



The New Currency of Leadership: Authenticity – introduction message

The cement smile. The Tarzan pose. We have all seen them in meeting rooms: leaders working harder on the mask than on the moment.

But masks drain energy, stall innovation, and destroy trust.

Authenticity does the opposite. It builds resilience, upgrades compliance to followership, and delivers real results.

I invite you to my article: “Authenticity – the currency of leadership”

In a world of anxious people, stressed teams and defensive mindsets, authenticity is no longer optional.

[hashtag#Authenticity hashtag#Leadership hashtag#Trust hashtag#TeamPerformance hashtag#FutureOfWork hashtag#CHAOS](#)

The New Currency of Leadership: Authenticity

In a world of anxious people, stressed teams and defensive mindsets, authenticity is no longer a choice. It is the path to trust, individual and collective learning, sustained energy and durable results.

Last week in the USA, I worked with a senior leadership team of a Fortune 500 company. On the agenda: how to tackle the core strategic issues the business unit is facing, how to innovate, how to continue outperforming both the market and the rest of their company.



But beyond that, the goal was to figure out how the team could grow. From normal high performing to a five-star ultra-highly performing team. To do that, we needed to address how they function as human beings who are supposed to support and trust one another in moving the performance to the next level.

Several individuals came to the table with what I call *the cement smile* – a smile that stretches across the face but never reaches the eyes. Others entered in their *Tarzan Testosterone Costume*: chest out, low voice, not a hint of fear.

What an effort. Why the theatre?

What is there to hide? Who you are? A doubt, a weakness, a simple “*I do not know*”?

Why do we put so much exhausting work of crafting a false idea that we are superwoman or superman? Beyond the great first impression, the short-term consequences are typical: energy drained, others get intimidated or lose trust, and the permanent risk of *being found out*. And the long-term consequences? Burnout, dissatisfactory relationships, and the sad fact that, as per Peter Drucker, *you never really lead anyone until people really want to follow you*.

I sometimes want to stand up in those meetings and shout:

“What is so bad about a tear or two when profound emotions enter the stage?”

What is so wrong about admitting you are out of your league?”

Let’s be honest and ask the right questions. How does this make you feel? What is the impact on your life? Then the cement smile cracks, and Tarzan becomes normal again. And something real tends to come through. And that is where the real conversation starts.

The Double Life of the “Professional-Me”

Yesterday, I was back in Switzerland, teaching a group of IMD MBAs. Different context: they are just at the start of their leadership journey, but the questions are strikingly similar. These are bright, motivated people, designing the guiding lines of the next decade in their professional lives.

They want to know: What do I want to be? Where do I want to work? How do I get into the company I dream of? How do I carry my leadership into practice?

And here too, the split appears: the *me-me* versus the *professional-me*. The idea that the private person and the professional person are separate actors on separate stages.

I asked then: why the fuss? Isn’t it all just “I”, in different outfits, adapting to the situation? But with the same DNA.



To get them thinking, I pushed them back into their personal stories. Not just the bright bits for LinkedIn headlines, but the challenging parts they might rather hide from daylight. The parental dysfunction. The bullying at school. The identity struggles.

Why? Because those experiences are not stains to hide. They are the very material of authentic leadership. They shape resilience, empathy, courage, perspective. Without them, you only have the heroic *"Here I am – look how perfect I am"* version of yourself. Shiny, polished, and totally useless when things get messy, as they always do.

We came to a conclusion together: the real work is to embrace your own 3D truthful representation. Show up with depth. Share what you are genuinely able and willing to share. Lead with the full story, not the Photoshopped one.

Why It Matters Now

I am reading Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation*. One of his points struck me hard: we become vulnerable – not only Gen Z, but all of us – when we forget how to play.

Play means trying, failing, getting up again. It means learning by discovery. Replace that with a defensive mindset, where everything is about looking good, staying safe, being perfect, and you end up brittle. You crack the moment reality hits.

That is exactly what I initially saw in the Fortune 500 team: defence mechanisms everywhere, nobody daring to play, to experiment, to fail publicly. Just corporate Tarzans swinging their sticks.

The truth: Superman has a cape. You? You just have a PowerPoint deck and a double espresso habit. Let us keep it real.

Fourteen Years of W-focus

This is not theory for me. Fourteen years ago, I started W-focus as my answer to the rat race I observed in organisations. Too much running, too little reflection. Too much corporate polish, too little truth. Lots of process, no strategy.

Our mission has always been simple: deliver top-quality professional services with a no-nonsense, highly focused, participative approach. Enable clients to build their own capabilities. Test and implement solutions that genuinely improve the organisation.

The name says it all.

"W" stands for "we." It signals a strong belief in an approach where the consultant works side-by-side with the client organisation. Not just in concept creation, but also in capability building – so the ideas actually stick and implementation is rapid and seamless.

"focus" signals intensity. High speed. Real results. Saving time and money by making impact quickly.



Notice what we never said: nothing about selling superhero masks. No cement smiles. No Tarzan costumes. Just sleeves rolled up, sitting at the same table, making sure things actually work on Monday morning.

Authenticity has been a constant thread since day one. No-nonsense. Participative. Human.

Authenticity as Competitive Advantage

There is still a fear that authenticity means weakness. Leaders whisper: *"If I show my doubts, people will lose respect."* I see the opposite every day.

Authenticity is energy conservation. It takes far less effort to be yourself than to maintain a mask.

Authenticity is trust building. People know when you are faking. They also know when you are showing up raw and real.

Authenticity is a reality check. It prevents bad decisions made from pride or fear of exposure.

In other words, authenticity is not a luxury. It is efficiency. It is effectiveness. It is the fastest route to results.

And in a world where anxiety is the norm, where defensive mindsets dominate, authenticity has become the ultimate competitive advantage.

A Closing Thought

So let me say this as directly as I can.

Drop the cement smile. Stop cracking your teeth trying to look strong. Put down the Tarzan pose. You won't create followership, and you are exhausting yourself in the process.

Keep the tears. Keep the doubts. Keep the messy story. That is where trust grows. That is where energy returns. That is where leadership begins.

Fourteen years into W-focus, I am more convinced than ever: Authenticity is not optional. It is the new imperative for success.