



Authenticity: Your Greatest Leadership Advantage

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Close your eyes.



THE PERFECT LEADER

This is how we think we need to lead.

Not how we should lead.

WHY THIS MATTERS RIGHT NOW

The Nonprofit Sector Is Asking a Leadership Question

The pressures on nonprofit leaders today aren't just operational — they're testing whether we lead from who we really are, and if we are solving problems that drive funding.

95%

of nonprofit CEOs are
concerned about burnout at
their organization

*Center for Effective Philanthropy, State of
Nonprofits 2025*

19%

annual voluntary turnover in
the nonprofit workforce, vs.
~12% across other industries

Johnson Center, 2025 Workforce Report

40%+

of voluntary nonprofit turnover
is linked to a lack of leadership
development

Bridgespan

So, What Is Authenticity, Really?

Authenticity is leading from self-authorship rather than from circumstance.

You define your values and standards — the room, the funder, or the crisis doesn't define them for you.

Your decisions stay recognizably consistent whether you're in a board meeting, a staff huddle, a crisis call, etc.

You can be self-aware about a weakness in public without it costing you credibility.

Self-authorship

The practice of writing your own leadership story — your values, your standards, your voice — instead of letting external pressure, politics, clicks, or fear write it for you.

You First: The Secret to Leading Everyone Else

*Before you can lead anyone else,
you have to understand yourself first.*

The leaders who move others are the ones who've already done the work on themselves.

Self-awareness isn't a soft skill — it's the prerequisite for every principle that follows.

This is where the real work of authentic leadership begins.

You First

Turning inward before turning outward — knowing your own values, patterns, and blind spots before asking anyone to follow you.

Meet Your Inner Committee

Before you can lead authentically, you have to recognize the voice that talks you out of it....



The "Sh***y Committee"

The internal chorus of self-doubt, comparison, and old scripts that shows up right when authenticity is called for — the moment before a hard conversation, a bold ask, or an honest "I don't know."

Its job isn't to be silenced — it's to be recognized as noise, not truth.

"Who are you to lead this room?"

"If they knew what you didn't know..."

"Play it safe. Don't say the real thing."

Four Principles of Authentic Leadership

A practical framework for leading as yourself for your business and your Team.

01



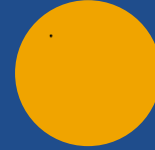
**Figure Out Yourself
First**

02



Lead With Heart

03



Stop Performing

04



**Are You Being
Real?**

Here's what each one looks like in practice.

The Four Principles in Practice

01

FIGURE OUT YOURSELF FIRST

Name the one value you won't compromise on — before you're pressured to.

IN PRACTICE

Write it down before your hardest meeting this week.

02

LEAD WITH HEART

Share enough of your real story that people can find you in it.

IN PRACTICE

Say one honest thing at your next team meeting.

03

STOP PERFORMING

Every hour spent managing your image is an hour not spent leading.

IN PRACTICE

Catch yourself performing — say the plain version instead.

04

ARE YOU BEING REAL?

Check yourself, your business, your team: the plain truth, or the polished one?

IN PRACTICE

Pick one check and be honest about where you're not.

How Nonprofits Can Lead Like the Best Businesses in the World

The world's best-led organizations — for-profit or nonprofit — share the same habit: they don't perform, they lead as themselves.



They start with self-authorship

The best-run companies build culture from clearly named values — not a mission statement or website. Nonprofits can do the same: name the standard before the humans, and the world, test it.



They lead their people, not their image

High-performing organizations invest in how leaders show up with their teams, not just how they look to the board and to their friends. Capacity building for nonprofit leaders is the same investment, made deliberately.



They treat trust as infrastructure

Trust isn't a soft outcome for top-performing organizations — it's the thing that lets them move fast, retain talent, and recover from mistakes. Trust builds safety. Safety leads to results. Nonprofits earn the same trust the same way: by being real.

THE MOVE

What You Do Monday Morning

Self-authorship is built one decision at a time.



Name one non-negotiable

Write the single value you will not compromise on this quarter — and where you're most likely to be tested on it. Do you live this value daily? Does your team?



Get REAL

Work on yourself – as the leader, identify areas of strength and opportunity. Be genuine about those things and start leading with authenticity.



Notice the Committee

The next time you feel the pull to perform instead of lead, pause and name it: “That's the Committee talking, not the truth.”

Close your eyes.

Your authenticity is not a risk to manage.
**It's your greatest leadership
advantage.**

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Collaboratory | www.collaboratory.org

Thank you.