

THE BROAD VIEW

Authentic leadership – key to thriving in uncertain times

It is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but is deeply personal and requires continuous growth and adaptation. **By Mette Johansson**

IN A world marked by relentless uncertainty and volatility, the question of effective leadership has never been more pressing. From navigating global pandemics to addressing escalating geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions, the challenges confronting leaders today are complex and multifaceted. Traditional leadership models, rooted in rigid hierarchies and stereotypes, no longer suffice. Instead, a transformative approach – authentic leadership – offers a path to navigating these turbulent times while fostering inclusivity and equity.

Breaking away from stereotypes

Conventional leadership advice has often perpetuated narrow definitions of what leadership should look like. Attributes like empathy, nurturing and care have historically been undervalued, often labelled as “soft” skills or, worse, seen as gendered traits. This outdated perspective stifles diversity in leadership styles and reinforces harmful stereotypes that hinder workplace inclusion.

Authentic leadership, by contrast, rejects such binaries. It empowers leaders to embrace their unique strengths, whether traditionally deemed masculine or feminine, and encourages them to lead in ways that align with their values. When leaders are true to themselves, they inspire others to do the same, fostering an environment where diverse voices can flourish and thrive.

Power of authentic leadership

Authenticity in leadership is not merely about self-expression – it is a powerful driver of organisational success. Leaders who are authentic create cultures of trust, collaboration and innovation. By aligning their teams around a shared vision and purpose, they inspire engagement and loyalty.

Authentic leaders are also uniquely positioned to champion Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives. When leaders demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity through their actions and decisions, they set the tone for the entire organisation. This, in turn, creates workplaces where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their best.

Finding your north star

At the heart of authentic leadership lies the concept of the “North Star” – a leader’s inner compass that guides their decisions and actions. Discovering this compass begins with self-reflection. Leaders must ask themselves:



At the heart of authentic leadership lies the concept of the “North Star” – a leader’s inner compass that guides their decisions and actions. PHOTO: PIXABAY

What are my core values? What drives my purpose? How can I align my leadership with these principles?

Answering these questions requires courage and vulnerability. It means being willing to acknowledge one’s flaws and learning from failures. Authentic leaders understand that their humanity – not their perfection – is what inspires others. By leading with humility and integrity, they cultivate trust and respect.

One of the most powerful aspects of authentic leadership is its ability to promote inclusivity. When leaders embrace qualities such as empathy and care as strengths rather than weaknesses, they create space for more diverse leadership styles to emerge. This is particularly important for advancing gender equity in the workplace.

Women, for instance, have often been constrained by narratives that undermine their leadership potential – “women are too emotional”, “women aren’t interested in careers”,

or “we hire the best person for the job, regardless of gender”.

These myths, perpetuated by lazy thinking, have held women back for decades. Authentic leadership challenges these stereotypes by valuing diverse perspectives and redefining what it means to lead.

Leading through adversity

In challenging times, authentic leadership shines even brighter. Leaders who are grounded in their values provide stability and direction when uncertainty looms. They communicate openly and transparently, ensuring their teams feel informed and supported. They also demonstrate resilience, modelling how to navigate setbacks with grace and determination.

Consider the global crises of recent years. Authentic leaders were the ones who prioritised their employees’ well-being, adapted to new realities with agility, and maintained a clear focus on their organisations’ missions. Their ability to lead with empathy and purpose not only helped their teams weather the storm but also set the foundation for long-term success.

Embracing the future

As we look to the future, the need for authentic leadership will only grow. Organisations must cultivate leaders who are not only capable but also compassionate – leaders who understand that their role extends beyond achieving financial targets to creating environments where people and ideas can thrive.

Authentic leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach. It is deeply personal and requires continuous growth and adaptation. Yet, its impact is universal.

By embracing authenticity, leaders can drive meaningful change, champion inclusivity and set a course for a more equitable and prosperous future.

As a proponent of authentic leadership and equity, I believe that leadership is not about fitting into a mould. It’s about breaking free, discovering your true self and using that authenticity to inspire and uplift others. Only then can we create workplaces – and a world – where everyone has the opportunity to lead and succeed.

The writer is founder of MetaMind, a consultancy focused on culture and leadership transformation; she is also chair and founder of non-profit KeyNote Women Speakers

Leaders who are authentic create cultures of trust, collaboration and innovation.

//////////

THE BUSINESS TIMES

More about us: bt.sg/about

SPH Media Limited

News Centre, 1000 Toa Payoh North,
Podium Level 3, Singapore 318994

SPH 6319-6319 | BT 6319-5360 | FAX: 6319-8278

Customer service: 6388-3838
business-times.com.sg

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
(ENGLISH/MALAY)
FAMILY MEDIA GROUP
WONG WEI KONG

EDITOR
CHEN HUIFEN

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
(NEWS)
LEE SU SHYAN

NEWS EDITOR
LEE U-WEN

How to contact us

News Desk: btnews@sph.com.sg
Lifestyle: btlifestyle@sph.com.sg
Podcasts and webinars: btldigital@sph.com.sg
Letters: btletter@sph.com.sg
Editorial partnerships and projects: btprojects@sph.com.sg

General enquiries

Advertising: mkgsales@sph.com.sg
Subscriptions: btocs@sph.com.sg
Digital platforms: btuserfeedback@sph.com.sg