

Four Reasons Introverts Are Naturally Authentic Leaders

It's a common myth that introverts can't be great leaders. This is due to the fact that leadership theories have favored extroverts for centuries. Western culture has also traditionally reinforced the leadership of outgoing, dynamic men who are articulately passionate, sure of themselves and just seem to attract followers.

Going back to antiquity, the first leadership theory was the Great Man Theory. Through our modern lens, its problems are pretty obvious. It implied that only certain men with the right characteristics could lead—they had to be white, tall, handsome, and wealthy.

But old leadership theories fail to address the power of the quiet, steady leader who inspires greatness within his or her team. And they also fail to address the draw of authenticity.

Authenticity is becoming a real buzzword these days, which is due to the push for increased acceptance and appreciation of diversity, and has also spurred the popularity of the Authentic Leadership Theory. This theory argues against the need for just one personality type in leadership positions.

The Authentic Leadership Theory is personality-type neutral. It argues that leaders don't have to fit into a specific box—they just need to have honest, authentic relationships.

The popularity of authenticity makes the modern day a great one for introverted leaders, thanks to thought leaders like William Gardner, Bruce Avolio, Fred Walumbwa, and others who have defined the Authentic Leadership Theory. Also boosting this theory are inspirational, introverted leaders from the past, like Ghandi, Jesus, and Abraham Lincoln, to name a few.

Introverts naturally possess strengths that can help them become more authentic leaders. Here are four of them:

Self-awareness

The phrase “know thyself” goes back to Socrates and is even inscribed on the Temple at Delphi. For introverted leaders, self-awareness is a part of their nature. They tend to be more thoughtful and introspective, which makes them more inwardly mindful and able to easily identify a clear purpose. The natural ability for self-examination also helps them more accurately identify their strengths and weaknesses. And the first step to improvement is awareness, so introverts may find have an advantage when it comes to developing the leadership skills they are lacking.

Relationship Building

This trait is about being genuine, honest and straightforward, while leaving behind hidden agendas or a managed persona. This also comes naturally to introverts, as they are much less focused on small talk, hype, and larger-than-life personalities. They tend to have fewer, deeper relationships instead of many unreliable friends. Introverts can leverage this natural tendency to maximize the real relationships by growing with others around them who are in pursuit of the same goal.

Balance

This is the opposite of impulsive or reactionary leadership. Neuroscience shows that the neural paths of introverts tend to push data through the frontal lobes, making them biologically prepared to process information in a steady, non-impulsive manner. Introverts have a natural preference for discussing subjects at a slower, more thoughtful pace to gain consensus and buy-in from others around them. They can hone this skill as they listen to other viewpoints, especially the extroverts who balance them, gathering all the options before working collectively to find the best solution.

Conscience

Introverted leaders are typically passionate about doing the right thing. They want to make sure their decisions will not adversely impact their team, product, or customers. Introverts may struggle with an over-active conscience at times—coworkers might even call them the perfectionists in the office because they want to understand how everyone is affected and make sure that things are just so. But their ability to tap into what feels right actually helps them lead and reach fair, ethical decisions that their employees can get behind.

Whether an introvert or extrovert, authenticity is a key component to sustainable leadership in today's workplace. Without authenticity, you will ultimately be recognized for who you truly are. Best to embrace it first.