



So, You Think You Can Lead?

An eye-opening look at what it truly takes to develop leadership authority & potential

Written by Anne Dranitsaris, Ph.D & Heather Hilliard

Are you truly leading? Or, maybe you're just acting like a leader? Do you know the difference? With our current orientation to developing leaders – which is basically providing little to no development – people in leadership roles are forced to do their best. Sometimes, this results in leaders feeling like imposters, while other leaders have an inflated notion of their capabilities and how 'great' they are as leaders.

Despite what most leaders seem to think, you cannot just show up and lead. Leading is a human development process. It's not something you can learn at a course or by reading a book. Leaders are, after all, human beings first, who engage in the act of leading to fulfill their roles.

Without effective development, leaders are forced to *act like leaders* using an adaptive leadership behavior persona because they don't know what else to do. Their Adaptive Leadership Persona, which is either Autocratic or Permissive in its style, creates limits and undermines their ability to actually be effective. Leaders end up focusing on being a 'good leader' based on what they think they should do or what will get employees to like them.

This is absolutely the wrong frame of reference. Asking if you are an effective or competent leader changes the conversation from what a leader likes to think of themselves to the impact that they are having on their people and the business itself.



The thing about getting stuck in the bad habits of Autocratic or Permissive Leadership is that you never achieve your authentic potential as a professional leader.

If you think you can lead, then you have moved past the limits of your Adaptive Leadership Persona and become conscious of yourself, your needs and the emotional drivers of your behavior. Without self-awareness, you won't be able to prevent reactive or adaptive behaviors which have negative consequences to the business and employees. If you really want to live up to your potential as a leader, you must know who you are, where you are going, what your purpose is and the core values you live by. You must also be able to stand alone and with others, knowing when each is required. You have to stop trying to be all things to all people, and instead be all you can be.

Your development as a leader starts with unravelling the mystery of your personal psychology --- the mechanics of the mind, your unique abilities, your self-protective behavior and adaptive ego patterns --- so you know where you are growing from. If you think you can lead, then you have mastered leading from your own sense of agency --- your personal authority --- with conscious awareness of how best to use your emotions, skills, interpersonal intelligence and experience.

Leading with Authority

Leading with Authority is based on practices of Conscious and Authentic leadership. These two models for leading emerged on the heels of the emotional intelligence movement of the last three decades. **Authentic Leadership** is described as the capacity for a leader to behave congruent to their values, ethics and guiding principals with empathy, self-awareness and emotional self-management. **Conscious Leadership** is about looking at how a leader can be of service to their own growth, their own development, and whether they are willing to step outside the safety of their comfort zone. This includes being conscious of the effects of decisions and actions on others. It is becoming aware of unconscious patterns and emotions that drive behavior and opens the door to an expanded perspective and new possibilities.

Both of these approaches to leadership require leaders to go within, to do the inner work that allows them to show up as their most powerful, authentic self — which will in turn inspire others to do the same. Conscious leadership requires leaders to identify, plan for, and move through the patterns that come up every time they are about to step out of their comfort zone. These fear-based patterns can be either autocratic behaviors (control, dominance, yelling, devaluing or dismissing others, self-promotion, etc.) or permissive behaviors (sabotage, procrastination, excessive inclusion, self-devaluation, etc.) or any other ways you've learned to "play it safe."

Stop Trying to Be a “Great” Leader

Unlike when you act from the two Adaptive Leadership Styles, *Leading with Authority* requires the courage to act with authenticity and consciousness. To do this, you have to stop trying to be a “great” leader and be real. You need to muster the courage to face yourself as you are as your starting place for development. This means building awareness and owning up to when the ego driven aspects of your personality are getting in your way. You must face the fact that sometimes you’re acting from your ego --- being obliviousness to facts; insisting on your own agenda; lacking objectivity; acting from prejudice and discriminating against those who are different; being excessively concerned about outcomes without regard for people; and using emotions or misusing power to get what you want. Without consciousness, you can’t distinguish between the needs of your ego, self-protective behavior and what is right action for people and the organization.

The thing about getting stuck in the bad habits of Autocratic or Permissive Leadership is that you never achieve your authentic potential as a professional leader. Sure, you’ll be able to act professionally when you have to, the operative word being “act”. But when it comes down to difficult situations, a lack of self-awareness will cause you to shift to adaptive behavior to deal with issues, manage conflict, and maintain your control.

Becoming Conscious of Leadership Behaviour

Much of the process of learning to be a leader who is *Leading with Authority* has to do peeling off layers of ego, self-deception, self-inflation and

adaptive behavior so that you can emerge, honestly and with integrity. This requires you to reflect on and identify your inner experiences and feelings. You have to consider your current capacity for emotional experiences and empathy with others and how you guard yourself from being vulnerable. It’s only through doing this work that you can make the shift in awareness of what you need to do to lead effectively.

Leading with Authority means:

- learning to reflect on feelings and subjective experiences and be comfortable discussing them with others.
- becoming honest about how you behave in relationships and how you guard yourself against feeling vulnerable and authentic (self-protective, ego-driven behavior).
- recognizing the dysfunction you have created in your team, function or organization by not leading in alignment to your values and set about to make changes.
- confronting the way you avoid interpersonal conflict and emotional discomfort and make excuses, blame others or rationalize your behavior.
- developing empathy and caring about what employees experience emotionally and factoring feelings into your decision-making process.
- developing a long-term strategy inclusive of social mission, employee development investment and engagement.
- learning that a successful bottom line doesn’t mean the people you lead are thriving or you are happy.

Leading with Authority means letting go of the need for short-term bottom-line wins at the expense of long-term objectives. You have to be willing to dig deep to emerge and get rid of any misalignments, incongruent leadership behavior or dysfunctional team behavior that stops forward movement. *Leading with Authority* is holistic and inclusive and creates the type of resilience, power and efficiency needed to thrive in the current marketplace and is richly satisfying to both leaders and employees.

Leading with Authority

The following are qualities required for *Leading with Authority*. Each of these qualities has skills associated with them that can most effectively be developed once a leader has achieved a certain level of Self- and Social- awareness.

1. Realistic Sense of Value & Competence

Leading with Authority means a leader must have a realistic sense of their own abilities and competence. To do this, they have to reflect on strengths and weaknesses objectively and not just judge themselves as “good” and “bad”. They replace judgments with descriptive language like effective, misaligned, accurate, high-responsive. Being real with oneself means they have more tolerance when others are critical or point out things that need improving. They have a solid foundation of confidence and aren’t intimidated by people with power and authority. They aren’t frightened of disagreeing with people in positions higher in the organization as they are confident in themselves. The ability to be authentic is the foundation for one’s own sense of authority so they can listen to what others have to say and disagree respectfully.

Leading with Authority also means that a leader gives up on competing to see if they are better than others. They don’t have to have the last word or win every argument. Nor do they compare themselves or engage in power struggles to prove whether they are inferior or superior. They can enjoy healthy debate without having to win at the expense of the other person. They can say “I don’t know” without feeling inadequate or ashamed.

2. Self-Determination

Self-determination is the ability to know oneself without outside influence. It is the ability to make choices independent of the influence and interference of others. One has to be aware of one’s self and hold it in constant regard to function autonomously and independently of the opinions of others.

Too often we hear leaders tell us they are afraid to say something for fear of how they will be judged or what it will do to their reputation. If someone tells them they are ridiculous, they don’t automatically question themselves and their abilities. *Leading with Authority* requires a



**Are your leaders feeling
frustrated and powerless?**

**Learn more about our
approaches to fast tracking
leadership development**

[LEARN MORE](#)



Leaders who are *Leading with Authority* allow others to have their reactions without getting on the defensive, or becoming self-protective.

leader to hold their own value as a constant without allowing how others behave or believe to affect it. They don't depend on others or circumstances to regulate their confidence and self-esteem.

When *Leading with Authority*, leaders accept that others will get upset when they say “no” and they learn to tolerate it. They also know what it costs them to give in and so are able to assert themselves appropriately. Instead of being permissive and letting people have their way, they assert their authority with firm lines and the expectation that others will manage their emotions. While they don't take responsibility for the feelings of others, leaders who are *Leading with Authority* are sensitive to how their words affect others and they manage the impulse to devalue others when they are feeling insecure or threatened. They tend to focus on what is right with people and are able to be there for their success.

3. Ask for What They Need

When *Leading with Authority*, leaders are aware that they are human and have needs like anyone else. They don't feel compelled to represent themselves as perfect. They can discuss themselves with a balanced focus on what they

are achieving and what they must improve on. Their ego needs and self-image is less important than their desire to grow and develop the skills and experience required to lead others effectively.

Leaders who are *Leading with Authority* allow others to have their reactions without getting on the defensive, or becoming self-protective. Nor do they adapt their style and conform so that others won't judge, envy or attack them. They realize they have no control over others' emotional and competitive reactions to them and can observe without reacting. They work to surround themselves with people that can be authentic and accept them for who they are.

4. Self-Activate and Take Initiative

Despite their role in the organization, *Leading with Authority* requires that leaders don't follow blindly or wait to be told. They take initiative to do things that are their responsibility and are aligned with their values. They are cognizant of the balance required to stay strong within themselves and make sure they do things for their own pleasure. They refuse to sacrifice their personal lives and relationships for being productive at work. This meets the needs of their ego, as the ego is concerned with doing. The self focuses on being.

Leading with Authority also means leaders have to know when they are letting their feelings get in the way of their goals. Some goals are more difficult than others, and challenges as well as issues can deflate even the most robust leader. They recognize feelings that get in the way of their ability to stay optimistic, taking one step at a time to maintain their confidence and work through barriers to success.

5. Cooperate & Collaborate with Others

Both collaboration and cooperation are processes in which two or more people work together for common, mutual benefit or a common objective. To work in this fashion with others requires leaders to suspend the needs of the ego and recognize and ignore any competition or power dynamics. While many leaders espouse the idea they are collaborative, they design processes and approaches that meet their needs without the awareness of the needs of others.

When *Leading with Authority*, leaders consider the impact of their decisions on others and ask for input on how things may affect them. They maintain their own sense of authority in the process and negotiate so that all parties get their needs met, when possible. They think about what they want and need, and have their own agenda based on the best interests of the business and their effectiveness as a leader. They don't give in to make sure everyone is happy and are able to listen to complaints without changing their decision.

6. Reasonable & Balanced Expectations

Leaders without training often expect employees to do things without adequate explanation. They use themselves as a benchmark for how fast and how well another person should be able to do something. When *Leading with Authority*, leaders discuss expectations with others and allow for conversation and negotiation, within reason. They don't impose their will and expect others to have questions or to say they don't believe

they can get something done in the stated timeline. Many leaders we work with complain they have too much on their plate while continuing to say yes to requests from senior leaders.

Leading with Authority means a leader doesn't jump in when someone needs help. They help others improve their abilities through transfer of skills instead of doing things for them. They recognize that employees can frustrate them



Qualities Required for Leading with Authority

1. Realistic Sense of Value & Competence
2. Self-Determination
3. Ask for What They Need
4. Self-Activate and Take Initiative
5. Cooperate & Collaborate with Others
6. Reasonable & Balanced Expectations
7. Interdependence
8. Empathetic (Social Awareness)

when they don't do things as fast or competently as they would like, without reacting from that feeling. They build tolerance to feeling out of control, and master helping others without giving into the impulse to take control.

7. Interdependence

Being interdependent means that a leader must step out of the power hierarchy and maintain their own identity and authority up and down the chain of command. They are able to create relationships of mutuality and give and take. They are not defined by their roles, nor do they define others by theirs. Instead, they get to know people and work hard at relationships to get what they need.

Many leaders in the process of becoming conscious must do an inventory of their relationships. They need to weed out those people who want to be with them and from those who use them. Just as they learn to recognize the vulnerabilities in others, they know their own tendency to overextend and put their own needs on hold. They don't exploit others and stop allowing themselves to be exploited by others. *Leading with Authority* requires leaders to have a greater sense of others' needs and be willing to help meet them, even if it means putting their own needs on hold for a time. They expect others to do the same for them.

8. Empathetic (Social Awareness)

Many leaders have difficulty understanding why they need to be empathetic. With empathy, a leader has developed the capacity to

know what another is experiencing or to put themselves in another's shoes. *Leading with Authority* doesn't mean that someone's emotions are problems to fix. It is getting on the same page and tolerating the emotions of others without feeling compelled to take responsibility.

Many leaders tend to dismiss or disregard emotions and see them as impediments to getting things done. *Leading with Authority* means that emotions are accepted as a part of the human experience and leaders don't feel compelled to get rid of them in themselves or in others. Seeing an employee struggle or listening to an issue someone is having with a co-worker is an opportunity to lead, coach or support them. A lot of leaders jump in and rescue others instead of being with them and discovering what it is they might need.



Leading with authority brings the pendulum to middle ground where leaders understand how to carve the right balance between directing and governing while inspiring and motivating.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT
LEADING WITH
AUTHORITY**

[WATCH WEBINAR](#)

Are You Ready to Lead?

While many people strive for leadership roles, few participate in the development required to be a leader. Developing leadership authority and potency is a commitment to fully realizing your potential as a leader. It means recognizing the reality that leading is a profession that requires you to train, gain experience and mastery to be effective. It starts with you as a human being first, and supports you to demonstrate the characteristics essential to *Leading with Authority*.

Sign up for our webinar or watch for our next newsletter in which we lay out a clear step by step framework to develop your leadership authority and potential.

[REGISTER](#)

Or, bring us in-house for our introductory workshop, So, You Think You Can Lead?, that will energize your leaders to wake up to their adaptive leadership persona's and start their journey towards Leading with Authority.

[LEARN MORE](#)

Do your leaders feel powerless?

Our LEADING WITH AUTHORITY program is specifically designed to transition leaders from permissive behaviours that get in the way of organizational success to leading assertively and with authority by building their confidence and their skills. Contact us for more details on bringing this program in-house.

ABOUT CALIBER

Caliber Leadership Systems is a Toronto-based consulting firm working with global clients striving to achieve their full potential. We specialize in helping clients build the infrastructure—systems, processes, structures, behaviour and leadership practices—necessary to prepare for and master the next level of organizational growth and development.

CONTACT US

For more information about how Caliber can help, contact us:

info@caliberleadership.com

416.406.3939

www.CaliberLeadership.com