



## **Authentic Leadership**

The area of leadership development has been a passion of mine for many years. I love reading on the subject, talking with leaders about their experiences and coaching people on taking leadership in their personal and professional lives. The problem with amassing information, particularly a lot of theory, is that I began to feel intimidated by the subject. How was I, an emerging leader, to take all these wonderful ideas and emulate them in my own work? The whole thing felt heavy and impossible.

Well, I found the answer over the past few months and what a relief! I believe that there is a single most important quality for leaders to possess to be successful – authenticity. Be true to who you are. Now for some of you, you might find this view to be contrary to your standard thinking. It took me awhile to process it too. Certainly there are many skills to being a leader – business acumen, uniting a group of people behind one vision, strategic thinking, communication and influence, placing people in positions that optimize talents, etc. But, if you have all of these abilities and you do not lead authentically, I believe that you will fail.

So, what does leading authentically mean? Bill George, former CEO of Medtronic and Harvard Business School Professor, in his book – “Authentic Leadership” put it best, I think. He wrote that a leader must:

- Understand his or her purpose
- Practice solid values
- Lead with heart
- Establish connected relationships
- Demonstrate self-discipline

This list of qualities is not meant to be developed sequentially, but a journey of continual growth in all areas. These core and seemingly simple truths coincide with other leadership theories, such as working with your strengths, focusing on the customer, serving employees and subsequently other stakeholders, and the importance of mission-driven organizations. And unlike me, Mr. George has decades of leadership experience that include a 12-year tenure as Medtronic’s CEO where the company’s market capitalization soared from \$1.1 billion to \$60 billion, averaging 35% per year.

I have found this breakthrough energizing and inspiring. I hope that it will motivate you in whatever leadership role you have and call you to be more of yourself and integrate your purpose, values and character in all that you do. Be the same person at the board table as you are at the dinner table. Perhaps this will encourage you to take on a leadership position that you thought you weren’t

ready for. Leadership does not solely exist in the corporate world – it is alive and well in your family, your church, the parent-teacher association, small local companies, non-profit organizations and in your own business. The time to step up to be a leader is not when you feel you are completely prepared to do so, it is to answer a calling that asks you to risk a little and challenge yourself. If you'd like to explore your journey in leadership, you can contact us anytime. We also have many excellent learning resources listed on our website. In particular, I would recommend these two books that I have read recently:

Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value  
Bill George (Jossey-Bass, 2003)

Gifted To Lead: The Art of Leading as a Woman in the Church  
Nancy Beach (Zondervan, 2008)

Success Intelligence: Essential Lessons and Practices from the World's Leading Coaching Program on Authentic Success  
Robert Holden (Hay House, 2008)

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