



No Performance Required - You are the Unicorn

Leadership has a funny way of convincing us there's a script. Watch enough leaders, read enough books, attend enough workshops, and it's easy to conclude there's a "right" way to lead. Speak this way. Act this way. Be more charismatic. Be more extroverted. Be more confident. Be more decisive. Somewhere along the journey, leadership can become less about who we are and more about the role we think we're supposed to play.

Recently, I was facilitating a leadership program with a cohort of new managers in a mining organization. One person's reflection has stayed with me - realization they had spent much of their early leadership journey trying to perform leadership rather than practice it. They believed that to be respected they needed to sound like someone else. To be influential, they needed to behave like the leaders they admired. To be successful, they needed to fit a picture of what a "great leader" looked like.

By the end of the program, something shifted. They realized they didn't need to become someone else. They needed to become more true to self. Authenticity isn't about having all the answers or never growing. It's about developing your own leadership style instead of borrowing someone else's. As leaders, we often confuse development with imitation.

- Development asks: *"How do I become the best version of me?"*
- Imitation asks: *"How do I become more like them?"*

Only one of those creates sustainable leadership. The irony is that the qualities we admire most in great leaders - trust, confidence, humility, courage, empathy - aren't performances. They're experienced. They're genuine. And people can usually tell the difference.

I often think about an image I created of myself standing in front of a mirror. Looking back at me wasn't another version of myself trying harder. It was a unicorn. We often describe exceptional leaders as "unicorns" - rare, almost mythical. But perhaps we've misunderstood the metaphor. Maybe the unicorn isn't someone who has mastered the perfect leadership performance. Maybe it's someone who has stopped performing altogether. Because the leaders people remember aren't the ones who played the role flawlessly. They're the ones who made it safe for everyone else to stop acting, too.

Where in your leadership are you performing? And what might become possible if you spent that energy simply becoming more fully yourself?

People chase becoming a "unicorn," when in reality they already possess the qualities they're trying to perform.

Be Inspired. Be Inspiring.
Stacie

Client Story

Client Story: Director at a Renewable Energy Organization

I have been working with a client on trading performance for presence. She recently shared what she had intentionally changed.

Instead of walking into meetings believing she had to prove she belonged, she started focusing on being curious. She asked more questions instead of feeling pressure to have every answer. She admitted when she needed input from her team instead of pretending she already knew.

She stopped trying to mirror the communication style of more outspoken leaders and leaned into her own strengths - listening carefully, creating thoughtful discussions, and following through on her commitments.

At first, she worried people might see her as less capable. The opposite happened. Her team became more engaged because they felt invited into the conversation instead of talked at.

People contributed ideas earlier. Problems surfaced sooner. Her one-on-one conversations became richer because employees no longer felt they needed to have everything figured out before speaking with her.

Perhaps the biggest surprise came from her own manager. Instead of commenting on confidence or executive presence, her manager simply said: "You seem much more comfortable leading now." And she was. Not because she had become a different leader. Because she had finally stopped trying to be one.

THE MOST REMARKABLE LEADERS AREN'T REMARKABLE BECAUSE THEY PERFORM BETTER THAN EVERYONE ELSE. THEY'RE REMARKABLE BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE COURAGE TO LEAD AS THEMSELVES.