

Summary – 7th WAVE Conference February 4, 2016

Maison de la Paix – Auditorium Ivan Pictet, Graduate Institute, Geneva

“Leading with authenticity, does it pay off ? Analyzing the influence of « Authentic Leadership » on diversity and inclusion”

Four prestigious speakers were invited to share their thoughts and opinions about authentic leadership : Mrs. Valérie Peyre, Founder and Director of Tekoe Tea Shop; Mr. Bertrand Levrat, CEO of Geneva University Hospitals; Mrs. Fabienne Lupo, President and Director of Fondation de la Haute Horlogerie; and Mr. John Antonakis, Professor of Organizational Behaviour at University of Lausanne.

1. How do our four speakers define authentic leadership?

To be oneself, to believe in your values, to share them and work with passion - but also to be competent and to be an example in order to bring a team together. An authentic leader is like a conductor : he/she must foster motivation to make his/her employees' eyes shine. He/She does not play an instrument but his/her contribution allows his/her team to play its sheet music brilliantly.

In the scientific literature about organizational behavior, authentic leadership is controverted and questioned. Reliable and consistent, proven data on its analysis is missing. It is questionable, as using the word or being « authentic » could mean a leader could be incompetent or even a dictator. The notion is also incomplete as being a good leader includes other attributes, such as competence (instrumental leadership), charisma (charismatic leadership) or the ability to motivate thanks to a reward (transactional leadership).

Both scientific research and the respective professional experiences of our speakers commonly agree that competence and the ability to unite your employees around a shared vision are key attributes of an efficient leadership style.

2. Why is authentic leadership important?

Authentic leadership is not important, it is essential. How to bring together, to federate and motivate your people without authentic leadership ? Our speakers insisted on the importance for a leader to have his/her staff aligned on his/her values and strategy. Whether you are setting up your own business, managing a company with more than 10'000 persons or coordinating an international event, communication is crucial and of the utmost importance to share the passion we have with our team members. Ultimately, they will be in line with the customers, the patients and all the other company's stakeholders. It is therefore essential that a company's values are shared so that they are communicated to the outside world.

3. Can authentic leadership be taught?

Learning by doing, having the chance to take advantage of mentoring opportunities, all of this may help to become an authentic leader. However, and based on scientific research, it is not sure that this management style may be learned, like it is the case with charismatic leadership. Charisma may be taught and improved and tools exist to do it. Obviously after two hours spent listening to our panelists, we may conclude that all of them are very charismatic personalities. Maybe they integrated charisma into their leadership style as a consequence of their professional experiences?

4. What are the effects of authentic leadership on diversity and inclusion?

Various statistics enhance the importance of diversity and inclusion on companies' overall business performance. Integrating various cultures, nationalities and genders helps organizations but represent at the same time a challenge and a difficulty. Leadership centered on strong ethical values shared by a majority of persons may help reach the

inclusion of all differences. However, and as Professor Antonakis pointed it out, from a purely scientific approach, it is not proven at all that such effect would be the consequence of an authentic leadership style.

5. What are the limits of authentic leadership?

Even though our panelists insisted on the importance of being an authentic leader, all of them admitted that such a concept had its limits.

To welcome a doctor infected by the Ebola virus from Sierra Leone (in 2015) is part of the Geneva University Hospitals' mission. But although detailed medical processes and guidelines to cure him are known by the medical staff, once a leader is faced with the news - « the patient's plane will arrive in Geneva within 8 hours, he just left Sierra Leone. Please get ready » - the leader must show the example, be by the side of his/her colleagues and employees without showing his/her fear for him/herself and his/her own family of such a deadly infection.

In such emergency and crisis situations, strong values centered around human dignity for helping human beings is necessary to motivate and coordinate employees in order for them to manage the situation.

When starting your own business, you need to be authentic as the founder's personality is key to convince your investors. When growing, the business needs to be efficient in order to survive and other means are necessary to express your authenticity. One solution may be to set up internal traineeships to communicate the values of your organization to your staff.

To manage the organization of the Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie, you need to give up some of your personality : the watch makers' brands and identities need to appear first, one must know how to remain in the shadows.

All speakers agree that authenticity bears its own limits : it is important to share your passion, your enthusiasm but it is advisable not to express your doubts or disappointments when faced with difficulties. Leaders must reassure; they have a role to maintain and they cannot simply be themselves vis-à-vis their teams at all times. Under certain circumstances they must just endorse their formal function.

Conclusion

Thanks to our speakers' diverse professional paths, various points of view on authentic leadership were presented and debated during this WAVE 7th edition. This allowed our audience of more than 240 participants to grasp this concept and to analyze its impact on diversity and inclusion in a far-reaching way.

Questions raised both during the Questions & Answers session and the cocktail following the conference showed the audience's general interest for this subject.

The Career Women's Forum hopes its participants left the event with new elements of inspiration and motivation in regard to their own leadership style and looks forward to welcoming them next year.

Thank you notes

We would like to thank all our individual and corporate members for their support and trust in our shared mission : «connecting and advancing women in business », and more specifically the Graduate Institute for its precious collaboration. The CWF is all of us ! It is what makes our network one of the highest profile platforms for professional women in the Region.

Our corporate members:



Our WAVE 2016 partners:



Our media partners:



We look forward to seeing you at the WAVE 2017 or at any future CWF event. Please consult our agenda for more details on: www.cwf.ch. On behalf of the CWF Committee 2015-2017, Valentina Gizzi, President and Patricia Legler, Vice President (president@cwf.ch and vice_president@cwf.ch).
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