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LEADERSHIP

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HOW TO BE A REBEL LEADER

THE 8 PRINCIPLES OF REBEL LEADERSHIP

Author Interview by Carmen Nobel

“When I think of rebels, I think of people who break rules to explore new ideas and create positive change.”

On a fateful visit to the Harvard Coop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Francesca Gino came across a cookbook called *Never Trust a Skinny Italian Chef*. Written by Massimo Bottura, chef and owner of the Michelin three-star-rated restaurant Osteria Francescana in Modena, Italy, the book was filled with nontraditional takes on traditional Italian dishes. The recipes astonished Gino, who grew up in Italy, where culinary traditions are a matter of great national pride.

“In Italy, you’re not supposed to mess around with traditions in general, especially when they are about recipes that have been passed on for generations,” says Gino, the Tandon Family Professor of Business Administration and co-head of the Negotiation, Organization and Markets Unit at Harvard Business School. “You just don’t do that! And yet, here

was a person, a rebel, who had found success by breaking rules and breaking traditions.”

Curiosity piqued, Gino, who is a behavioral scientist, embarked on a quest to find successful rebels. She flew to Italy to meet Bottura. She interviewed Chesley Sullenberger, the airline pilot who landed a 150,000-pound jetliner on top of the Hudson River after his plane lost both engines in a bird strike. She wrote about Ava DuVernay, the groundbreaking film director of *Selma* and *A Wrinkle in Time*. She studied the 18th-century pirate Blackbeard, whose ship, she says, “was arguably more democratic than America was at the time.” And she considered her young son, Alex, who puts red food coloring in his milk sometimes, just to shake up his breakfast routine.

The stories of many successful rebels, the lessons they impart, and the behavioral science behind these lessons are collected in Gino’s book, *Rebel Talent: Why It Pays to Break the Rules at Work and in Life*. In the book, Gino argues that business leaders should strive for and encourage rebellion in their workplaces. And she makes the case that rebellion would make life more fulfilling for all of us.

“When I think of rebels, I think of people who break rules to explore new ideas and create positive change,” Gino says. “These are people who are doing good in the world.”

01 SEEK OUT THE NEW:

“It’s very easy for us all to fall back into routines and mindlessly follow them, day after day,” Gino says. “What this principle allows us to do, even in situations where routines and traditions exist, is to break away from them and find inspiration.”

For business leaders, this could mean introducing employees to things that aren't obviously related to the organization. Consider Chef Bottura's dishes, which are often inspired by music and visual arts. ("Tribute to Thelonious Monk," for example: black cod served with white daikon radish and green onion on a bed of squid ink, meant to represent the jazz musician's keyboard.) Bottura aims to inspire his staff by playing music in the kitchen during meal prep and hanging paintings throughout the restaurant. "Even in the staff bathroom, you have prints of different pieces of art," Gino says. "And the reason that the art is there is that when you look at it, you start asking questions."

02 ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTIVE DISSENT:

"As humans, we often focus on just one perspective, and generally it's our own," Gino says. "Whether it's in conversations or in meetings, we often seek out the opinions of people who have something similar to offer. What rebels do is fight that instinct. They find ways to steer some conflict or encourage disagreement."

Gino cites Rachael Chong, CEO of the New York-based nonprofit organization Catchafire, who seeks out dissenting opinions from her workforce from the get-go, including when she interviews job candidates. "When she hires new people, she basically looks for people who disagree with her," Gino says.

03 OPEN CONVERSATIONS, DON'T CLOSE THEM:

"Rebels are willing to keep their minds open," says Gino, who recommends that business leaders take a cue from the world of improvisational comedy.

A cardinal rule in improv is that one person must always accept the premise of whatever another person says, and then expand upon the thought, such as saying, "yes, and..." rather than "yes, but..." At Pixar, this technique is called "plussing." Gino explains how it works in *Rebel Talent*: "The point of plussing is to improve ideas without using judgmental language. You add to, or 'plus,' what has been said. Instead of criticizing a sketch, the director will build on a starting point by using the expression, 'I like Woody's eyes, and what if we...'. This encourages a collaborative attitude. Someone else might jump in and add her own plus."

04 REVEAL YOURSELF— AND REFLECT:

Rebel leaders focus on their strengths, are honest about their weaknesses, and make an effort to reflect on both. "They don't hide who they are, or pretend to know, or be something that they are not," Gino writes.

She cites Patricia Fili-Krushel, whose jobs have included chair of NBCUniversal News Group, president of ABC Television Network, and CEO of WebMD. "As the leader of WebMD, Fili-Krushel met a group of engineers in Silicon Valley, all men," Gino writes. "When they asked her, right off the bat, what she knew about engineering, she made a zero with her fingers. 'This is how much I know about engineering,' she told them. 'However, I do know how to run businesses, and I'm hoping you can teach me what I need to know about your world.'"

"You reveal yourself, and, in the process, you're gaining respect and status in the eyes of others," Gino says.



— QUIZ —

What Kind of Rebel Are You?

Francesca Gino's short quiz will help you learn which type of rebel, out of four possibilities, you tend to be. You'll receive a short explanation of your type and a few tips on how you can further deploy and develop your talents.

Take the quiz →
hbs.me/rebel

“Rebels work through the constraints, and, if anything, the constraints become a source for thinking differently about the problem.”



**05
LEARN EVERYTHING—
THEN FORGET EVERYTHING:**

Successful rebels understand the importance of mastering the fundamentals of their trade or industry, but they never let themselves become slaves to the rules. “They have a deep understanding of what’s there, and that’s the basis that allows them to transform and create,” Gino says. Take Bottura, who spent years studying the aging process of Italy’s most famous cheese before developing a signature dish called *Le cinque stagionature del Parmigiano Reggiano in diverse consistenze e temperature*, or “the five different ages of Parmigiano Reggiano in five different textures and temperatures.” The 24-month-old cheese is made into a hot soufflé, the 36-month-old cheese becomes a chilled foam, and so on. “It’s really about developing a deep understanding of the thing that is already there before you break, transform, and create,” Gino says, “...and it’s very delicious.”

**06
FIND FREEDOM IN CONSTRAINTS:**

Many people think they can’t innovate because the parameters of their job are too constrained. Rebels work through and even find inspiration in constraints. Consider Captain Sullenberger, constrained by federal regulations, not to mention two disabled engines, when he made the creative and heroic decision to use the Hudson River as a runway. Or the author Dr. Seuss, who made a bet with the cofounder of Random House that he could write a whole book with only fifty different words. The bestselling result: *Green Eggs and Ham*.

“Rebels work through the constraints, and, if anything, the constraints become a source for thinking differently about the problem. The constraints don’t hold you back, but they’re a platform you use to think creatively about the situation,” says Gino.

**07
LEAD FROM THE TRENCHES:**

“Another interesting aspect about the rebels I met is that they often take on roles or activities that you wouldn’t expect them to take,” Gino says. In short, rebel leaders are willing to get their hands dirty, and their employees respect them for that.

“Napoleon would not have spent all his time in the executive suite,” she writes. “Chef Bottura is often found sweeping the streets outside his restaurant, unloading deliveries, and cleaning the kitchen.”

08 FOSTER HAPPY ACCIDENTS:

“Too often, leaders believe that success depends on hierarchical command and control,” Gino writes in *Rebel Talent*. “Rebels, on the other hand, know the value of a happy accident. They believe in workspaces and teams that cross-pollinate. The rebel realizes that a mistake may unlock a breakthrough.”

For example, Steve Jobs deliberately designed the Pixar headquarters such that employees in various departments would have to run into each other regularly. If a computer scientist encountered an animator at the employee mailroom every day, then there was a good possibility that the two of them would start sharing ideas. Sometimes happy accidents are actual accidents that rebels turned into something wonderful.

At Toscanini’s, an ice cream shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, one of the most popular flavors is burnt caramel—created decades ago when the chief ice cream maker got distracted and, yes, accidentally burned the caramel. Rather than toss out the batch, he put it on the menu board that day, and it has stayed there ever since. At Osteria Francescana, the menu includes a dessert called “Oops! I dropped the lemon tart,” which has a similar backstory.

“It’s a reminder for all of us to design things—whether teams or workplaces—such that connections are more likely to happen and happy accidents are more likely to occur,” Gino says. 🍷

“The rebel realizes a mistake may unlock a breakthrough.”

Francesca Gino is a professor at Harvard Business School and teaches in several HBS Executive Education programs. Please visit www.exed.hbs.edu/faculty for a full list of programs.



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LEADING INNOVATION IS THE ART OF CREATING

'COLLECTIVE GENIUS'



By Kim Girard

As Linda Hill sees it, innovation requires its own brand of leadership. The coauthor of the new book *Collective Genius* discusses what 16 of the best business innovators have learned.

As Harvard Business School professor Linda A. Hill began to dig into the scholarship around leadership and innovation, she soon realized there was a lot of research on both.

What she didn't find, however, was work linking the two. Specifically, what is the role of the leader in creating and sustaining an innovative organization? Her 2014 book, written with three coauthors, attempts to answer the question of why some companies, such as Pixar, are able to invent continuously, while others aren't.

The book, *Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation*, was written by Hill, the Wallace Brett Donham Professor of Business Administration; Greg Brandeau, former CTO of The Walt Disney Studios; Emily Truelove, assistant professor of business administration at MIT's Sloan School of Management; and Kent Lineback, Hill's cowriter on *Being the Boss: The 3 Imperatives for Becoming a Good Leader*.

What most distinguishes innovation leadership, the book argues, is recognition that innovation is a "team sport," not the act of a sole inventor. "Truly innovative groups are consistently able to elicit and then combine members' *separate slices of genius* into a single work of *collective genius*," the authors write.

Or, as Hill puts it, "Conventional leadership won't get you to innovation."

The authors identified organizations with reputations for being highly innovative, then found 16 leaders within those organizations and studied how they worked.

Determined to feature a global perspective, the authors include narratives of executives within India-based IT company HCL Technologies, the German division of online auctioneer eBay, and the marketing division of automaker Volkswagen in Europe.

WILLING TO TAKE CHANCES

In a chapter devoted to how executives can create the ability to innovate in their group, the authors explore how key leaders at Pixar, eBay, and Google have used discussion, conflict, and trial and error to their advantage.

At Pixar, for example, the company was caught short in 2008 in a clash over production schedules for the movie *Up* and the short film *Cars Toons*. Blindsided by news that *Cars Toons* was behind schedule, coauthor Brandeau had to figure out how to finish both projects on time with limited computing resources while also limiting friction among the forces.

The crazy solution: Brandeau asked Disney Animation (Disney bought Pixar in 2006) whether the studio could borrow 250 computers, an idea someone initially called “insane.” The team trucked the computers 360 miles from Burbank, California, to Emeryville, near San Francisco, setting up the systems over a weekend. The move worked and the studio hit both deadlines. The book cites short-term innovation—in the decision to borrow the computers—and the team’s ability to creatively resolve conflict as marks of innovative leadership.

At eBay Germany, the authors found examples of how a maturing company like eBay can retain its innovative spirit. For a holiday promotion, a young project manager and his marketing colleagues launched a “treasure hunt,” working nonstop to launch registration pages, clues, and an hourly countdown clock. Trouble was, the launch violated eBay’s well-established corporate project-development processes. When the treasure hunt began, 10 million contestants logged on, crashing the local servers.

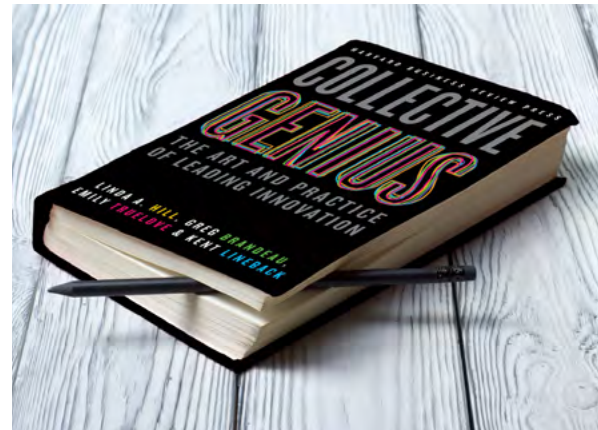
Philipp Justus, who was eBay’s senior vice president for Europe at the time, could have stopped this and other similar “micro-projects,” but instead, he decided to pursue them and fly under the radar of corporate headquarters. Successful innovations emerged, such as an Easy Lister feature and separate registration processes for private and business sellers. Later, Justus shared the successes with then CEO Meg Whitman, which led to a global micro-projects strategy.

With eBay, Hill says, the authors wanted to show how Whitman’s willingness to experiment with rapid prototyping “broke rules to get something done” and modeled such behavior for the entire organization.

Collective Genius shows how Bill Coughran, Google’s then senior vice president of engineering, created an environment in which engineers could figure out on their own how to best address the company’s massive storage challenges in 2006. The problem: Storage issues were created by the huge amount of data processed by the Google File System (GFS) designed for Google web searches.

One team, called Big Table, argued for adding systems on top of GFS; the other team, called Build from Scratch, wanted to replace GFS entirely. Coughran decided to give the two teams space to defend their ideas, letting them collect data and test rigorously. The Build from Scratch team eventually realized its system wouldn’t meet the company’s requirements, but members were assigned to work on a next-generation system and many of those ideas were eventually used.

“Key leaders at Pixar, eBay, and Google have used discussion, conflict, and trial and error to their advantage.”

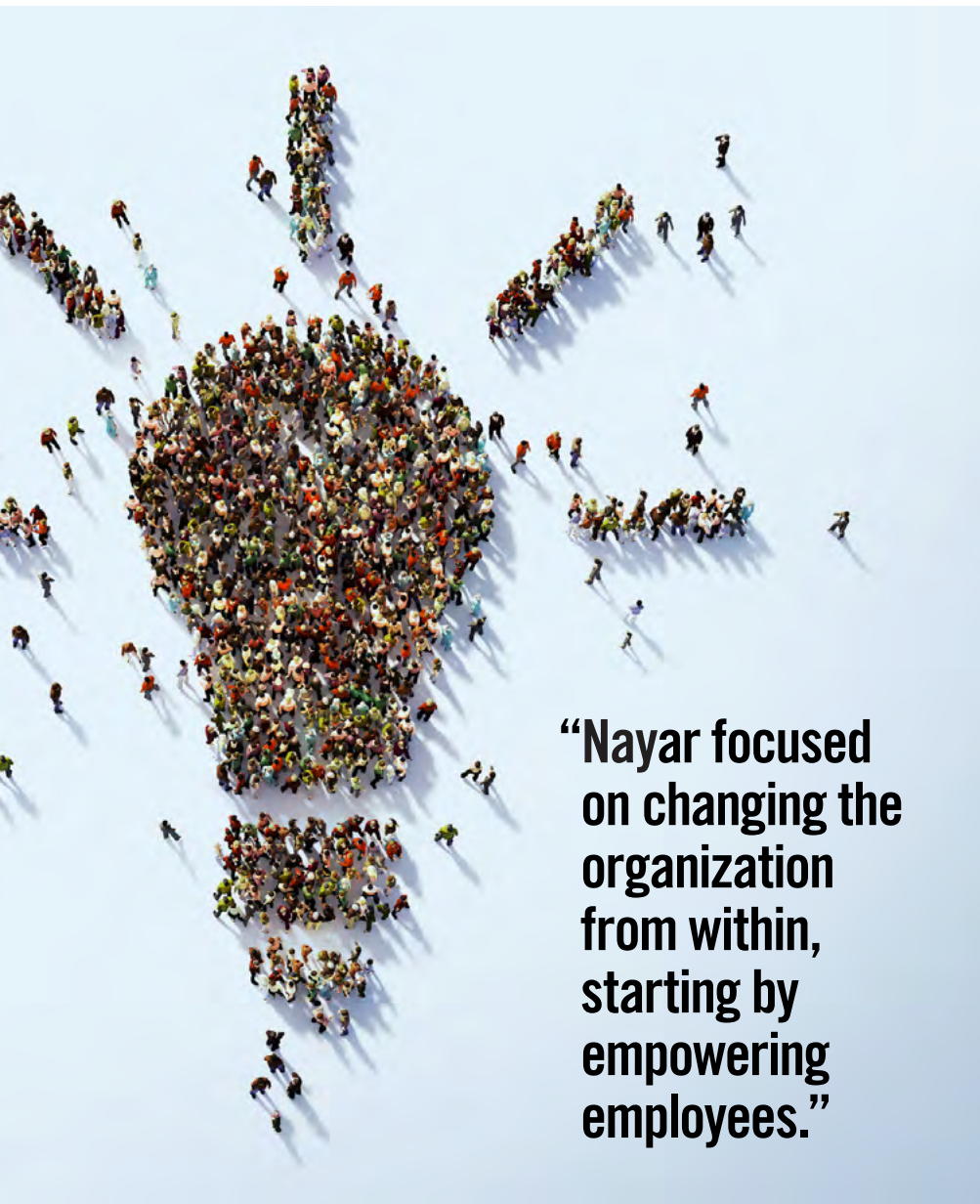


— BOOK EXCERPT —

Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation

Linda Hill, Greg Brandeau,
Emily Truelove, and
Kent Lineback

Read an excerpt →
hbs.me/genius



“Nayar focused on changing the organization from within, starting by empowering employees.”

Coughran gave the teams the room they needed to create a resolution, the mark of a leader who lets innovation happen, Hill says. He also never tried to be the visionary, the expert, or the decisive “I’m in charge” leader, she says. Instead he asked difficult and probing questions during regular review meetings that helped frame issues and sharpen discussions.

“He wasn’t passive,” Hill says. “He was weighing two things and letting them play out.”

Companies often make the mistake of compromising too early or letting one or two groups dominate. “He allowed both ideas to be developed and tested enough to learn and not combine them right away,” Hill says. “He let them play it out. His job as leader was to figure out when to step in.”

THE “YOUNG SPARKS”

Of the 16 leaders studied, Hill says Delhi-based HCL, under former CEO Vineer Nayar, might be the boldest. Nayar, who pulled the company out of a five-year slump, challenged the common belief that Indian companies provide low-cost products and services but don’t innovate. “That [assumption] made him crazy,” Hill says. “He said ‘We can and will compete that way.’”

Nayar focused on changing the organization from within, starting by empowering employees. In 2005, he told a team of 30-something young employees called the “Young Sparks” to develop the brand and a plan to change how employees experienced HCL. The group started with an icon, Thambi, which means “brother” in Tamil, symbolizing “the importance of the individual and the value of the collective” at HCL.

Nayar recast his role as leader. He pushed for more transparency, adding 360-degree reviews for all employees and 360-degree feedback of his own work—he promised to resign if his own review dropped to a certain level. He set up a portal that asked employees to solve “my problems” and reported getting incredible answers from workers.

From 2005 to 2013, when Nayar led HCL as president and then CEO, the company's sales, market cap, and profits increased sixfold, according to the book. *Fortune* magazine wrote that HCL had "the world's most modern management" and the company was named one of *Businessweek* magazine's most influential companies.

Nayar tells people, "I don't know the answers," which goes against the common belief in Indian business that the CEO should be a visionary. For Hill, Nayar shows the possibilities of what can be accomplished by an innovative leader who embraces a new style of leadership.

Since finishing the book, Hill has been traveling, meeting with business and organizational leaders about how to implement the team's leadership ideas at different management levels.

"We're meeting with a lot of interesting people to try to figure this out," she says. ☺

"For Hill, Nayar shows the possibilities of what can be accomplished by an innovative leader who embraces a new style of leadership."

Linda A. Hill is a professor at Harvard Business School and teaches in several HBS Executive Education programs. Please visit www.exed.hbs.edu/faculty for a full list of programs.



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THE TRUTH ABOUT AUTHENTIC LEADERS



By Bill George

Is “Be yourself” terrible advice for a leader? Bill George, the creator of the “authentic leadership” approach to management, answers critics and outlines the path for executives to be more effective.

The debate over which form of leadership works best seems settled, in my view. Most leading companies globally are focusing on developing “authentic leaders” within their ranks. Executive courses at Harvard Business School in authentic leadership development are oversubscribed and expanding every year. As the *Harvard Business Review* declared in January 2015, “Authenticity has emerged as the gold standard for leadership.”

In 2003, our book *Authentic Leadership* proposed a new kind of leader, whose character was the

ingredient that mattered most—more than characteristics or style. We also challenged older models of leadership, including the “great man theory” and competency-based leadership models. Previous generations of businesspeople spent more time trying to “market” themselves as leaders rather than undertaking the transformative work that leadership development requires.

CRITIQUES OF AUTHENTICITY

But recently three leading scholars at INSEAD, Stanford, and Wharton challenged the concept of authentic leadership. Like all movements—Harvard University Professor Michael Porter’s famous five forces of strategy come to mind—growing acceptance of an idea often attracts contrarian critiques, which ultimately are healthy in clarifying our understanding.

In *Leadership BS*, Stanford’s Jeff Pfeffer says, “the last thing a leader needs to be at crucial moments is authentic.” Herminia Ibarra, formerly of INSEAD, adds “We have to find a way to fake it till we become it.” Wharton’s Adam Grant told the *New York Times* that, “‘Be yourself’ is actually terrible advice... Nobody wants to see your true self.”

While these writings have garnered plenty of press attention, their critiques of authentic leaders reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of authenticity. Webster defines authenticity as “real or genuine; not copied or false; true and accurate.” It comes from the Greek word for “author,” which led author Warren Bennis to say, “You are the author of your life.”

That said, authentic leaders monitor their words and behaviors carefully to be attuned to their audiences and to enroll their colleagues and teammates. They do so because they are sensitive to the impact their words and actions have on others, not because they are “messaging” the right talking points.

Authentic leaders are constantly developing themselves to increase self-awareness and improve relationships with others. They don’t hide behind their flaws; instead, they seek to understand them. This lifelong developmental process is similar to what musicians and athletes go through in improving their capabilities.

HOW LEADERS DEVELOP THEIR AUTHENTICITY

Rather than trying to redefine what it means to be authentic, research and leadership development programs should focus on *how* leaders develop their authenticity. Being authentic as a leader is hard work and takes years of experience in leadership roles. No one can be authentic without fail; everyone behaves inauthentically at times, saying and doing things they will come to regret. The key is to have the self-awareness to recognize these times and listen to close colleagues who point them out.

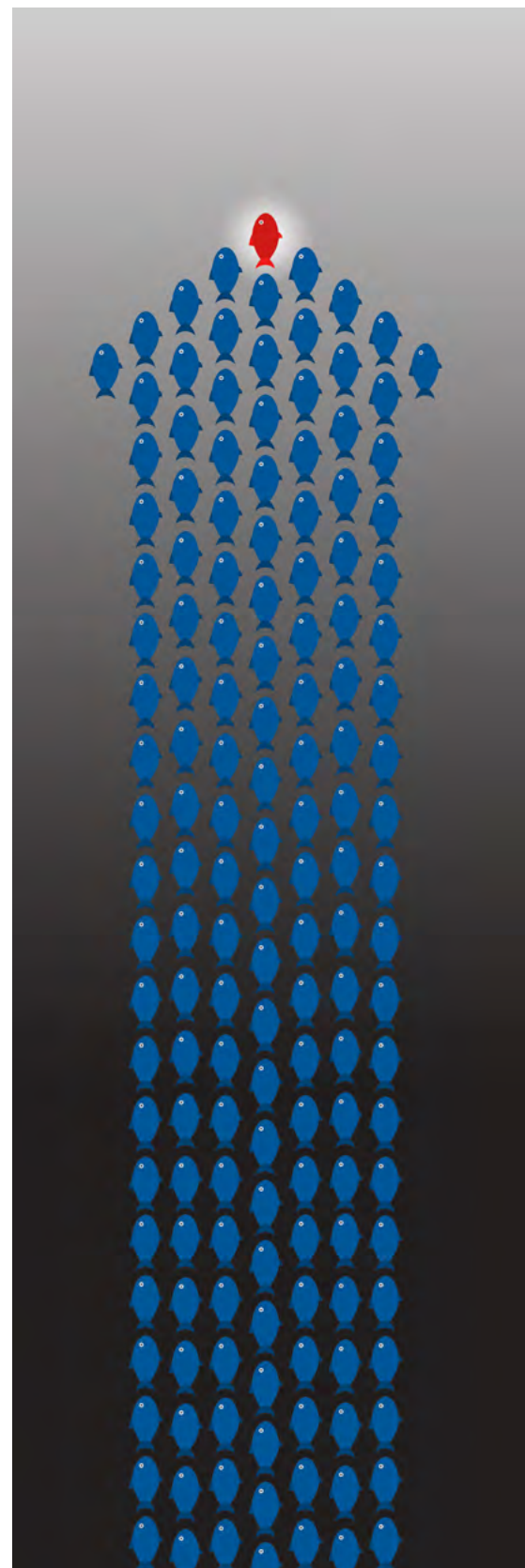
“Authentic leaders monitor their words and behaviors carefully to be attuned to their audiences and to enroll their colleagues and teammates.”

The essence of authentic leadership is emotional intelligence, or EQ, as articulated by Daniel Goleman. People with high IQs and low EQs can hardly be called authentic leaders. In contrast to IQ, which basically does not change in one’s adult lifetime, EQ can be developed. The first and most important step on this journey is gaining self-awareness.

In preparing to write *Discover Your True North*, my research team and I conducted in-depth interviews with 172 authentic leaders. This research highlighted the vital role of self-awareness in leadership development. Here are some recommended steps people undertake to develop a deeper understanding of themselves in order to become authentic leaders:

01

Explore their life stories and their crucibles in order to understand who they are. As my HBS colleague Lakshmi Ramarajan says, the process of learning, growing, and developing an



integrated self is a process of construction and meaning-making. As leaders explore their life stories and crucibles and process their experiences, they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and feel increasingly comfortable being authentic. This is a lifelong journey in which we are always discovering the next layer, much like peeling an onion. As leaders discover their truth, their True North, they gain confidence and resilience to face difficult situations.

02

Engage in reflection and introspective practices by taking time every day to step back from the 24/7 world, turn off all electronics, and reflect on what is most important to them. This can be done through introspective practices that are growing rapidly in popularity, such as meditation, mindfulness, prayer, long walks to clear one's mind, or simply sitting quietly and reflecting. The key here is to set aside preoccupation with task lists, iPhones, and the latest news in order to reflect privately. In this way, the urgent does not take precedence over the important in one's life, and leaders examine how they are living their lives and engaging with the world around them.

03

Seek honest feedback from colleagues, friends, and subordinates about themselves and their leadership. One of the hardest things for leaders to do is to understand how other people see them, which is often quite different than how they want to be seen. To gain greater understanding of how they are coming across, authentic leaders obtain real-time feedback by listening to their "truth tellers," who give them candid critiques about their leadership.

Those who surround themselves with loyal sycophants, who only tell them how well they are doing rather than being brutally honest, risk going off track. Leaders also gather feedback through regular 360-degree reviews from peers and subordinates. The qualitative comments shared in 360 reviews can be of great benefit if leaders take them to heart and genuinely try to change.

04

Understand their leadership purpose so they can align people around a common purpose. Purpose defines the unique gifts people bring to leadership challenges, through which they can align others with their purposes in order to create positive impact. This is far more important than focusing entirely on achieving success in metrics such as money, fame, and power, yet purpose ultimately produces sustained success in those metrics as well.

05

Become skilled at tailoring their style to their audiences, imperatives of the situation, and readiness of their teammates to accept different approaches. There are times when leaders have to make difficult decisions that are sure to displease people, and they'll need to give tough feedback. At other times they need to be inspiring, good coaches, and consensus builders.

These flexible styles aren't inauthentic if they come from a genuinely authentic place. In this sense, leaders' styles become the outward manifestation of their authenticity. As leaders gain experience and develop greater self-awareness, they become more skillful in adapting their style without compromising their character.

“One of the hardest things for leaders to do is to understand how other people see them, which is often quite different than how they want to be seen.”



What is needed now is a deeper understanding of how leaders become authentic as they navigate the practical dilemmas and paradoxes they face. For example, Karissa Thacker's book *The Art of Authenticity* takes authenticity to a deeper level by exploring topics such as relational transparency and honest conversations, making peace with paradox, and seeking the truth.

My colleagues at HBS are working on the challenges of being authentic, such as how and when to be vulnerable, cognitive distortions, making meaning of who we are by integrating the constructed self with the true self—or True North—and going from purpose to impact. These are fertile areas for research by academics and in-company leadership experts.

We need to focus on how we can enable leaders to become more authentic, and give them the tools to do so. In this way, authentic leaders will be able to create better lives for everyone they serve. 🧠

“We need to focus on how we can enable leaders to become more authentic, and give them the tools to do so.”

Bill George is a senior fellow at Harvard Business School and teaches in several HBS Executive Education programs. Please visit www.exed.hbs.edu/faculty for a full list of programs.



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