

You should be a Leader

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Why should people follow you?

They say that true leadership is less about the role and more about the kind of behaviour that inspires others. And so leadership is about relationship and influence and in fact choice - the choice of those around you to follow your lead. Of course if your job title starts with a C (for Chief) or includes the words Director, Manager, Head of, or Supervisor, staff may feel they don't have much choice. They have to follow you, but you only get their compliance as a matter of course, and sometimes not even that. If you want commitment from your team you are going to have to earn it. And if you are going to give a high level of commitment to your leader, you are likely to do that only if they have you feel they deserve it.

The question of whether you should be a leader could apply to those in leadership positions already (is this where you really belong?) or to those who aspire to a (bigger) leadership role - again the question applies - is this where you really belong? Those who believe they were born for leadership greatness may struggle to find the authenticity the best leadership often requires. Those who consider they may not have what it takes, might at least be ticking the first box - a sense of humility and a recognition that by themselves they are not good enough - see last month's article for more on this

Goffee and Jones wrote the popular Harvard Business Review article and book, *Why Should Anyone Be Led By You?* As the HBR summary states, "we all know that leaders need vision and energy, but after an exhaustive review of the most influential theories on leadership—as well as workshops with thousands of leaders and aspiring leaders—the authors learned that great leaders also share four unexpected qualities".

They say the first quality of exceptional leaders is that they selectively reveal their weaknesses (weaknesses, not fatal flaws). Doing so lets employees see that they are approachable. It builds an atmosphere of trust and helps galvanise commitment.

The second quality of inspirational leaders is their heavy reliance on intuition to gauge the appropriate timing and course of their actions. Such leaders are good "situation sensors"—they can sense what's going on without having things spelled out for them.

Managing employees with "tough empathy" is the third quality of exceptional leadership. Tough empathy means giving people what they need, not what they want. Leaders must empathise passionately and realistically with employees, care intensely about the work they do, and be straightforward with them.

Finally, the fourth quality of top-notch leaders is that they capitalise on their differences. They use what's unique about themselves to create a social distance and to signal separateness, which in turn motivates employees to perform better.

All four qualities are necessary for inspirational leadership, but they cannot be used mechanically; they must be mixed and matched to meet the demands of particular situations.

Koen Marichal provides a critique of the concept, suggesting the book is "stuck in the middle between the transactional & authentic transformational leadership 'worlds'. In the transactional world followers are instruments to fulfill larger objectives. Leadership behaviour is 'doing the right thing' to get people to work for you. Leadership is rational and has economic purpose. In the authentic transformational world followers are real human beings".

Leadership behaviour, he argues, aims at making people stronger, self-steering, intrinsically motivated. Leadership is relational and has multiple purposes. He gives his own summary of "what it takes to be an authentic leader?" (the subtitle of the Goffee and Jones book). He says the recipe is also deceptively simple:

- 1) Know and show yourself enough, also framed as 'skillful self-disclosure'.
- 2) Take personal risks. Make it personal. Be present as a person.
- 3) Read and rewrite the context. Leadership starts with observing and understanding and then passes to adapting to the situation and change it.
- 4) Remain authentic while conforming enough. "Authentic leaders tease their organisational culture."
- 5) Manage social distance: use bandwidth to shift from distance to closeness as needed.
- 6) Communicate with care.

You can read his article and a whole host of leadership resources here on the website of [thefutureleadershipinitiative](http://thefutureleadershipinitiative.com).

Be yourself - but with more skill!

Going back to the HBR article/book, they articulate that the primary purpose of the four qualities stated above is to encourage authenticity among leaders. To be a true leader, the authors advise,

"Be yourself...more...with skill."

So perhaps the answer is yes - you should be a leader - AND, you should try to be a better one. We might also argue - you are a leader, whether or not the function is implied by your job title. The fact is that people listen to you and are influenced by you - the deeper question, perhaps, is "where are you leading them?"