistakes and shortcomings. But it is precisely this connection, which helps them empower others.

## **Result-oriented and task-driven**

Authentic leaders are result-oriented and task-driven. They understand the objectives of organizations, but they don't push towards profitability and productivity by any means necessary. They understand the [importance of teamwork](#) in order to achieve those objectives.

The authentic leader understands that flexibility can get things done faster, because different tasks and different people require different things. In order to achieve certain tasks, a leader might use a [mentoring approach](#), while at other times a more directing approach is needed. Therefore, authentic leaders need to implement a [level of situational leadership](#).

Result-orientation requires a great deal of knowledge. An authentic leader must therefore also be well aware of the operational goals and things such as industry trends. You must be willing to learn and listen to different opinions regarding the objectives in order to pick up the best ways forward.

Furthermore, Bennis wrote in the introduction of the revised edition of his *[On Becoming a Leader](#)* that today's leaders must have 'adaptive capacity'. To Bennis, this means the ability to make decisions and later measure the effectiveness, instead of waiting to

analyze the situation before acting. For this to yield the best results, an authentic leader must be on top of tasks and the desired outcomes continuously.

## Focused

Authentic leaders must be focused. As George's three-step pathway to leadership highlights, authentic leadership takes years of experience and personal growth. You therefore must be able to see the end-goal and outline this vision for your subordinates. According to George, "*Without a real sense of purpose, leaders are at the mercy of their egos and narcissistic vulnerabilities*".

Staying focused on the face of different challenges can be difficult. But the more self-aware you are about your values and the objectives you need to accomplish, the better you become at draining out the unnecessary aspects around you. Therefore, to become more focused, you need to continually re-evaluate and re-assess your own goals, behavior and those of people around you.

## Empathetic

Finally, an authentic leader has to [showcase high-levels of empathy towards other people](#). George writes in *True North* that leaders can grow as authentic leaders when they "*are more concerned about serving others than they are about their own success or recognition*". Authentic leader wants to empower others, instead of focusing on their own needs.

Betsy Myers, founding director of the Center for Women and Business at Bentley University, writes in her book *Take the Lead: Motivate, Inspire, and Bring Out the Best in Yourself and Everyone Around You* that "*leadership is about how you make people feel*". In order to do so, you must treat them genuinely and honestly.

Being more empathetic is ultimately about understanding other people's needs and stepping into their shoes. This can be enhanced through better communication and analysis of your own feelings. Furthermore, you should aim to [improve your emotional intelligence](#), which you can learn more about from the below video.

### Five principles for authentic leaders

In order to enhance the above characteristics and to start leading in authentic manner, you need to implement core principles to guide your way. Kevin Cashman, CEO of LeaderSource and executive of Leader Institute, recommends in his 1998 book *Leadership from the Inside Out* five principles authentic leaders should follow.

## Principle #1: Know yourself authentically

The first principle is about self-awareness and integrity. It builds on the idea that instead of paying attention to what others are doing, a leader should focus on his or her own behavior. In essence, be the kind of leader and employee, you want others to be.

As George wrote in 2007, "*the harder person you will ever have to lead is yourself*". If you know yourself and your behaviors, you can set an example and inspire others with your example.

## **Principle #2: Listen authentically**

According to Cashman, the second principle relies on the principle of psychological reciprocity: if you want to influence others, you must open yourself up to their influence.

When you [listen to others authentically](#), you are open to the ideas and objectives of the other person, and you allow them to perhaps teach you something.

## **Principle #3: Express authentically**

Expressing authentically means talking with a genuine voice. To Cashman, it's about avoiding the need to refine your style or trying to hold on to our sense of integrity at all times. Authentic expression allows subordinates to see the leader is talking from the heart and from experience, even if the presentation isn't perfectly worded.

Authentic expression is closely linked with the idea of creating value. While writers, like George, acknowledge that authentic leaders don't just say whatever comes to mind, but use emotional intelligence to decide *how* to say something, it still doesn't mean you don't go straight to the point.

The difference of saying whatever and expressing your opinion authentically is in the creation of value. Authentic leader says things in a way that lead to a positive outcome. For example, instead of telling someone they have been lazy in getting the report done, authentic leader would share tips on how the report can be finished quicker and point out to the negative impact of not achieving objectives.

## **Principle #4: Appreciate authentically**

Appreciating authentically can, according to Cashman, be part of authentic expression. It focuses on creating value because appreciation tends to make people feel better about themselves and motivate them to work harder.

By appreciating someone, you can boost his or her sense of self-worth and development. It results in long-term positive value, instead of short-term value provided by criticism.

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## Principle #5: Serve authentically

Finally, Cashman recommends authentic leaders to serve authentically. The idea is ultimately to serve instead of control, whether it is the subordinates, the customers or society as whole. It's about understanding the interdependence of people in organizations and larger communities.

An authentic leader must use the below building blocks in order to succeed.

### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP

Authentic leadership, although still a new theory, has been closely reviewed and analyzed. Many of its proponents focus on the positive advantages the leadership style can provide to an organization, while critics point out to some obvious failings in the approach. Let's turn our attention to both arguments.

#### Advantages of authentic leadership

One of the first benefits of authentic leadership is the enhanced relational engagement it brings about. Since the focus is on objectives and a person's inner behaviors and values, the leader is **more able to maintain trust and cohesion among the group**. The focus is on empowering the employees and guiding them through the tasks in an empathetic and honest manner.

George points out to this importance of trust in *True North*. He points to the examples of Enron, WorldCom and Tyco and the CEOs who "*put their companies at risk by focusing on the trappings and spoils of leadership*". George went on to write how trust is not built by trying to appear authentic or caring, but highlighting one's inner values.

The relational engagement is closely related to the second positive of authentic leadership: it's **ability to build positive and rewarding relationships**. The focus on employee-leader relations is on the development and on listening to people's ideas and thoughts. The open relationship, which doesn't mean everything is always happiness and agreement, creates an authentic environment, where people know their place in the organization and the direction the team is working towards. Although authentic leadership means the leader is the ultimate decider, the style invites and relishes the opportunities of listening to other people's opinions. The collaborative environment can improve employee satisfaction and make them feel like equal members of the group.

In addition, proponents of authentic leadership highlight the **consistency authentic leadership style can provide for an organization**. It is the leader's inner values, combined with the operational objectives of the organization, which are at the heart of the way the team operates. This means that subordinates know what to expect in times of trouble and sunshine. If the leader is passionate about sustainability, then it will always provide a backdrop to everything the organization does. The values provide stability and consistency to an organization. More importantly, as Northouse wrote in his book, "*Authentic leaders do not compromise their values, but rather use those situations to strengthen their values*".

Finally, authentic leadership **tends to guarantee the ethical and moral standards are high**. Since the style emphasizes the use of morality as the guidance for leadership, the organization can have a stronger ethical footing. According to George's surveys of leaders, the common problems of morality don't arise among ethical leaders. As he writes in the book, authentic leaders don't seek self-gain, but want the organization to succeed and prosper, along with the subordinates.

A good example of this is Howard Schultz and Starbucks. Because of Schultz' own experience with the problems of employee healthcare, he built his company around the area that all employees, even those working part-time, should have access to healthcare options. He used his personal values and life experiences as guidance and created a company, which reflected these values.

### Advantages of authentic leadership

Undoubtedly, the leadership theory's biggest disadvantage is **its infancy**. The authentic leadership theory doesn't have a coherent or unified theory, with different authors adding their own flavor to what it means to be *an authentic leader*. Therefore, proper analysis of the benefits and the measuring of authenticity can be difficult.

Furthermore, authors such as Northouse question the **ambiguity around specific context**, such as authentic leadership's moral compass. In [\*Leadership: Theory and Practice\*](#), Northouse pointed out, "*Whereas authentic leadership implies that leaders are motivated by higher-order end values such as justice and community, the way that these values function to influence authentic leadership is not clear*".

In addition to this dilemma, the moral component **can cause contradicting objectives within an organization**. The leader's values might not always align with what is right for the organization or its shareholders. In fact, the needs of the subordinates and other stakeholders might not always meet. Therefore, a leader might find him- or herself in a situation where they have to either sacrifice their inner value of providing employee bonuses or provide these bonuses in order to grow the company's sale potential.

But could authentic leadership also reveal the 'inner jerk' of a leader? Although George has said that authenticity shouldn't allow you to be a jerk, the focus on honesty might not be suitable for all situations. In his [blog post](#), Peter Stark, President of Peter Barron Stark Companies, writes about examples where the team has failed to meet its targets and when authentic leadership might not provide the right answers. He goes on to say,

*“We don't all have a 100% positive outlook and attitude every single day, but it is still our job as leaders to role-model and create a positive workplace environment. You may be genuinely honest and*



*decide to share your anger over a team member's mistake or shortcoming. Honesty is great, but in this situation, the employee needs a leader who can give feedback in a way that is helpful and well-received."*

Finally, there is a danger authentic leadership **might hinder an organization's ability to make quick decisions**. As the leader wants to gather feedback and listen to other opinions before using his or her judgment, the speed at which these decisions are taken can be jeopardized.

Overall, the **leadership style can take years to develop**. As George's three-step pathway to authentic leadership shows, you will need to gain experience and self-develop your style and understanding of your values long before you can start considering yourself as a leader or an authentic leader. But leadership doesn't always allow the luxury of time. You might find yourself surrounded by a situation that requires leadership and you simply need to step up and take the necessary measures. Without proper self-knowledge, you might not be able to implement a true authentic leadership style in this situation.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Authentic leadership is a theory born out of the frustrations of the failings of the corporate world. Its focus and emphasis demonstrates the moral and ethical problems corporations have found themselves in, with leaders often showcasing more care for their own wellbeing rather than the common good.

Considering the levels of frustration, it's no wonder the idea of an authentic and genuine leader has become so popular. An authentic leader would use his or her internal values as a guide to making decisions that consider the corporate objectives, but also the wellbeing of his or her subordinates. Rather than focusing on short-term goals and gains, authentic leadership wants to empower people with a long-term vision. As the examples of authentic leaders have shown us, authentic leadership sets out a vision and works towards it, even when it might take years to accomplish.

But the relative youth of the movement has caused problems for the movement. Because it relies heavily on concepts such as *morality* and *authenticity*, there will be people who have different opinions on what it truly means to be an authentic leader. How do you define your moral values? What if you truly believe in things others don't view ethical or good? These are the issues the theory must solve in order to move forward.



Nonetheless, authentic leadership provides one idealistic view on what leadership can offer at its best. Its focus on building genuine relationship and creating an environment based on trust is useful for most organizations.