



*The Inspired Planet*  
Multicultural Coach and Consultant

# **7 Steps to Authentic Leadership**

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First Edition

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# Introduction

You have a vision for your organization, a view of how you would like it to be at some point in the future. I know that you want to communicate it to the people in your organization and that you want to lead them to the alignment with your vision. I imagine that, along with many emerging leaders, you find it difficult to sustain the vision – just how **do** you keep it going?

'7 Steps to Authentic Leadership' will give you a process by which you can build and sustain your vision whether you are the CEO of a multi-national organization, the manager of a team, or the team leader of a non profit.

## So what is an Authentic Leader?

Not everyone can, or wants to be, a 'rah-rah', 'inspirational', 'follow me folks', 'larger than life' kind of leader and there are real dangers in trying to 'fake it'. Jim Collins in 'Good to Great' shows how the leaders of 'great' companies are, for the most part, quiet and unassuming people. An Authentic leader, has an **unwavering commitment** to the fulfillment of a vision. Why? Because he/she has aligned their personal purpose and mission with that of the organization.

Exactly what form the vision takes is not the concern of this report. It is likely that it has come from an awareness of your organization's context, lens of the world, theory of change, mission or from a desire to develop the organization in a new direction. It will certainly be unique to your organization but the question addressed here is how do you 'give it wings', not for a short hop, but so that it can soar on the thermals of organizational culture?

So, here are 7 steps, proven by years of experience. Following these steps will increase the likelihood that Authentic leadership will become a way of life allowing you to sustain and embed your vision, whatever it is.

## Step #1 – Know Your Talents & Listen to Your Inner Voice

How do you relate to the vision? Is it just a good idea or does it connect with you and who you are?

You may already know what your 'essence' is – the phrase you would use to sum yourself up when you are at your best.

If so, jump to Step #2. If not, there are lots of ways of discovering it. Here are some that I have found useful:

### □ ***Take a talent assessment***

I don't mean a normal audit like you might get your team to do. Ask yourself what you are good at – *really* good at. Beware of false modesty here. We are all told from being small children that it's big headed to praise ourselves. For many people self-deprecation is hardwired but here's a chance to break free. What have others said you do really well over the years? What kind of things do you know you have excelled at? What were you doing at the moments of exhilaration in your life when you felt so good inside that you wanted to shout out?

Chances are that when you recall these experiences they will remind you of what you already know very well – who you naturally are and what your talents are. You can also find many methods of identifying talents, but paying to do this is not necessary. You can do it on your own if you are willing to listen to your positive inner voice and shut out the negative voices that sabotage your efforts and dreams. Ask yourself powerful questions, and reflect upon them over time. What do I really love to do? If there were no limitations and nothing holding me back, what would I be doing?

### □ ***Write an obituary for yourself.***

This sounds a bit spooky but it has a good pedigree from St Thomas Aquinas through to the Rockwood Leadership Institute. Imagine you are no longer here and someone is writing your obituary. What would they say – what would you *want* them to say about you and your achievements? Are there any gaps – things that you would (maybe) have got round to if you had more time? What are the things that you would have loved to do and never did? This exercise helps to clarify your mind by taking you outside yourself. You are looking at your life from the perspective of someone else and that can bring some objectivity into the process but the aim is still to try to establish who you really are – in essence.

### □ ***Ask yourself the 'miracle question'.***

Imagine that when you wake up tomorrow a full-blown miracle had happened by which everything was exactly as you wanted it to be in relation to your life, your work, your

relationships - everything. How would you know? What would you see, hear and feel? Again, this is about identifying some of the things that really matter to you – the things that light you up.

So, your 'essence' turns out to be 'enjoying seeing people grow' or 'creating wealth' or something else entirely. It is a statement that sums you up – that 'fits' deep inside in a way that just feels right. So then what?

**Here's the trick.** Take that understanding of the essential you and put it alongside the vision you have for the organization. What links can you make between the two? To what extent can the vision satisfy, at least some part of what inspires you and is aligned with your personal mission? When you do this, the vision becomes, in part, a part of you and so commitment to it is easier to maintain – even when change and fear sets in, you can remind yourself that your beliefs are aligned with your purpose within the organization! Align your purpose and passion with your organization's mission? Make links in new ways that you hadn't envisioned before. Create a mind map for this exercise to help you brainstorm on the similarities.

## Step #2 – Imagine the End Point

There is a well respected view that no one can do anything they haven't imagined first – at least to some degree. This may be overstating things but it is certainly true that the more vividly we imagine something, the more likely it is to happen. In the act of writing something down, we engage the imaginative part of our brains and at the same time, in a way, making the thing more concrete – concrete imagination. That is why it is so important to write the vision down but not like a traditional Vision Statement. This is a description of *your* vision - in as much detail as it is possible to do it. This vision of yours, what will it really look like, sound like, feel like when it's arrived? As with the miracle question above – how will you know, *really know*, that it is now already a reality? You can also do a visual such as a Vision Board or Web of Dreams.

Whatever works for you in re-imagining your dream again and again will help you achieve it. Also, by telling others about your dream you have basically created a larger dream and have engaged others in your dream to co-create together. This has also been shown to work. It's not true that if you keep your wish to yourself that it's more likely to come true. Please share with as many people as possible.

## Step #3 – Imagine the Path to Your Dream

You have the vision clearly defined and imagined so now you have to create the path which will guide you to it. What are the key events or elements which you must pass through to achieve the vision? Define four or five major 'points', establish the due date and hold someone primarily responsible for achieving them. Putting these in place helps to keep focus especially if the end point is some way into the future. Once they are realized, these events can provide an important sense of achievement for the whole team on the journey towards the vision.

## Step #4 – Communicate & Engage

This is all very well but the vision is simply not going to happen unless everyone in the organization is involved in delivering it. It will just remain a pleasant, future dream. Create internal networks and buddies to champion your dream and you do this via the following sub steps:

Don't neglect communicating the vision to your networks of support outside of the organization and your personal leadership coach if you have one. The more that people know what you Dream is, the more likely it is to happen. There are many reasons why this holds true, but primarily because you will then find people who will be resourceful in giving you support in some way to achieve this Dream/Vision. Doors will open. Also, you are aligning your dream/vision with others and this creates greater accountability. Furthermore, neuroscience has proven that the more you concretize a dream verbally, in writing, or via art or some other way that the more your brain cements the path and is likely to come to fruition. This programming is used in Sports successfully, and it can also be applied to organizations strategies, tactics and visions.

### ***Communicate***

What people usually forget here is to communicate with themselves about the vision. Sounds strange I know but think about it. Every day, many times a day, we have conversations with ourselves in our minds. We run the scripts we have been running for years, the "I can't...", "I'm no good at..." and so on. We also run positive scripts as well of course...sometimes. Imagine how powerful it would be to hear the vision read out in an interesting, even exciting way by someone who really believed in it. That someone is you – so regularly read the vision that you have written down

out loud with as much heartfelt passion as possible. In this way you are engaging your senses in communicating the vision to yourself – visual in reading the words, auditory in hearing them and kinesthetic in feeling the effect of them. But the other people need to know as well. Some well tried ways of getting the message across include:

- Launching the vision at a company or organizational event.
- Print it out and personalize it for each individual – perhaps on a laminated wallet card.
- Distil it down to a few words that really capture its essence – print them on mugs and t-shirts, after an internal strategic visioning process
- Find ways to use the language of the vision every day – encourage managers to do the same.

There are many more... be creative and involve others in developing them. And the reason for this? David Rock in his book 'Quiet Leadership' writes how neuro-science is proving that 'what you focus on increases'. Attention actively creates and strengthens neural pathways and that is why repeating things creates habits. The more that you and your people give attention to the vision, the more embedded it will become and therefore the more likely to succeed.

## **Engage**

As leader, you are ultimately accountable for delivering the vision but you can't usually do it alone. How can you actively engage your people in the process?

Cascading the vision can help. Ask managers to create their own version of the vision for their area of responsibility – get them to imagine it in as much detail as possible - get them to write it down – and get them to read it out loud to their people.

Human nature being what it is, most people probably ask at some level "What's in it for me?". It's not just you that needs to connect with the vision. A visionary leader makes sure that, as far as possible, everyone in the organization can connect with it. Michael Gerber (E-Myth Revisited) says the job of the leader is to make it a 'game worth playing'.

## ***Step #5 – Determination & Will***

Without determination and will to achieve your dreams, the negative thoughts and emotions will take over and win. You must replace all negative thoughts with positive energy and thinking to maintain your determination and will, this feeds your accountability to self and to others. Success is yours with this in mind. The path may change, but the goal if envisioned by all in the same way will remain the same.

## ***Step # 6 Action***

Take action to achieve your vision in a way that continues to engage your team. Don't just wait for others, make sure there is accountability and steps being taken to get to the envisioned end point.

## ***Step #7 – Metamorphosis***

The vision has a core which is strong and worth achieving. The visionary leader has to decide what that core is and what elements are less vital. The visionary leader has opportunities to re-design the 'how', the 'where', and the 'who' but the 'what' and 'why' will remain solid as long as the vision is appropriate to the Crisis, or the Transition.

In times of great catastrophe the vision (depending on its nature) may simply not be right anymore and the visionary leader has to know when the time has come to make that call and envision something more appropriate.

## ***Cycle Begins Again-***

*This is not really a step, but an awareness that our journey works in cycles, change begins again and again. It's also part of every great journey, Vision, Reflection, then Action, Vision, Reflection then Action. In Popular Education Theory it is referred to as systematization.*

## So what now?

- Is any of this going to happen?
- Just how important is your vision?
- How would it feel if you are able to
- really make it happen?

The fact that you have read this e-book means that you are serious about becoming a visionary leader. Following these steps could change your organization and your life...

...but it is hard to do this alone. Maybe you haven't thought yet about getting some support.

Now more than ever, nothing is certain and in a complicated world there can be no guarantees – so why not maximize your chances of success?

- Make a plan *now***
- Do it – Don't self sabotage**
- Become the visionary leader you want to be**

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