Truth & Trust Essential for Authentic Leadership

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Introduction

In our last issue we started to address Moral and Ethical Behavior. Taking a unique approach, we looked way back to the Roman Empire. We found that what we have been experiencing for the past number of years – a lack of trust and confidence in our business, religious and political leaders – is in fact not new, but a long pattern of observed behaviors. Therefore, what is new is actually old. Our goal, as always, is to better understand leaders and leadership and try to understand why our leaders are not effectively leading. In this issue we look at two parts of Moral and Ethical Behavior: Truth and Trust.

What is Truth?

Consistent with our reflective view of leadership and its relationship to antiquity, we believe truth and trust are essential for authentic leadership. In today's world, truth comes under attack. Historically, sources of information possessed a level of credibility. Newspapers, radio and television reporters all valued the accuracy of their reports. The outliers such as tabloids were obviously suspect but entertaining, and were considered as such. Today, all bets are off. For those of us who are a bit older, recall the warnings of information overload years ago, and the human's ability to assimilate and distinguish the good from the not so good information. Well, the future is now. As a global society, we are continually bombarded with information, albeit good and bad. The challenge is where is 'truth.' It has become rather apparent that a person's perception of truth affects their ability to trust the source of information they are receiving. Taking this one step further, when in a leadership role, the viability of truth and subsequent ability to trust the leader have a significant influence on a leader's authenticity and effectiveness. Unfortunately, as has been so well documented, including in our previous articles, we have case study after case study of poor leadership and the distortion of truth so much that we start to question what is truth. We live in a time when no one is sure what is true and what is not.

Looking Back a Few Thousand Years

Excerpted from an article titled: Aristotle on Truth, Paolo Crivelli:

> Let me start with Aristotle's conception of the bearers of truth or falsehood. According to Aristotle, items that are true or false are of three main kinds: sentences, thoughts, and certain objects whose nature is neither mental nor linguistic. The sentences that are true or false are sentence tokens, utterances, events of speech that occur over relatively short portions of time. Similarly, the thoughts that are true or false are thought-tokens, either mental events that occur over relatively short portions of time or thinker-individuated mental states. For Aristotle, events of perceiving and imagining also are true or false.
>
> Events of perceiving and imagining fall under none of the three kinds I just mentioned: they are neither thoughts, nor sentences, nor objects whose nature is neither mental nor linguistic.

Excerpted from How to Read Ancient Philosophy, Miriam Leonard:

> When the goddess speaks, giving voice to the paths of 'truth' and the path of 'belief', the opposition between the two ways is expressed through the rudiments of language:

>> There is the way *that it is and it cannot not be:* This is the path of Trust, for Truth attends it.

>> Then there is the way *that is not and that it must not be:* This, as I show you, is an altogether misguided route.

> The route to truth and the route to false belief are differentiated through the complex distribution of the words 'not' and 'to be', while the misguided route is the one 'that is not and that it must not be'.

Finally, excerpted from Britannica Online:

> Truth, in metaphysics and the philosophy of language, the property of sentences, assertions, beliefs, thoughts, or propositions that are said, in ordinary discourse, to agree with the facts or to state what is the case.

> Truth is the aim of belief; falsity is a fault. People need the truth about the world in order to thrive. Truth is important. Believing what is not true is apt to spoil a person's plans and may even cost him his life.

> Telling what is not true may result in legal and social penalties. (*Not necessarily in our current environment.*) Conversely, a dedicated pursuit of truth characterizes the good scientist, the good historian, and the good detective. So what is truth, that it should have such gravity and such a central place in people's lives?

Jumping ahead several thousands of years to a more contemporary perspective on Truth. Julian Baggani writes: 'Truth is not just about Facts'.

> Philosophers' problems with truth are not the same as the worlds. The post-truth debate cannot be readily fixed by a better theory. Most off the time, people are clear enough what makes something true... To use Alfred Tarski's famous example from the 1930s, "Snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white... If that sounds obvious, that is the point. A statement is true if and only if it corresponds to a state of affairs or event that obtains in the world.

> Why then has truth become so problematic in the world outside academic philosophy? One reason is that there is major disagreement and uncertainty concerning what counts as a reliable source of truth.

What is Trust?

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy statement on trust:

> Trust is an attitude that we have towards people whom we hope will be trustworthy, where trustworthiness is a property, not an attitude. Trust and trustworthiness are therefore distinct although, ideally, those whom we trust will be trustworthy, and those who are trustworthy will be trusted. For trust to be warranted (i.e. plausible) in a relationship, the parties to that relationship must have attitudes toward one another that permit trust. Moreover, for trust to be warranted (i.e. well grounded), both parties must be trustworthy.

> Trusting requires that we can, 1) be vulnerable to others (vulnerable to betrayal in particular); 2) think well of others, at least in certain domains; and 3) be optimistic that they are, or at least will be, competent in certain respects. Each of these conditions for trust is relatively uncontroversial. There is a further condition, which is controversial however: that the trustor is optimistic that the trustee will have a certain kind of motive for acting. Controversy surrounds this last criterion, because it is unclear what, if any, sort of motive we expect from people we trust." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

Excerpted from: Authentic Leadership, Trust, And Employees' Work Engagement:

> Trust is manifest by one's actions – ultimately reflecting core beliefs, assumptions, and the depth of personal commitment. Thus, trust is basically defined as the mutual understanding between two persons that vulnerabilities will not be exploited and that the relationship is safe and respectful. Trust is "a willingness to rely on another party and to take action in circumstances where such action makes one vulnerable to the other party".

Authenticity

This brings up yet another question: Who is authenticity for? The definition above, along with many other similar 'individual focused being true to oneself' definitions, are inward looking. While knowing oneself is keenly important, and introspection is one of the focal points for our leadership development programs; does an inward focus parlay into authenticity as a leader? We think there is more to it than just an inward focus.

Most commonly the thinking on authentic leadership is inwardly focused; following inner guidance built on experience, a skill set, knowledge, compassion, empathy and a focus on what is the best organization and the employees and not necessarily, what is best for themselves.

As we mentioned at the onset of this article, we are not suggesting we have the answer key to this issue. What we are attempting to do is frame out the argument in the dimensions beyond a leader looking inward. In fact over the last 20+ years we have seen too many leaders who apparently have not done any inward looking.

The current thinking on authenticity certainly is not new. Secular and religious notions of authenticity have coexisted for centuries under different guises; perhaps the earliest account of authenticity that remains popular is Socrates' admonition that "the unexamined life is not worth living", from *Plato's account of the trial of Socrates*. Socrates quote: "To Find Yourself, Think for yourself." Apparently, we have scores of people in our world who have not found themselves, as thinking for yourself seems to have become a lost art.

In aesthetics, "authenticity" describes the perception of art as faithful to the artist's self, rather than conforming to external values such as historical tradition, or commercial worth. A common definition of "authenticity" in psychology refers to the attempt to live one's life according to the needs of one's inner being, rather than the demands of society or one's early conditioning. [1][2][3]

An authentic leader probably does not think in terms of authenticity. In addition, they should not, because you cannot declare yourself an authentic leader. Only those following the leader can make that call. Again though they probably do not think in terms of authenticity but rather in terms of trust and willingness to follow this leader.

We believe authenticity is in the eyes of the beholder or follower. We are confident that there are many leaders who conform to the traditional perspective of being true to themselves, and have examined their lives as stated above, but are or were viewed as lousy leaders.

Discussion

The relationship between truth, trust, authenticity is essential for a leader to be believable and effective. This relationship is more important during times of distress and hardship. Working on these relationships backwards highlights our premise. For a leader to be effective the leader must be real, sincere, and genuine; in our taxonomy that means authentic. In the summer of 2015, we wrote two articles on leadership and authenticity. Those articles are on our website (www.themacrisgroup.com), and we invite you to revisit them. While there are several attributes to authenticity such as compassion and consistency, for the purpose of this article, trust in that leader is essential. As indicated above, trust is complex. We all know trust must be earned and for a leader to be authentic the 'followers' must trust in the leader. Trust implies doing the right thing, having the knowledge and abilities to fulfill the obligations and requirements of the leadership position. Trust should not be assumed nor considered a given as part of the title. In addition to these aspects of authenticity and trust are interpersonal skills, self-discipline, communication skills, body language and emotional intelligence. Researchers indicate body language conveys more than one's words do about confidence, trustworthiness, honestly and intentions. People interpret ones message only partially from the words being used. They pick up most of the message, and the entire emotional nuance behind the spoken words from nonverbal signals. As we work our way backwards, we arrive at truth, the foundation of our premise here. Truth is the foundation. Ancient philosophers pondered truth and over 2½ millennia truth is elusive. Obviously, certain facts are just that, indisputable facts. As we stated above, *Truth is the aim of belief; falsity is a fault. People need the truth about the world in order to thrive. Truth is important. Believing what is not true is apt to spoil a person's plans and may even cost him his life.*

Ergo, when purported truth is subject to skepticism or known to not be true, trust becomes jeopardized. Like most things earned, once lost, it takes a lot more to restore. Once trust is lost, deeper examination may reveal further chinks in the armor thereby affecting a leader's authenticity and ultimately the leader's effectiveness.

Disputes regarding truth create further schisms between believers and non-believers. As indicated in our opening comments, the mechanisms for propagating information are immediate and plentiful. Verification of sourcing is suspect coupled with the potential for agents who use these mechanisms and capabilities to

further their subversive agendas. All of this challenges the accuracy and verifiability of truth. However, when truth is challenged and the challenges reveal untruths, trust diminishes, authenticity becomes suspect and leadership begins to fail.

Of concern are people who cannot or will not accept that statements or "facts" are not true and continue to believe that what is not factual is actually true. This is not just a current issue but if you think over that last 20 years of how many followed leaders who were actually leading companies and institutions toward ruin.

Case Study

There is a case study, albeit a bit dated but none-the-less applicable. Several years ago, I had a business partner. He was a precocious person, 20+ years older than I and seemingly the ideal person to develop business. At first, it was a bit difficult for me to deal with him always being 'on.' He was the quintessential front guy, who was a charming conversationalist and customer interface person. However, I was always a bit suspect of him. He just did not seem authentic while being quite personable.

On a business trip to Detroit, I was there with my wife, and Joel (not his real name) was there alone. Since Detroit has a vibrant Greek town, we took Joel to a Greek restaurant for dinner. When dinner was over, my wife and I left for our hotel and Joel indicated that he would stay and have a nightcap at the bar. We left.

The next morning, we met Joel, he told me he thinks the Greeks had picked his pocket, and he was missing his wallet. Being a bit concerned, I mentioned I would return to the restaurant and check to see if he had lost it or if it fell out of his pocket. When questioned, the bartender said he remembered Joel but doubted anyone had picked his pocket, and the cleaning staff found nothing in and around where he was sitting. He did mention he was chatting with a few people at the bar including some ladies.

While it will never be known what happened to the wallet, it can only be surmised how the wallet disappeared. The truth was lacking and inaccurate, trust (despite all of Joel's denials or cover-ups) destroyed, and my uneasiness with Joel's demeanor from

early on had been validated. Additional investigating on my part revealed that he had been conducting other less than honorable financial transactions with company money, furthering my lack of trust. That business relationship ended in the near future when I further challenged his leadership abilities.

Conclusion

Truth and trust are critical factors for an effective leader. There should be no question that leaders, in business, religion or politics, will be truthful with those they serve. Truth is the foundation of trust. To survive, an organization needs to trust their leaders and trust that their leaders have the best interest of the organization and those in the organization at the forefront of the decision making process. Unfortunately, we have seen too many examples where this is not the case and it has made trust in leadership plummet. As we have said before we don't have a magic elixir to fix this moral dilemma. Our goal is to give you our readers some things to think about and hope that there are some leaders who will take our thoughts to heart and start to move this trend of lack of trust in leadership in the other direction. We don't expect to influence the "executive floor corner office" but a move in leadership can start at any level. Ethical behavior, truth and trust are needed at every level. As the old saying goes, "every snowball starts with a single snowflake."

1. Wood, A. M., Linley, P. A., Maltby, J., Baliousis, M., Joseph, S. (2008) The authentic personality: "A theoretical and empirical conceptualization, and the development of the Authenticity Scale". Journal of Counseling Psychology 55 (3): 385–399. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.55.3.385
2. Authentic life. Psychology Centre Athabasca University.
3. "Existential Psychology". Eastern Illinois University.