

project is matched by an inner decision are we true to that position. Both in our personal lives and as leaders, authenticity is being what and who we are and being happy with it.

High authenticity (10) in a leadership position means we don't pretend. We don't pretend to be convinced of our products. We are convinced. We don't pretend to care for our team or customers. We do care. We do not, for financial or other reasons, bullshit ourselves into liking the business, the stakeholders, and their problems. We either like the business or we don't and, accordingly, we assume the role or don't.

Hypocrisy (0) seems to be a hard word to describe the ubiquitous phenomenon of pretense in business, especially by salespeople. Why do buyers often make their decisions talking to a supplier's technicians and bypass the salesperson? Because buyers hope that technicians haven't been trained to pretend. Technicians' answers are deemed more trustworthy.

Being **treacherous (-10)** is not just trying to look better; it involves intentionally cheating. While hypocrisy is perfectly legal, treachery is generally illegal. It is betrayal.

The **exaggeration of authenticity (11)** is offensiveness. All exaggerations diminish trust. While authenticity may lead us to say "no thank you to a proposal," offensiveness would, in addition, insult the proposer.

Authenticity and strategy

For a business or a person to be authentic, a strategy is needed. A strategy that synergizes inherent talents, competencies, drive, and circumstances with a market

segment (demographic as well as psychographic) that demands exactly that mix. If talents or competencies are offered to market segments that don't inherently appreciate them, selling gets painful and often hypocritical. In order to move away from a market that really doesn't seem to care if our business exists or not, we need a strategy that sharpens awareness of our strengths and their significance to a better-defined market segment.

When we try to get smart, sooner or later discussions turn to the subject of strategy. And immediately we tend to think of warlike scenarios and of classic authors like Clausewitz and Sun Tzu. Sun Tzu is a cultural treasure who is in the spotlight because of a 2,500-year anniversary. China's top-level leadership even promotes his famous *Art of War* to presidents and chancellors to facilitate understanding and diplomacy.

Business writers and commentators regularly attempt to transport generalship to marketing and sales. The results are sometimes less than satisfactory; principles are confused with tactics and competitors are categorized as enemies. "Knowing thy enemy" then inadvertently creates a me-too benchmarking frame of mind, and a market situation, in which the volume of noise, not discernment, is supposed to make the customer listen. When that happens it is time to reframe the situation, because a warlike frame of mind distracts focus from that unique mix of competencies and circumstances that could make almost every company truly indispensable and authentic.

Authenticity is not just honesty, but rather truthfulness to our natural purpose. We recognize authenticity in leaders and organizations by a purpose and

Humans want to be resourceful, not cogwheels. They want to be problem-solvers, not animated objects. They want to be helpful, not just functioning. If we can empathize and understand better in that regard, we will create a much more dynamic set of relationships within the organization. Purposeful individuals with a natural aim to do useful things, recognized as such by managers, and coupled with a sensible business strategy that solves real problems for real customers, will result in a more viable organization.

Conceptual understanding versus experience

Experience is, of course, useful in any situation. However, other factors can trump experience in the business environment, and experience can sometimes have a limiting effect on our minds.

It is not really the experience per se that makes us valuable and capable. It is what we do with the experience that matters. Getting value from experience really requires understanding. Sometimes we achieve formal merit by experience. Hopeful owners or other stakeholders may confuse their desire for managerial understanding with managerial experience in “similar” areas. John Scully, using his long experience with Pepsi, increased Apple’s turnover in the medium term, but was unsuccessful in the longer term. His thoughts were framed (and in a sense trapped) by reliance on his previous success. He had experience in battling for market share, but without Steve Jobs around had no conception of the “inner conversation” of Apple’s early adopters. Ironically, it is harder to learn from success than from failure.

Experience is not sufficient in and of itself to make us sound business leaders. If we want to become functionally competent in our business, we need to couple experience with a conceptual understanding of what we are actually dealing with in our business.

Conceptual understanding versus money

Unlimited funds are not the blessing we think they are. It is amazingly difficult to manage an “unlimited” resource that is limited to others. Not only do we tend to waste it; we also overuse it and create damage both to the resource itself and to whatever it is applied to.

Most economic mistakes are made in affluent periods, not in depressions. If unlimited funds rain on, for example, nonprofit organizations, or if the right to print money is granted, or if an inexperienced new government benefits from a good tax year, what do they tend to do? Well, think about it. What would you do if you meant well and had cartloads of money at your disposal? You would start throwing money at problems. However, it usually takes a while to discover that throwing money at problems does not make them disappear. Often the reverse is true: throwing money at a problem creates a whole new set of problems.

In the 1990s, NGOs threw money at Somalia, trying to alleviate hunger and solve the political problems. Because the internal difficulties were not understood, the money did not end up where they threw it. First, sizeable portions went to appease warlords, thus sustaining the violence. Second, most of the food aid that entered the country came straight back out, and was sold in markets in Kenya, creating an unsustainable false economy. NGO