

AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP: DEVELOP THE LEADER WITHIN

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Lesia was an executive member of Manitoba Operating Room Nursing Association (MORNA), and has been involved with the planning of many in-services, workshops, and conferences. She was a member of the ORNAC 2003 National Conference Planning Committee and presented at the 2011 and 2013 ORNAC Conferences. Lesia is passionate about perioperative nursing and the role OR Nurses play in providing quality patient care.

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ABSTRACT:

Great leadership usually starts with a willing heart, a positive attitude, and a desire to make a difference. Strong leadership is important, in today's health care climate, to ensure optimal patient outcomes and the fostering of future generations of knowledgeable, motivated and enthusiastic perioperative nurses. This article will explore key elements necessary for the development of authentic leadership. While highlighting the role that personal development plays in leadership skills, this article will also discuss ways to cultivate authenticity in leadership. The following questions will be addressed: What is authentic leadership? How does one become an authentic leader?

What is authentic leadership?

George (2003) describes authentic leadership as an individual in a position of responsibility who is genuine, trustworthy, reliable and believable. Leaders who are authentic conform to fact or speak the truth and are, therefore, worthy of trust, reliance or belief.¹

A conceptual definition of authentic leaders was proposed by Avolio et al (2004) as "those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are

perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge and strengths, and aware of the context in which they operate. These leaders are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient and high on moral character."²

According to George, authentic leaders have five key characteristics:

1. The ability to understand their own purpose;
2. Practice solid values;
3. Lead with heart;
4. Establish enduring relationships; and
5. Practice self-discipline.

Authentic leaders, **in understanding their own purpose**, search for meaning at every stage of life's journey. Authentic leaders are able to find passion in life and are able to articulate it. Authentic leaders need to "walk the talk" by following behaviours they want repeated or actions they'd like matched.

Practicing solid values involves testing one's fortitude. An individual's values may be challenged in difficult situations. Practicing solid values involves being steadfast with one's values, making difficult decisions, and acting in a manner consistent with those values to

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ultimately demonstrate integrity and inspire trust and respect.

Leading with heart requires compassion, presence, and vulnerability. Authentic leaders are open to having close personal relationships and to embracing the full range of life's challenges, hardships, and difficulties. Authentic leaders develop heart and compassion in those around them by getting to know the life stories of those with whom they work and by engaging coworkers in shared meaning and cultivating mentoring relationships. As the quote by Maya Angelou "You may not remember what someone says or does, but you'll never forget how they made you feel."

Leaders with heart have the opportunity to influence and bring out the best in others. A great leader does make a difference to the people they are leading through their presence and their ability to inspire and encourage the best from the people they work with.

Establishing enduring relationships requires a sense of connection and shared purpose in working toward a common goal. Authentic leaders build a sense of connection by remaining

vulnerable enough to share life's stories as a way of developing trust and intimacy. Relationships built on strong connection grow stronger in the face of pressure and adversity. Authentic leaders build relationships through values and not merely through a desire to please.

Practicing self-discipline involves incorporating balance into one's personal and professional life in order to deliver consistent results. Fundamental to authenticity is the notion of an individual remaining true to these five core characteristics and values. This understanding helps explain the evolution of authentic leadership: the more an individual remains true to his or her core values, identities, preferences, and emotions, the more authentic these individuals are believed to become.¹

How does one become an authentic leader?

The process of becoming an authentic leader is a journey rather than a destination. It requires the pursuit of a continuous personal journey of self-discovery, self-improvement, reflection, and renewal.

In order to become an authentic leader an individual must develop a leadership style that is consistent with his or her personality, values, and character regardless of the circumstances he or she is faced with.

Becoming an authentic leader requires the courage to commit to a process of personal transformation 'from the inside out'. Mastery of both the professional and personal are needed for success as an authentic leader. The ability to understand one's own strengths and weaknesses, while simultaneously accepting one's 'shadow or dark side', is an essential component of becoming an authentic leader.

Healthy work environments are supportive of the whole human being, are patient-focused, and are joyful workplaces. A good litmus test is how often do you hear joyful laughter in the rooms and corridors? A healthy work

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES – BECOME AN AUTHENTIC LEADER

The following are some suggestions from the author based on her experiences and knowledge:

- Read books, articles, and anything and everything related to leadership;
- Seek internet sources to enhance authenticity in leadership;
- Volunteer to serve in the community and give back to others;
- Participate as a team member in an organization or in an affiliated mission trip to an underdeveloped country or community;
- Initiate a personal program of self-renewal;
- Complete a self-assessment of personal strengths and weaknesses;
- Mentor a future leader;
- Devote time to family, friends, colleagues and self;
- Find a new hobby or rediscover an old one;
- Celebrate and express gratitude in life;
- Insert appropriate humour in to all aspects of life; and
- Commit to a philosophy of lifelong learning.

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environment offers a work setting in which policies, procedures, and systems are designed so that employees are able to meet organizational objectives and achieve personal satisfaction in their work.³

The key to a successful organization is to have empowered leaders at all levels including those at the front lines. To be a strong leader is to inspire others, develop them, and create change through them. As a perioperative nurse you can lead by flipping that switch and understanding that it's about serving the patients and the colleagues on your team.

Authentic leaders are perceived as hopeful and optimistic, as practicing with a high ethical standard, ensuring that their values are made transparent, and focusing on the priorities of their staff.² Leaders are defined by their unique life stories and the way that they frame these stories to discover their passions and the purpose of their leadership. The test of an authentic leader's values is not what they say but the values they practice when under pressure.

A sense of 'family' and an atmosphere of cheer within the team are commonly reported by those in healthy work environments. In healthy and effective work environments employees are treated in a respectful and fair manner. Concern and value for each person, as an individual, are apparent.³

Healthy work environments also exhibit a strong sense of trust between management and employees. These organizations engage and empower employees in decision-making, risk-taking, and personal and professional growth. Authentic leadership is described as the "glue that holds together a healthy work environment."⁴

Authentic leadership style is crucial in the creation of positive work environments and the professional growth and development of perioperative nurses. In order to have thriving work environments we need to cultivate the authentic leaders within all our work places.

Growing and developing as a leader is a journey that often spans one's entire career. Authentic leaders are comfortable in their own skin. They know who they are, where they came from, and how to build rapport with others.⁵ Great leaders understand that their reputation for authenticity needs to be painstakingly earned and carefully managed.⁶

Are you your authentic self? Carefully consider how you approach your workplace and how you are perceived by those around you so that you can begin or continue your journey toward life-long authentic leadership! Be patient with yourself... everyone makes mistakes and often it is through our mistakes that we learn our greatest lessons in life.

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ORNAC Standards pertaining to this article can be found in the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) (April 2013) Standards, Guidelines, and Position Statements for Perioperative Registered Nursing Practice (11th edition). Perioperative Registered Nurse Manager Standards and Competencies (RNMS and RNMC) Section 1, pages 51-60; Perioperative Registered Nurse Educator Standards and Competencies (RNES and RNEC) Section 1, pages 61-68; and Perioperative Registered Nursing Practice Competencies (RNS and RNC) Section 1, pages 35-50.