

LEAD from the heart

Embrace vulnerability as a pillar of authentic leadership.

For decades, traditional leadership programs glorified attributes like strength, fearlessness, and unwavering confidence. Yet the voice of the modern employee has shifted this narrative, calling for leaders who mirror their own vulnerabilities and humanity. The pursuit of authentic leadership now mandates a transition from mere strength to vulnerability, embedding humanity deeply into our professional interactions. As the idea of demonstrating humanity in the workplace becomes a higher priority, leaders must begin by demystifying themselves and start leading from the heart.

WHAT IS THE CATALYST FOR THIS SHIFT TOWARDS MORE AUTHENTICITY?

The pandemic upended the workplace. As jobs became remote overnight, workforces rapidly evolved, and many organizations diversified due to an increased geographical and cultural spread. The rapid transition to remote work and the resulting diversification of teams highlighted a glaring gap: even four years post-pandemic, 70% of managers remain untrained in leading hybrid teams effectively.

In today's digitally connected but dispersed



FROM GERMANY

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workplace, conflict is inevitable. Authentic leadership, therefore, isn't about sidestepping friction but instead about how leaders are addressing and navigating through it with transparency. Aiming to instill values from the top-down, organizations are now recognizing authenticity as an essential leadership skill.

TACKLE THE JOURNEY TO AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP AS A UNIFIED FRONT

Recent Gallup data indicates that employee trust in organizational leadership has declined since the start of the pandemic. At Acrolinx, recognizing the need for a global, remote-first workforce post-pandemic meant reevaluating our leadership approach. To do so, we embraced a united commitment to lead with more bravery and vulnerability.

Ahead of the journey, our leaders ensured that inclusivity was at the foundation of this mission. A critical aspect of leadership is addressing every individual, and inclusive language should be at the root of employee communications. With the rise of remote work, workforces have grown increasingly diverse, making it easier to work with people from different cultures and countries. For leaders, this means that they need to make sure they're communicating inclusively.

Next, we embarked on Brené Brown's Dare to Lead™ program, acquiring skills in vulnerability, value alignment, trust building, and resilience. The comprehensive training equipped us with the tools to face the forthcoming challenges with a renewed framework.

SET THE STAGE FOR A VULNERABLE ORGANIZATION WITH CLARITY

Even in the most caring organization, difficult situations will inevitably arise. To maintain a vulnerable environment, it is critical to establish boundaries early on that outline situations that are acceptable, and those that are not. For example, when performance and behavior issues occur in the workplace, a leadership team that preaches vulnerability will not dismiss these matters. Challenges like this still must be met and clearly addressed, but in a kind way.

To promote this leadership framework,

giving and receiving engaged feedback also becomes an essential practice. Communicating difficult or unpopular decisions is part of every business, however when organizations claim to be rooted in vulnerability, the process of providing feedback must be handled with grace. Instead of sitting opposite the person you are giving feedback to, take a seat next to them and signal that you are on their team and overcoming obstacles with them. When organizations undertake the journey to lead authentically, they must also commit to establishing guidelines and routines that

the conduit through which these values are lived out daily, allowing leaders to stand firm in their beliefs, even in challenging circumstances; and

- **CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHERS TO BE VULNERABLE:** Authentic leadership extends beyond personal vulnerability to encouraging the same from others. By assuming a mindset of collective best intentions, leaders can create an environment that deters blame-shifting and promotes open, honest dialogue without armoring up.

CREATE AN AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP CULTURE FOR LASTING SUCCESS

By fostering courage within our teams, we aren't only empowering ourselves and others to lead with compassion, kindness, and vulnerability, but we're weaving these principles into our organizational fabric. As new leaders and teammates learn from others to handle conflict and misunderstanding in the same way, this culture



exemplify how to lead with kindness, humanity, and clarity.

USE THIS ROADMAP TO MANIFEST HUMANITY IN LEADERSHIP

How do leaders set the tone for their workplace and create an environment where vulnerability isn't just accepted but encouraged? Leading by example is paramount.

- **EMBRACE CONFLICT AS A CATALYST FOR GROWTH:** Instead of avoiding uncomfortable discussions, authentic leaders must dive into challenging conversations head-on, fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue. This approach requires courage and a willingness to confront rather than circumvent adversity;
- **HONESTY IS THE FOUNDATION OF VULNERABILITY:** To lead with vulnerability is a journey that starts with self-awareness and culminates with courage. Leaders must understand their core values to embody them genuinely. Courage then becomes

of authentic leadership proliferates, and it becomes a fundamental aspect of a company's DNA. In fact, research has found that authentic leadership not only makes employees feel more secure in their organization, but it also enhances employees' individual performance.

Today's workplaces seek leaders who aren't only authentic and psychologically safe, but are also human at their core. By demystifying leadership and embracing vulnerability, we can pave the way for genuine, lasting success in our organizations. Our current and future leaders need to make the effort to show their employees that they're more similar than they might think.

In elevating authentic leadership, we must not just show up but show up as our true selves, making our complexities and emotions visible and relatable. This approach is essential for any organization fostering an inclusive, supportive and genuinely connected workplace. ■

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