

Three principles of *authenticity*

A Report by The Leadership Council

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Three principles of authenticity

ISBN 978-0-9561113-4-0
Published by The Leadership Council
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Three principles of *authenticity*

Introduction

'These are my firm principles and if you don't like them, well, I have others'. The old Groucho Marx joke deftly whets that knife-edge of conviction, ego and compliance on which so many of us dance. Politicians, caught between genuine motivation to create a better society, personal ambition, and electoral realities. Corporate executives, struggling to balance profitability with multiple responsibilities, all against the backdrop of a ladder to be climbed, a pension to be funded, perhaps an honour to be won. Everybody's at it.

Yet authenticity matters. Perhaps more than ever before, because, in an age where the tweet is more toxic than the sword, concealing the tensions inherent in the complex balancing acts we play becomes every day less possible.

Sir Martin Sorrell's ability to cut through to the heart of a topic is legend, and in his interview for this paper he doesn't disappoint. Not missing a beat, he fires off a definition of authenticity, plus two compelling reasons for it, in three crisp phrases.

'Authenticity means being genuine. You need to be genuine to be successful. When you're not genuine, you will be found out.'

Hard to argue with.

Why then does authenticity remain curiously un-pin-downable, as testified by the forests of academic papers and management texts on the topic? Authenticity is about the self, and we all have very different selves. So while we may agree on dictionary-style definitions, things get complicated when we try to capture 'authentic characteristics' or 'authentic behaviours'. 'Authentikos' is an ancient greek word and it means exactly what we use it for today - genuine. Behind that lie two smaller words, 'self' (autos) and 'armour' (entea). When you're wearing your own armour, you're authentic. I can see and appreciate your authenticity (or worry at your lack of it) and you can do the same for me. But *your* authentic and *my* authentic cannot, by definition, be the same. Copying really is not good enough.

Learning to wear our own armour is not easy. Henry Haskins, a wise Wall Street stockbroker a century ago, once said *'We have to serve ourself many years before we gain our own confidence'*. Arguably our education doesn't help: all those techniques to avoid the word 'I', to kill or camouflage the appearance of originality, compounded for so many of us by the blockheaded corporate mantra of 'no "I" in team'. And then there's the added challenge in most careers of 'authentically' embracing a succession of cultures, value sets, and the rest as people move from job to job. No wonder we reach the upper rungs of management and leadership in so many spheres of life with at best a faint and shaken grasp on our own authenticity. Entrepreneurs, as you will find by reading this paper, tend to be much more in touch with authenticity, and it's worth thinking what others can learn from this.

In my coaching work, I find that most if not all of the managers and leaders I work with are magpies: their professional personae decorated by scraps of style, manner and attitude lovingly (sometimes unwittingly) filched over time from random heroes and role models. Can imitation that flatters others while furnishing our own nests be a wholly bad thing? If we accept the tight triangle which Sir Martin draws between being authentic, genuine, and successful, such magpie behaviour should give cause for concern. Clearly there's a question of *whose armour?* I find myself time and again asking (sometimes out loud) *'Will the real leader please stand up?'*

The interviews collected here - together with polling data from The Leadership Council's first collaboration with Populus (pages 34 onwards) - throw important light on this elusive topic. This is a pool of wisdom and perspective which merits close reading. Our consistent aim in this, as in all of our Leadership Council papers, is to produce something which can be digested on a short-haul flight. But the lessons are most definitely long-haul.

I was struck by two main areas of insight: first, each of our interview panel was able to pinpoint a series of 'alarm bells': warning signals that anyone wanting to check their own, or others' authenticity should watch out for. So much has been written about how to develop your own authentic leadership: very little has been said about these 'alarm bells'. Second, on the positive side, some core principles of authenticity do emerge - three of them to be precise.

10 alarm bells, early alerts which can indicate when authenticity is absent or at risk of being compromised:

1. *When facts get distorted.* As soon as you find yourself, or see others, massaging or manipulating the facts, for whatever legitimate reasons, watch out.
2. *When authenticity gets muddled with passivity.* Too many people reach a personal comfort zone and happily remain in it, waiting to be recognized and feted for what they are. In doing so they sign their own personal career death warrant.
3. *When you play out your own damage on others.* We're all damaged in some way: if you're authentic you will recognize your own damage and do your best to deal with it. You will not pass it on.
4. *When you're dealing with an alien culture.* Authenticity can look very different in different cultures. If you think 'one size fits all' across global boundaries, your authenticity bubble is likely to be pricked.
5. *When you hold back from asking a 'too obvious' question.* If something's on your mind but a fear of seeming ignorant keeps you silent, you're putting your own ego ahead of proper risk management.
6. *When the culture is prickly about feedback.* When people are reluctant to give or take feedback, they put up an unbreakable barrier between themselves and self knowledge.
7. *When someone is clearly in it for themselves.* Ambition is not a dirty word, but if in truth you're only looking out for your own future, beware: at some point (as Val Gooding points out) you will have to claim you're in it for the greater good, and at that point you will stop being authentic. It will be spotted.
8. *When there's a gap between words and actions.* Inconsistency always betrays inauthenticity.

9. *When your authenticity infringes on others.* In considering the footprint of your own authenticity, you need to think about the effect it's going to have on other people, people whose support you need. As Sir Keith Mills argues, if that's a negative effect then there will be trouble.
10. *When you need a prepared script.* Leaders should have sufficient knowledge of and passion for their ventures not to need prepared scripts except for the most politically delicate contexts. They needn't be great orators, but they do need to be able to speak from the heart with conviction.

After those warnings, we will end on a more positive and uplifting note, with three principles of how to get it right. The first two correspond broadly to well-explored management theory around the topic. The third is more unexpected.

Three principles of authenticity:

1. *Know your self.* The oldest injunction of them all never loses its force and relevance. Socrates taught that *the unexamined life is not worth living*. Giving yourself the time, and forcing yourself to have the honesty and humility, to take a good long objective look at yourself, is a constant and vital part of becoming and remaining authentic. Self-knowledge also brings with it a responsibility to improve and correct. As Nani Beccalli-Falco puts it, *If you're a bully and you see that but don't change it, you're not just a bully, you're now a stupid bully.*
2. *Learn to filter.* This is where authenticity must make friends with diplomacy: Michael O'Leary's name features more than once in this paper. Jim O'Neill talks about *being able to speak straight to people... But that can be dangerous and offensive, so if you want to get ahead, one of the most important things to learn is how to tell people things they may not want to hear, in a way that they will find acceptable.*
3. *Love what you do.* If authenticity is about your self, unless at some deep level you as a person can connect with, believe in, and even love what you do, you will never be truly authentic. *A lot of people in business tell me they'd be fulfilled by working for a charity,* notes Rita Clifton. *I tell them they need to find the cause in what they're doing already, not always look elsewhere... My litmus test when considering a new role would be – write your own theoretical press release describing why you're taking this job. Can you imagine standing up and talking about it to strangers with genuine conviction, explaining why you have taken this role, why doing it matters to you? If not, don't take the job.*



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NANI BECALLI-FALCO

Senior Vice President of the GE company and the President and CEO of GE Europe.

Ferdinando “Nani” Beccalli-Falco has been with GE for 39 years. He has held a number of key positions across a range of geographies including the US, Europe and Asia. A Masters graduate of chemistry engineering from the Polytechnic of Torino he has acted as an industry adviser to institutions,

governments and is a member of the Science and Technology Advisory Council to the EU Commission President. He is the President of the Board of GE Avio S.r.l and a board member of the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), the GE Foundation, the Junior Achievement Young Enterprise and other boards.

I’m a history buff but I never trust what I read, it’s always seen through a modifying lens. All great leaders have their own shortcomings. You gain experience, you recognise that a lot of things written about you are not true, things you’re credited with are in fact the result of many people’s efforts.

I don’t know such a thing as a perfect leader. The best you can hope for is some authentic qualities. I appreciate Angela Merkel’s ability to listen – she asks questions and she focuses on the answers, unlike most politicians who are only interested in sending a one-way message. Or Jacques Chirac’s knowledge about things – his sheer level of intellectual interest and engagement, so he was able to dialogue in detail about anything, including when he would come and talk with us about GE. I loved the capability of communication of Jack Welch, the best communicator I’ve ever heard: a clear crisp synthetic ability to capture a complex message in a very simple way. Jack is one of the brightest guys you will ever meet, a dream of a boss – but even with him I could point out some shortcomings.

Real authenticity is the ability to spot and work on your own shortcomings. It’s about self knowledge, trying to convert a weakness into a strength and trying to be authentic about it. Too many people think that authenticity means never changing – far from it. If you’re a bully and you see that but don’t change it, you’re not just a bully, you’re now a stupid bully. Be clear about it with the people around you – ‘I recognise that I’m a bully and I’m working on it’ – go out of your way to ask for them to support you, to feedback, to warn you if you’re in danger of slipping back.

Authenticity is a garden you need to cultivate every day. I can tell when I’m not being authentic. For example I may have a poor performer in front of me and at that moment I lack the guts to spell things out clearly, which makes me inauthentic. And then something bad happens. The poor performer goes off unchecked and causes some major damage, or out of the blue you fire them and they have every right to shout ‘Why?’ at you. We all have moments like this. Whenever you hide the truth or lie, you’re not being authentic and at some stage that will always create a problem.

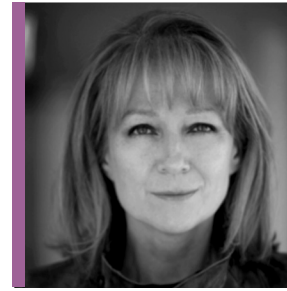
You have to recognize that truth can be a blunt instrument, and needs to be delivered with kindness. It goes back to trust – if I am not clear, or send mixed messages to the poor performer, how can that person trust me? If I’ve been clear from the beginning, kind but clear, when I go back to that person and say ‘you know I’m sorry it’s not working’ – he can trust me, even though he won’t be happy.

How you deal with facts matters. If you feel you have to present the facts in a way that distorts them, you know immediately that you’re doing that. That is the sign to watch out for. Your conscience will tell you, you know exactly when you are walking into that territory, and generally the time you most need to watch out for that is when bad news is being delivered.

This question of authenticity is definitely culturally different around the world. In Japan for instance I have found that truth and interpretation aren’t easily separated. In Japan you’re quite likely to be given an ‘interpretation’ of the truth which is clearly very far from what a Western perspective would view as the facts, but it will be given straight and without the intention to deceive. For the sake of pleasing you and in the interests of good diplomatic relations, it can be raining cats and dogs but if they think you like sunshine they will say ‘what a lovely sunny day’. That makes life difficult if you’re from outside the culture.

Look what happens when people try to modify or anticipate or spin the truth. A good example is former Spanish President Aznar and the Atocha Incident. Three days before the general election, where Aznar was campaigning on a platform of uniting Spain in the face of separatist threats, a bomb went off in Madrid, killing nearly 200 people. On zero evidence Aznar immediately blamed Basque terrorists, instructing all Spanish diplomats around the world to repeat this claim, before the facts emerged proving it had nothing to do with them. Aznar never recovered. With today’s criss-crossing of information, if you’re lying, it’s more certain than ever that you will be caught. Modern media creates a system of checks and balances that forces you to be as unambiguous and clear as possible

Authenticity is about trust, and trust starts with trusting yourself. Be true to yourself, don't put up a mask, don't fake who you are, try to play to your strengths and recognise and work on your weaknesses. If you're a leader you need to master resources, in order to be able to achieve objectives, to motivate people and convince them to do something. You can't do that if there is no trust.



RITA CLIFTON CBE
Chairman of BrandCap and
Non-Executive Chairman of Populus

Rita has been called 'Brand guru' by the Financial Times and 'The doyenne of branding' by Campaign magazine. The Daily Telegraph described her as 'The brand leading the brands'.

Rita graduated from Cambridge and started her career in advertising, where she became Vice Chairman and strategy director at Saatchi & Saatchi in its most successful period. She then joined Interbrand, the world's leading brand consultancy, as London CEO and then Chairman from 2002. She now also has a portfolio of chairing and non-executive director roles, including ASOS.com, Bupa, Nationwide and Populus, the opinion pollster and research company. Alongside this, she has recently become Chairman and investor in BrandCap, the brand consultancy for the boardroom.

The worst thing about 'authentic leadership' is that word, Authentic with a big A. It's a word like Community or Innovation or Quality, a word that gets hijacked for various reasons. 'Authentic' as a word has become rather self-conscious and then, if you're not careful, you get a whole industry growing up about 'how to become authentic'.

Be yourself - because you'll never be as good at being someone else, as a coach once said to me. In the main I think that's true. However sometimes over the years I've found myself in situations when I have thought it appropriate to have a stance or angle that I didn't necessarily find natural. My voice might change, some small detail like that. I can quite clearly see these signals that I'm not totally being myself but I am doing that for a reason.

If you don't plan the future you want, you get the one that shows up. That can happen very easily. It's a lesson to us all not to confuse authenticity with passivity, just thinking that if you are authentically yourself everything will work out right for you. I am a firm believer in coaching: you need an objective view of yourself to check you are on track, and that comes much more easily from someone who sits outside your life and your business context.

Just being yourself isn't enough, you have to be your best self. Say you're someone who naturally is quite relaxed about timekeeping: it would be authentic to turn

up late, but that mustn't happen. If you're inclined to be egotistical, try hard not to be. If you're tactless or have anger issues, it's really important that you don't indulge that under cover of 'being yourself'. You have a responsibility to yourself and to others to select your best qualities and bring those into the room, and to try to control the negatives. A lot of coaches will tell you to focus on your strengths and on the positives and that's not wrong, but I believe you have to have the discipline of always working on the negatives and weaknesses as well. Those are what can harm you and the people around you. For example it is very difficult to lead today's organisations unless you are a good listener and genuinely interested in everything around you – people included. If your ego is getting in the way of that, you really have to deal with it. What is my best self, and how am I going to get that across? That's the question. No faking or lying, just a keen self awareness of which of your qualities will play well and which you need to manage. I look at some people coming up to leadership roles, people who are really quite damaged but have never come to terms with the fact. I want to say 'you have to get some coaching or therapy before you can do this, otherwise you will cause damage and not get the best out of people.'

There's a big difference between getting to the top and being a leader. People can get to the top of an organisation out of their own energy and drive and need for recognition and status. However at some point or other, if the buck stops with you as a Chief Executive, you have to be a leader. That means having a clear view of where the organisation needs to go, and of making sure that people want to follow you.

Financial metrics are no substitute for authentic passion. So many people agree that there are problems with metrics. They always focus first on financials, then on 'non-financials' – which makes everything that isn't financial sound second rate or rather trivial. In fact financials are lag indicators, they are a rear view mirror. The lead indicators tend to be the non-financials (which I now always encourage people to call 'strategic'). If I'm a long term strategic investor, I want to know about the lead indicators. I need to know that the company I'm about to invest in is such a good business that it can almost be run by an idiot, because some time it most certainly will be. Those lead indicators measure whether customers are happy, whether employees are content and working well together. At M&S in the late 1990s at the end of Rick Greenbury's tenure, staff weren't happy. They could see the problems coming, they knew that there were product issues, that there was a growing feeling that 'it's not the way it was'. It took a while for customers to really notice, but when they did, business quickly decayed. When Stuart Rose came in, everyone knew he had worked there before, everyone sensed he had a genuine authentic feeling for the business and that he wanted it to be the best that it could be.

The sense of personal fit between a leader and their business matters – for example I would find it difficult to run a beer brand. I might respect the company and the product but I couldn't talk about it as someone who really understood what made it tick, because I'm not a beer drinker. It really can be that simple. People can smell if you're genuine about your affinity with and commitment to something. I remember an incident when Coca Cola had an incident of alleged poisoning in Belgium. At first Coke seemed to deny it could have anything to do with them, and in fact, the problem did turn out to be with the pallets on which the cans were stored. However, in their first response, they'd ignored a basic rule – if there's a problem anywhere near you, you have to 'own' the issue and promise to get to the bottom of it. Then the Global CEO of the business at that time came out to face the media in Atlanta looking like a white middle-aged accountant (because he was). Of course no-one expected him to come out on a skateboard, but immediately you felt the mismatch with this extraordinary youthful global dynamic brand. A perceived reluctance to get himself to Belgium was in danger of making people think 'maybe not so global after all', and the end impression was of a brand run by someone who didn't actually epitomize what the brand is supposedly about. Just as a health company should have a CEO who doesn't look as though they lie around on the sofa stuffing themselves, a company's staff want to feel proud of their leader on youtube or TV, and for people not to say you're led by a hypocrite.

A lot of people in business tell me they'd be fulfilled by working for a charity. I tell them they need to find the cause in what they're doing already, not always look elsewhere. At Interbrand, the moment we worked out that our own 'cause' was about 'brands have the power to change the world', it was phenomenal how much engagement and motivation that released. My litmus test when considering a new role would be – write your own theoretical press release describing why you're taking this job. Can you imagine standing up and talking about it to strangers with genuine conviction, explaining why you have taken this role, why doing it matters to you? If not, don't take the job.

Authenticity means admitting that you're not perfect, that you have a history. People will find out everything about you. They will find that Bullingdon picture or the Marxist demo, and at that point things will go wrong unless you have created the right expectations that you're not perfect, you're a human being, you've made mistakes, and you're doing what you believe in.

'Authenticity' must never be an excuse for 'take me as I am'. In a creative agency, would you say to a client, 'I know you've got a great product but it's fine to be

in a dreary package stuffed any old how on the shelf?’ Yet in those same agencies I’ve listened to young people complaining that the way they present themselves, how they dress for example, isn’t important. The same thing is true right at the top. If the CEO wants to send signals that restlessness and energy and renewal, the sense of constantly renewing, matter, they’d better not be the type of person who says proudly ‘Do you know I don’t do email’. It’s a very binary choice: keep on it and ensure you look and act the part, or start looking like you don’t care or are out of time.

Managing your personal brand is not incompatible with authenticity. There’s no point in saying ‘I want to be CEO’ if you’re shuffling around in flip-flops and show no curiosity about how business works and can’t read a balance sheet. You need to learn the skills, the practical skills, the business skills, the financial skills, the ability to do public speaking. Above all, whatever damage you have suffered as a human being – and we all have that – you do not want to be playing it out in how you manage people. You will have to see it for what it is and learn to deal with it.



SIMON DAVIES
Firmwide Managing Partner, Linklaters LLP

Simon is Firmwide Managing Partner of global law firm Linklaters LLP, a position he has held since January 2008. In this role, he chairs the Executive Committee and is a member of the firm’s International Board. Prior to becoming Firmwide Managing Partner, Simon spent 12 years in Asia, specialising in M&A and securities, serving terms in each of Hong

Kong and Tokyo. Simon was Managing Partner for Asia from 2003 - 2007. Simon joined Linklaters in London in 1990, having studied at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Simon is also a trustee of the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain and a fellow of the 48 Group Club, an independent business network committed to promoting positive Sino-British relations.

People have been shaken during the past five years. Values and beliefs have been fundamentally challenged. That has torn away a lot of veneer. You’re down to brass tacks and the only way to respond is authentically.

Authentic leadership is about transparency, not just about your agenda but about you. It only works through self knowledge – if you know who you are. To truly be an authentic leader you need to be self aware.

Can you develop authenticity? Anyone who can understand that their life is in large part a journey of self discovery, and who can be honest with themselves about what they’re discovering, can be authentic.

I had a wake up call in 2007. At a full meeting of all the partners, roughly 500 people, I mentioned the fact that my wife had just had our first child. One voice in that crowd, a senior person, shouted out ‘Oh, so you are human’. That struck a nerve. There was no malice or harm in the comment but I realised that there was a big gap between me and the people around me at a human level.

We’re living at a time which makes this more important than ever. There’s more information available, and that demands greater transparency. Moreover there’s a general distrust of business and leadership, and the need for authenticity to bridge that gap has never been greater. Unless people sense that you as a person, a human being, care about and connect to what you’re doing, they’re unlikely to trust you or follow you.

Simply reading the mission statement and asking people to charge forward doesn't work. You have to create an authentic personal connection. A decade ago I found that very unnatural and awkward to do. Over the years I have become aware of it. At first, I had to consciously force myself to do it, to engage at that human and personal level with the people around me. Over time that has become increasingly natural simply because when you see it working, you feel good about doing it.

There can be a tension between authenticity and toughness. Being transparent, authentic, engaging personally, matters. So does delivering strong results. If you become preoccupied with showing empathy, that can handcuff you when you need to take tough decisions – for example to remove someone. Learning how to square those two things is a vital skill.



VAL GOODING CBE

Non Executive Chairman, Premier Farnell

Val was appointed Non Executive Chairman of Premier Farnell in June 2011. She is also Non-Executive Director of Vodafone Group Plc and Tui Travel plc. Trustee of Historic Royal Palaces and the English National Ballet.

In 1996, Val became Managing Director of British United Provident Association (Bupa), and was appointed to the position of CEO in 1998, a role she held for ten years before stepping down in 2008. Prior to joining Bupa, Val spent 23 years working with British Airways Plc, where she held a number of positions, including Head of Cabin Services, Head of Marketing, Director of Business Units and Director for Asia Pacific.

One CEO I worked for showed unvarnished authenticity, yet he was not regarded by many as a particularly good leader. He was 100% authentic and true to himself, he wasn't particularly vain, wasn't in it for himself. His goals and his rigour in pursuing them were totally authentic. He was quite sure footed even when he may have been wrong. It all ended up being too rigid – you need to be able to learn, to adapt, to wrap things up a bit because people may switch off or dismiss you if they find you unsympathetic, however authentic you may be.

Taking feedback well and working on it is a hallmark of good leadership.

I can think of a situation where a leader had some very negative feedback in a staff survey. A confident authentic leader would have found a way to share that feedback with the population and ask for help in sorting the issue out: 'my goal is for us all to be successful, I've had this feedback which shows something on my side is getting in the way, I need to do something about it and I need your help'. None of that happened, and things went from bad to worse. If you take it on the chin and open up about the problem, you will find people admiring your courage, admiring your commitment to learn and get it right.

Authenticity is most under the microscope when things go wrong.

In a crisis, with a lot at stake, those are the moments when you do see the whites of eyes and you need to have people stand up to be counted, not hiding, not denying the facts. A long time ago a former doctor told me an experience he'd had as a young hospital doctor. He'd done a hip operation on an elderly patient. You use quick setting cement and that requires everything to be in exactly the right position. He'd got it wrong, the hip set and he knew that the patient was likely to have a slight limp for life. Right away after the operation he told her direct. That's incredibly rare in medicine or in any other profession, but it was absolutely the right thing to do.

You can be ethical and still get it wrong.

There's quite a lot of shading and subtlety – at a moral or ethical level you can think as a board you're making an ethical decision, and then find later on that yes, ethically it was correct, but it turned out to be disastrous. There are always trade offs. Barclays got fined only a fraction of the UBS fine on LIBOR, but UBS emerged more or less intact while Barclays lost their Chairman and CEO. Why? They decided as a board that they were going to do the ethical thing, put their hands up, they went public first, and they got punished for that. If you're always going to do the right thing, you may get crucified. The judgment needed to navigate that kind of authenticity is rare indeed.


Maturity matters.

I'm not talking about age per se, I mean inner maturity. For all the psychometric tests and assessments we subject people to while jumping through career hoops, I feel strongly that we don't pay enough attention to the real maturity of the person. Do we do enough real pastoral work, coaching and feedback, particularly in formative first 10/15 years? Certainly we have improved over the years – at the beginning of my time in business such things were unheard of. Organisations should think everyone coming in is a potential leader, so everyone should be coached to be the best they can possibly be – and in the process, flaws need to be dealt with openly. People

with real personality issues which they're too immature to have grasped can do so much damage. A surprising number of such people make it to the top.

Vanity is a red flag. If you're working around someone who is constantly trying to advertise their wares, get their achievements into the public domain, constantly on the look-out for a photo-op or an award nomination, that's a red flag to say this person may not be authentic.

Asking basic questions is a basic duty. In the creative industries there's usually a liberal culture which makes it possible to say or ask just about anything. In more conformist corporate life it can be very difficult to say 'I don't know what you're talking about, give me an example, explain'. That can lead in complex companies to boards signing up to things which in truth they haven't fully understood. You see that fear of appearing ignorant in many people – for example the CEO who will never under any circumstances admit they don't know the answer to a question about their business. This basically immature fear of appearing ignorant leads to serious danger – you simply glide over things and hope the ice doesn't break beneath you.

The older you get, the less you can be bothered to put on an act. If you're very secure in what you know and what you don't, in understanding your strengths and weaknesses, you can be more authentic. You would be amazed how reluctant people are to ask questions on boards which reveal ignorance, and you could even say the banking crisis was caused by that. In my experience women are better than men at revealing their ignorance. This is particularly relevant for boardrooms. In exec meetings you're all on the home team, there are no people with the job of friendly critic around the table, but you all know what you're doing, and if you have some big area of ignorance you'll quietly fill that in some way. In boardrooms you get NEDs who by definition are unlikely to be expert in your sector. There's a sort of silent assumption on all sides that they are however experts on anything from finance to HR to leadership and so on. The more people think you know, paradoxically the more pressure there is on you not to ask a question which might be seen as showing ignorance. But it's the ignorance of the NED or the Chairman that is one of the greatest strengths they can bring to the boardroom. Pretending you do know or staying silent is basically not authentic. What's authentic is saying 'I don't know about this, I need it explained to me' or 'what does this mean?'.


Being true to yourself doesn't mean always putting yourself first. I'm surprised by how many CEOs are in it for themselves and do what suits them and puts them in the best position. It's rare to find people who are resolute about always putting the interests of company or organisation first. If you are in it for yourself, there's going to be an authenticity issue. Not because you don't genuinely believe in your self-interest but because at some stage you will have to claim that you are in it for the greater good. As a business person or a politician or anything else, you might think you can spin it for a while in terms of the national good, or delivering shareholder value, while at heart for you it's about the next bonus or election. But however smart you are at disguising your motives, the people around you will infallibly pick up on a sense of inconsistency, a dissonance, even if they can't put their finger on exactly what it is. They will know you are not authentic.

The freedom to be authentic comes from really knowing yourself. Quite often a main cause of inauthenticity is a deep down lack of confidence or insecurity. If you feel insecure in trying to carry out a job or a role or a leadership position, that can make you adopt a protective shell of behaviour that is actually not the real person. If you know who you are, if you're confident of what you represent, you're much less likely to end up in that position. Authenticity is about learning who we are, and that takes time, courage and honesty.



THE HON. MARY-JO JACOBI JEPHSON

Non Executive Director, The Weir Group

Mary Jo Jacobi has held senior roles in the banking and financial services industry at HSBC (1993-2000), Lehman Brothers (2000-2001) and Drexel Burnham Lambert (1985-1990). She has also worked in the global oil and gas industry, notably as Vice President, Group External Affairs at Royal Dutch Shell (2001-2005) and as Executive Vice President at BP

America following the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill (2010-2011). She was also a Non-executive Director of Tate and Lyle plc (1998-2004). Mary Jo was formerly an aide to President Ronald Reagan, joining his administration in 1981 and serving as Special Assistant for Business Liaison from 1983-1985. She resumed US government service when President George H W Bush appointed her Assistant Secretary of Commerce of the United States (1992-1993). From 2005-2010 she was a Civil Service Commissioner in Great Britain. Currently, Mary Jo is a consultant on business strategy and communications and is a Non-Executive Director of Mulvaney Capital Management. She has been a Visiting Fellow of the Leeds University Business School since 2004 and of the Oxford University Centre for Corporate Reputation since 2009.

Authenticity, like Coca Cola, is the real thing. What it means to me is that a person is being his or her true core self in various situations; not necessarily being exactly the same in every situation, but the core attributes of the person come through, his or her basic values and attitudes are present and constant, regardless of the context. You know you are dealing with a real person and you know who they are, which is comforting. It gives you comfort that they will be that same person come good or ill. When you know that about someone you feel confident following them, and that makes them a leader.

When your leader is the real thing, it gives the organisation a sense of security, a sense of continuity, that the staff or the shareholders or the stakeholders know what to expect from this leader. You know there is no role playing or acting; you're seeing his or her core essence. When you see a leader living the role, not playing the role, it gives reassurance about where they are taking the organisation.

There's a difference between authenticity and rigidity. The authentic leader lays out the big picture based on his or her values and world view, but it isn't a course that binds and confines, it's broad parameters that guide them and the organization. It allows some room to adapt without sacrificing the core essence. Flexibility, the willingness to make a mistake without seeing it as the end of the world, is an important part of it.

Ronald Reagan was the real thing. One of his great sayings was 'I didn't leave the Democratic Party, the Democratic Party left me'. Many things changed but his core beliefs most certainly did not. People ask 'how can you say this man who was an actor could be authentic?' I don't know any actor, good, mediocre or bad, who can sustain the same role for 8 years or more. Not rigidly; adapting as situations demanded; but always remaining true to a core set of beliefs, his guiding principles. Because those beliefs and principles were set and long term, they enabled him to take a long term view and allowed him to put his sense of national goals ahead of personal ambition.

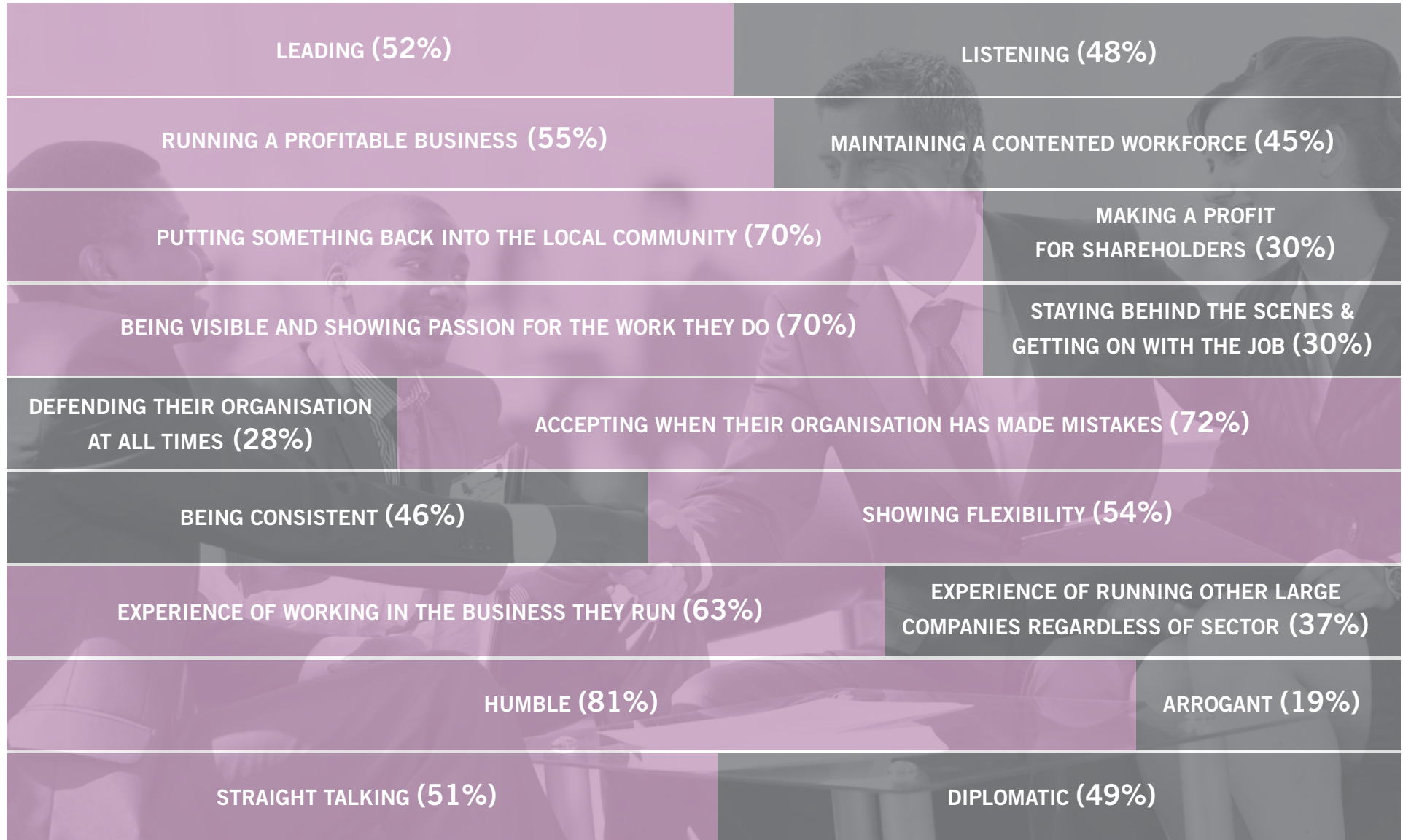
I have wondered about the authenticity of recent relationships between No 10 and the White House. I personally found it baffling that Tony Blair could have been equally close to both Bill Clinton and George W Bush, two very different individuals with entirely different principles and world views. I could say the same about David Cameron's relationships with both Bush and Obama. For me there is a question about authenticity coming out of this. Partly I believe authenticity is about having the confidence to speak truth to power: Margaret Thatcher was famous for challenging both Reagan and George HW Bush. I recall her great comment, 'Don't go all wobbly on us now, George!' Being able to speak the truth both ways in a relationship is key to keeping it authentic, keeping it real. Feeling you can call time out, in private or if need be in public, to ask whether this is where we should be going. As soon as others feel constrained or unable to do this, watch out: the leader is in danger of losing touch with his or her authentic self, and as soon as that happens there are some major risks for all involved.

Authenticity can be dangerous. Hitler was "authentic" and a charismatic leader. Charismatic leadership can be inherently dangerous – not to say that some leaders can't use charisma for a good purpose. It's important to note the clear difference between charisma and leadership. They are not mutually exclusive but they are absolutely not the same thing. We sometimes celebrate and promote charisma on the assumption that it's the key to leadership, and that is a very wrong perception. Charisma can help a leader inspire followers, but charisma alone is an empty vessel that must be filled with values and principles.

All of us in the world of leadership have studied authenticity. There are schools of authentic leadership at Harvard and elsewhere. Clearly it's something that can be honed – but can you create it in someone innately inauthentic? No, I don't think so. The truth will always show. (continued on page 22)

ATTRIBUTES OF GOOD BUSINESS LEADERS

Which of these is the most important attribute for a good business leader?
(Engaged Britons)*



*the segment of the population who are most engaged with and interested in topical debates and current affairs.

Beware the gap between words and actions. Whenever you see that, in yourself or others, it should ring a serious alarm bell. Ultimately your actions will speak louder than your words.

Maturity is knowing when to emphasise or de-emphasise aspects of personality, while remaining true to the core. An authentic leader becomes more valuable when he or she can show their authenticity through self awareness and situational awareness. Still staying true to self, but not always full on all the time. Emotional intelligence guides the authentic leader.

The digital age makes it more important than ever to be authentic. When people get a sense of who you truly are, that also means that any perceived change, anything seemingly out of character, will immediately be sensed. Imagine Michael O’Leary suddenly coming across as obsessed by high quality customer service. Like Scrooge, he would have to persuade the world he had had a genuine epiphany. Authentic leaders are consistent, avoiding big swings, keeping any change of tone or character within a range – and preferably a limited one.

But if you’re going to change, make sure you’re forgivable. In the USA, we have a slightly unusual phenomenon – the public confession which is accepted even if it represents a big swing from the previously-known character – but only if you are forgivable. Bill Clinton was known as a womanizer throughout his life, and after the Monica Lewinsky incident he went on TV with a quiver of his lower lip and a tear in his eye, seeking pardon from everyone, Roman Catholic bishops to Rev. Jesse Jackson. Was it authentic? Not for me to say. But it was forgivable. What is forgivability? It is the ability to re-earn trust that’s been lost, by changing or promising to change. By admitting a bad behaviour and committing to a better way. But even then it’s important not to lose sight of what’s gone before. Bill Clinton’s rehabilitation wouldn’t have rung true if he’d turned 100% puritan; he still has a twinkle in his eye.

Working for an authentic leader is empowering. You know where he or she stands and where he or she wants to take the organisation, and those known parameters give you freedom to operate. There was a deodorant in US which marketed itself with the slogan ‘it takes the worry out of being close’. Authentic leadership is like that; it gives you the freedom to follow.



SIR KEITH MILLS **Chairman, 2014 Invictus Games**

Sir Keith Mills was born and educated in the UK. He founded Air Miles International Group BV (AMIG) in 1988 to develop the AIR MILES programme.

In September 2003 Sir Keith was appointed International President and CEO of London 2012, the company that was established to bid for the 2012 Olympic Games. Sir Keith led the team and along with Lord Coe was responsible for developing the bid strategy and persuading the 115 IOC members that London should be granted the rights to host the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2012. Having established the London 2012 organisation which planned and organised the Games (LOCOG), Sir Keith remained as Deputy Chairman alongside Lord Coe to oversee operations. In 2013 Sir Keith was asked by Prince Harry to Chair the Invictus Games, an international sporting event for wounded, and injured servicemen and women.

Authenticity is about being genuine. Is someone saying what they think you want to hear, or what they actually believe? The latter is sadly rare in our society. For example among our elected representatives it’s so unusual that there has to be a special name for such people – conviction politicians. Love or hate Tony Benn, he was one of them.

I sued Coutts Bank because the institution wasn’t being genuine and honest with their customers. What let them down was an institution that failed to tell the truth to its customers. A real pity to see that – the bank had lost its way even though the individual I dealt with there was totally authentic. That must be a truly depressing experience, to feel you’re on the right track only to be let down by your own organization.

I’d say most women have a better nose for inauthenticity than most men. My wife will often say to me when we’ve met someone together – ‘I just don’t believe this guy’. In the first few minutes you form a quick view of whether they are authentic, whether they believe in what they’re doing and saying. I had a good experience of this recently when I’d been asked to run the Invictus Games which Prince Harry had initiated. I went and had coffee with him and within five minutes it was clear he deeply believed in this project, and his authentic personal approach to this persuaded me I really could do something to help.

What to watch out for is one word - trust. Authentic people exude trust. How do you define that, bottle it, what are the key indicators? Tough to say, but easy to sense. Authentic people are trusted, and they themselves trust their own judgment.

Are you born authentic or can you learn it? I think probably you develop it when you're still very young. As you're growing up I think you find your way to being true to yourself, you find your way to establishing principles and you're not shy to stick to those principles, then you're on the path to being authentic. If you don't develop that early on, it's hard to learn later.

Authenticity does not mean you have to speak your mind 24/7. In our digital media age, if you're running a company or a country or an army, whatever you say is around the world in nanoseconds. If you speak your mind all the time, it can have some pretty negative consequences, truth can sometimes be hard and counterproductive.

Authenticity needs to go hand in hand with discretion. In many organisations it seems we may have lost genuinely authentic leadership, because leaders are progressively (and with justification) paranoid about genuinely expressing their views. An important part of learning to be a leader is learning the skills to manage how you communicate your beliefs. When I do media interviews I know I have to filter what I say. I hope I get my genuine views across, but at the same time unless I manage the way I express those views sensitively it can backfire. So the art of managing your own authenticity in a positive way is something you can learn - but the basic attribute of authenticity is much harder to come by in adult life if you don't already have it.

Measuring what you say to the culture you're in is vital. Go to the Far East and places like Japan, and you'll find it very difficult to get candid views about issues. Indeed if you express your authentic views about subjects it can be considered to be brash, rude and arrogant. In terms of international diplomacy and communication, you really have to measure what you say to the culture. Sadly we get huge miscommunications. Right now we have a dangerous situation in Ukraine: look at the gap between what the West is saying and what Mr. Putin and his colleagues are saying. We're expressing ourselves in very different ways, but I wonder if our analysis of the underlying issues is that dissimilar. I believe many of our problems around the world start off as communications problems.

Michael O'Leary has been very clear and authentic about how he views Ryan Air's customers and the way they buy airline seats, and he has grown a business which has twice

the market capitalisation of BA. Interestingly, in the past few months, he is trying to temper that. Maybe he senses that he has been too authentic, and his customers are reacting against it. He's a good example of someone who clearly believes what he says, and that has stood him in very good stead in business. But as soon as the 'authentic' message changes, that can backfire badly, on the same principle by which Gerald Ratner destroyed his business.

Contrast O'Leary with Branson. I think O'Leary has underestimated the fact that customers like to be respected, and I think he treated customers with contempt. Eventually, notwithstanding ticket prices, they don't like that. Branson by contrast has, from the beginning, gone out of his way to make friends with his customers - he has exhibited warmth and empathy, all of which has come across as pretty genuine. He has built a whole empire of businesses almost entirely on his approach to customers. Both those styles are authentic but with different results based on different levels of sustainability. When you're establishing your own authentic position, it's worth working out - does respecting my own authenticity infringe on the people I need on my side, does it harm them or damage them or make them feel small? If so, there's probably going to be a problem further down the track.

I see a lot of serial CEOs and chairmen who flit from business to business. Many do a good job but they struggle to exhibit a genuine belief that they care about the company or the people. You never feel they are speaking from the heart. It's a tell tale sign when leaders read from prepared scripts. Those leaders prepared to lead and speak from the heart, from what they believe, come across as a lot more authentic. A good authentic leader doesn't have to come across as a great orator but they have to be able to stand up and talk about their business and where they're taking it, and be listened to and believed.

Authenticity can be skin deep. A few years ago at a conference I heard a speech where the presenter put up on screen a number of major global company brands, and asked the audience which they most respected. A number of companies like Apple, Innocent and Facebook were selected, companies that had built a real genuine authentic personality and offering. The speaker then asked a second question - now select from the same list those you'd be happy to put your pension into. This time it was the BPs and GEs, the long term solid money making machines, that came into focus. I found that quite telling in terms of how those business are viewed and how authentic the businesses really are. Facebook is passionate and many people love it, but how many would put their pensions in it? Deep authenticity is about trust and longevity. Do I think BP will be here in 20 years? Yes. Do I think Facebook will? Not a clue.





JIM O'NEILL

Economist

Jim is Chairman of the Cities Growth Commission and also chairs the economic advisory board to the Greater Manchester Local Authority. He is Honorary Chair of Economics at Manchester University. He is also a Visiting Research Fellow at the international economic think tank, Bruegel, and on the economic advisory board to the IFC, the investing arm of the World Bank.

Jim worked for Goldman Sachs from 1995 until April 2013, spending most of his time there as Chief Economist. Jim is the creator of the acronym "BRIC" and recently made a documentary series for the BBC entitled MINT: The Next Economic Giants. He is one of the founding trustees of the UK educational charity, SHINE. Jim also serves on the board of 'Teach for All' and a number of other charities specialising in education and in September 2013, became a Non-Executive Director of the UK Government's Department of Education.

I get dragged into lots of discussions on leadership. I don't talk much about authenticity except in one very important sense which is less about the individual and more about the organization. I'm convinced that to lead people well, you have to match your style of leadership to the style and type of the organization. Other than that, I think it's about being able to speak straight to people, tell it how it is. But that can be dangerous and offensive, so if you want to get ahead one of the most important things to learn is how to tell people things they may not want to hear, in a way that they will find acceptable.

What makes a great CEO? When I was leaving Goldman's I got into a discussion about that. Someone said - 'one you don't know the name of'. There's some truth in that. Can you really know until after they've left? The definition of a great CEO should surely include someone who leaves an organization in good health that can survive their leadership after they have gone.

Name me one political leader of today you regard as authentic. I find politicians an odd bunch, as a general rule authenticity is not a characteristic I'd typically associate with them. I am not saying this to be especially offensive. I mean it is the territory and role - they have to almost act. They seem to live in a bit of a dream world. A lot of people who end up being leaders seemed to be defined by one single shared and burning ambition - to be the number 1. While I don't understand or share that ambition I do

see it as real and authentic enough in those people. But you have to ask - if the most authentic thing about you is your ambition, exactly how far can I trust or rely on you? The way the media and PR worlds work can carry such people very far indeed, but the very same factors lead to so many people crashing down.

The media muddies the water. So many senior figures find themselves saying something they may disbelieve or only half believe, just because it will go down well. For example if you take many of the things said about the banking industry in recent years, I think many of the words of political leaders are said purely to seem popular with the public and they don't actually mean what they say. The damage caused by the banking system in recent years is undeniable, but objectively if you look at the City's contribution to the UK balance of payments over a period of decades it has been very significant and positive, outstanding by any global standard. If our main policymakers authentically hold highly negative views about the industry, can we trust them as genuine policymakers? And if they don't really hold those views, can we trust them?

Authentic and inauthentic leaders. Ronald Reagan perhaps was authentic - he didn't try to be anything he wasn't - which seems ironic for an actor. Maybe Yeltsin in a strange way in Russia. Clinton and Blair had aspects of it, but what let them down was the impression that they wanted to direct the media and image of policy at times.

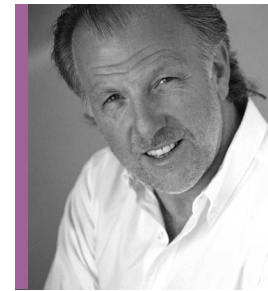
When I'm with a leader I have a sixth sense for whether they're being authentic. I can tell straight away. Body language is the strongest signal, much more so than what they're saying. In politicians it's usually when they're smiling and being really kind that you realize they might not quite be what they portray.

Can you learn or develop authenticity? I certainly think you can have it and lose it: typically in the attempt to be No. 1 and please everybody you lose it, because you can't authentically do both those things. Possibly that's easier in a privately owned company, where you don't have so much public spotlight, you have fewer people to answer to, so if you have a set of principles and try to be authentic about them, the likelihood you're going to have to compromise is reduced. Whereas in a more complex organization, you may well have to make a choice between authenticity and advancement. One example of a deeply authentic person I've met is Lamido Sanusi, the Central Bank Governor of Nigeria. He knew all the geeky nerdy economics but was strong and frank about

complex issues like corruption. I could listen to him all day, but he is the exception not the rule. That ultimately has proved his undoing – his uncompromising stand on corruption led to his dismissal by the country's President this February.

Class remains a big issue in Britain. The way that the top levels of business and finance and the rest are still so often dominated by people who at least want to appear to be at home at the top of the class system creates a built-in incentive for ambitious people from modest backgrounds to be inauthentic. That's probably one reason why I have spent much of my life working for US companies. In a British bank I would probably have been given the option to conform socially and seem posher than I was and get ahead, or stay authentically me and be kept in a back room.

My advice to young people is just be yourself, be honest to yourself, don't try and be something that you're not.



DAVID RICHARDS CBE

Chairman, Prodrive

David Richards CBE is currently the chairman of Prodrive, former chairman of Aston Martin, and a former team principal of the BAR and Benetton Formula 1 motor racing teams. He and his wife Karen have recently invested in a couple of hotels in the village of St Mawes in Cornwall.

My starting point is one of scepticism about authenticity. Much of what I observe suggests we're living in a world where if you take a particular position, authentic or not, the risks are much the same. When Ed Miliband talks about increasing the top rate of tax, you wonder – is that authentic? If he does actually believe in it, that's worrying to a number of people. And if he doesn't, if it's a piece of political spin he feels he has to say, that's worrying too. To an extent we're all damned if we're authentic and damned if we're not.

Many people equate being authentic with telling things exactly as they are. One thing I have learned is the importance of using a 'reality filter' – and preferably being totally explicit about that. When I'm running a Formula 1 team, I will be very clear up front: 'Look guys I will never lie to you, but I'm not going to tell you everything all the time.' It's vital that you have a sense of the end game and are pragmatic about that, which means knowing when to keep quiet and sit on your hands.

It all begins with self knowledge. You have to work out what kind of a person you are, what you actually want to do. I have a very simplistic belief that in life and in business you will find two basic types – builders and traders. I've always known from a young boy that I love building and creating things, but I'm a useless trader. Without that kind of self knowledge you can't begin to be authentic.

You can tell it's Authentic Leadership when people believe in the leader. Take Ben Ainslie – there is no way that you could bring a team back from where they were to go on and win the Americas Cup, unless people have that belief in you. I see so many people driven by a fear of failure, driven by their own negative demons, and that is no way to live. An authentic leader who you believe in will help you dismiss all those negative demons. That leader will know how to share a sense of a goal that's achievable,

while making it clear that as a leader they can't do it alone - they need your help. We've recently seen the same process with Ron Dennis going back into McLaren. After three disastrous years and with a fourth looming, he has gone in there and said 'we can do this'. He has changed the team, changed the organization, changed the whole spirit, and they believe in him: 'we have a leader who will take us out of this'. At the same time he has been very direct and honest, making it clear that it won't turn around overnight, and that it's not down to him but down to the team to get there. It's not just his past record that has created the believability, it's his whole approach.

I sometimes wonder how religious leaders manage it. Every religion has a wonderful essence which clearly it's not a problem to speak about authentically, but then there's invariably a load of nonsense surrounding that, which of course many of their followers passionately defend. That's a problem of authenticity I'm very glad I don't have to deal with.

Apparently trivial personal things can have a big impact. I've known men, leaders in their fields, who have always been respected, always seen as very consistent and authentic, and then they'll have a mid life crisis and leave their wives for a very much younger woman. You look at that and because you see they've broken the consistency in one area of their life, you can't help wondering about their authenticity more broadly. That may or may not be justified, but it's the way people think.

Personally I feel I've become more authentically myself in my professional life over time. As you become more confident about your position, policies, direction, you naturally become more authentic - you feel more comfortable with who are, what you can achieve, how people respond to you. You refine and refine your offering and position, such that the gap between your true self and your professional self gets narrower and narrower.

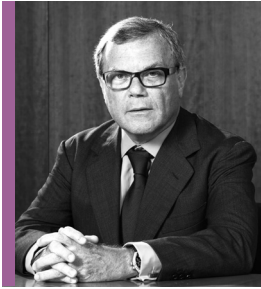
If authenticity matters to you, beware of situations which could compromise that. I've been involved with businesses which I am passionate about, but where the pressures of multiple shareholders dragging the agenda in every direction make it impossible for anyone sitting in the middle to stay on track, to stay authentic. When that happens, you just have to get out.

Authenticity is easier for entrepreneurs. You can't deliver to your full potential in an organisation unless you are under the skin of it, and if you created it in the first place that's

not hard. You have to both understand it and have an empathy with it - to have a critical mass of people who believe in you and will follow you. The real challenge is for people moving into a new company or industry or division, how to achieve authenticity in that context. Even if you come with huge credentials, moving into a new organisation you have a very short time to get that critical mass of understanding and of people following you - the first 90 days defines the rest, no question.

Leaders should use authenticity as a powerful filter for getting things right. I know I can't sell something unless I 100% believe in it and have an authentic conviction about it. So whenever my team is putting together a project and wants my help to sell it to a client, my first instinct is to ask - can I, can we, authentically stand behind this? So I stop and pull it to pieces. Is it actually such a great idea? And if it is do we have every single dimension of the skills, resources and funding worked out? If I can be convinced, that gives me the inner confidence to go and sell it with total authenticity. I've learned this the hard way, from being at some meetings where I just felt uncomfortable and I knew in my heart even before it started that I could not authentically back this idea or position to the hilt.





SIR MARTIN SORRELL

CEO WPP Group

Sir Martin Sorrell founded WPP, the world's leading advertising and marketing services group in 1985 and has been chief executive throughout.

Authenticity means being genuine. You need to be genuine to be successful. Ultimately the numbers will show you the genuine truth, which is why I focus on them.

When you're not genuine, you will be found out. I went into business with someone who laid out the basis of our partnership in a way that his actions later proved false. You may be able to hide it for a while but never for long, and it will always cause you damage.

One of my bugbears is how CEOs lose touch. Most CEOs surround themselves with staff and agencies who make them inaccessible, cultivating a highly tailored and manicured image for the CEO and the business. Someone wrote to me this morning having seen our results, saying 'we can provide you with content to get further coverage'. That's a good example of an invitation to fly in the face of authenticity. We have the content and it is part of our business to present it. Farming that out is not our style. But generally I see things becoming more manufactured and less genuine. How much Twitter and Facebook comment is genuine and how much is commissioned spin?

At the same time, new media makes it harder to hide. Some people claim there is more gossip and information about business and business leaders now than ever before. I'm not so sure. I don't see more of it, but it's true that what is there is more accessible. The pressure is on, and rightly, for openness and transparency. If the idea of greater accessibility makes you hide, things will only get worse for you. The days of ducking behind a phone or a PA have largely gone.

I hear people boasting about how authentic they are, how they've never changed. To me that sounds suspiciously close to being inflexible and unable to learn.

Some people say you can sense authenticity from body language and tone of voice. It's true you do read a lot into the subliminal messages you get when you're with people but I find this approach too subjective. By all means track the correlation between how someone has come across when making a commitment, and how they actually delivered, but be wary of reading too much into first impressions.

I can sense immediately if I've handled something in a way that wasn't genuine for me. For example I'll find myself getting irritated and that makes me behave in a way that doesn't do justice to the situation. I have one rule for when that happens - if I think I've made a mistake I will never leave it, I will go back straight away and try to correct it.

Can you be taught to be genuine? Can leadership skills be taught? I believe that you can educate people. There's the old Harvard Business School question, 'would you hire one of our MBAs?' The answer is yes, partly because you have some confidence that this person will have picked up useful skills, knowledge and networks from the process, but perhaps even more because it's a self-selecting process. You won't go there unless you believe in yourself and can get the investment together to bet on your own future. And that belief and that investment are genuine.

I've received my fair share of snubs and those have made me more determined and genuine about who I am. Some people will experience class discrimination even today in Britain, and I've suffered from anti-Semitism. These are quite subtle things in our apparently multi-cultural society these days, but when you listen to someone like Nigel Farage you can see that they are quite easily exploited and brought to the surface. Being on the receiving end of these things can encourage you to be better at camouflaging whatever it is that makes you 'different', so you might be seething underneath but gliding through apparently untroubled on the surface. I react differently: I will always pick someone up on any comment of this sort. I think it's important to do that because otherwise I'm not being genuine.



Leadership attributes and authenticity: a pollster's perspective

'Show me who you really are'

Andrew Cooper, Founder and Board Director, Populus



The US state of Missouri is traditionally viewed as a bellwether of how America is thinking: a state that almost always votes for the winner in Presidential elections and serves as a default destination when consumer researchers want to test the views and behaviour of 'middle America'. Fittingly, Missouri was ahead of its time in the motto that adorns its car license plates; it is the self-styled 'Show-me state'. The state's distinctive chosen characteristic to highlight is its scepticism: don't tell me, show me. It has become a reflex reaction that defines people in economies around the world. We are all, more or less, Missourians now – and that is why authenticity has become such a definitive characteristic of leadership, whether in the business or political sphere.

In recent years scepticism has increasingly decayed a widespread reflexive cynicism, driven by an array of economic, social and cultural factors.

Around the world, people in mature economies (and also many developing ones) are saturated with ever more information and presented with seemingly endless choice, while having – or feeling they have – little or no time to be able to digest messages and make informed choices. This makes people feel pressured or trapped, rather than empowered.

In commerce, as in politics, vast marketing budgets are then spent outbidding the opposition, encouraging people to expect more for less. Too often it feels to consumers that there is little or no connection between what is promised and what can be delivered. As a result few people are willing to take communications at face value; many people's first reaction to any communication will be to ponder what the motive is for saying it, and to test it against the tangible evidence of its integrity.

This is a massive challenge for business leaders, as it is for those in politics. The financial crash and years of austerity compounded the widespread feeling that those in power – in business and politics – both knew more than they'd been letting on and also didn't know what they were doing.

So, authenticity matters much more than it did ten years or more ago. Hardly anyone is willing to judge a business leader by what they say.

Today's CEOs have to operate in a vastly more challenging environment than their predecessors. They are widely perceived to be accountable on a broader front and to a vast range of different stakeholders. Our research finds that more than 7 in 10 voters believe that because CEOs hold positions of real power – more power than the average MP in the view of most – they should be accountable to 'society' (whatever that means).

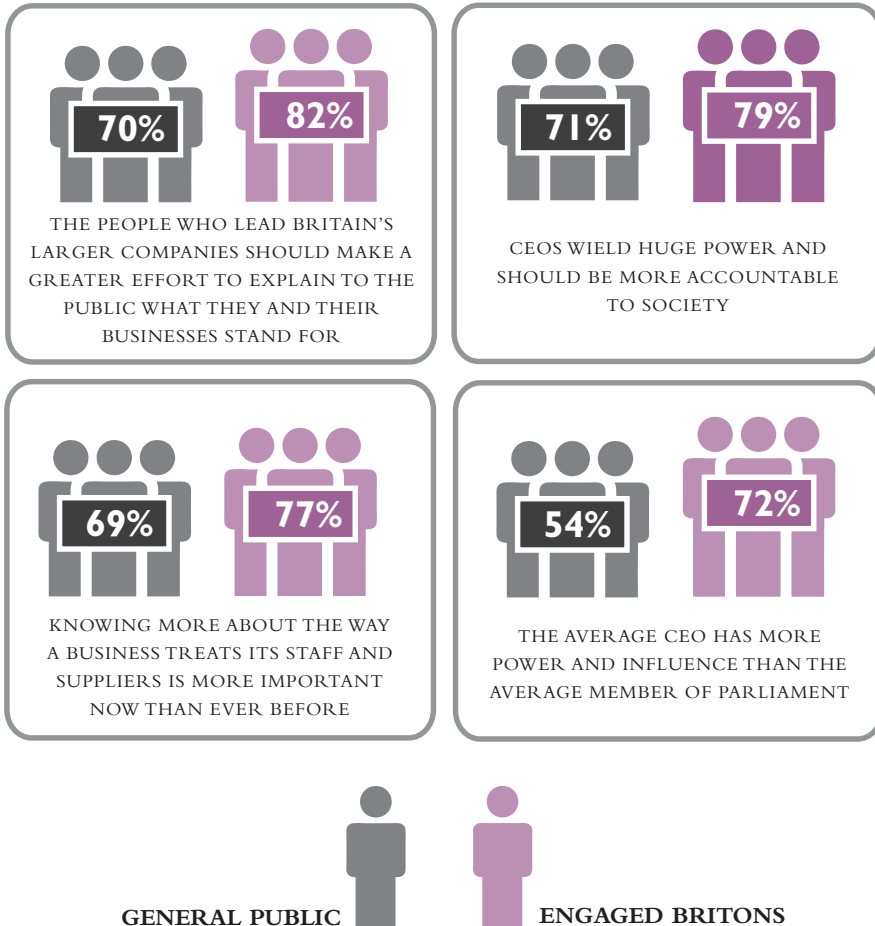
Mark Twain famously said that a lie can be half way around the world before the truth has got its boots on. If that was true when he said it, over 150 years ago, it is true a thousand times over in the internet age – and, equally, a truth can be half-way around the world before a crisis-management press-release has got its boots on. The authenticity of a business leader will be tested against the behaviour of the weakest and most remote chain in their corporate structure.

So every leader of an organisation should set themselves the same simple, commonsense tests of authenticity that consumers judge them by: Is everything I say and do consistent with the brand values I claim and the brand promise that I make? Do I give straight answers to straight questions? Do I immediately and straightforwardly accept responsibility when things go wrong?

As the late, great, Michael Deaver – communications director to Ronald Reagan 'the Great communicator' – used to say, 'the first rule of communication is that you have to know who you are'.

The data on the following pages, and on the centrefold of this report, is drawn from a Populus survey of 4,068 GB adults between 30th May–6th June 2014. Interviews were conducted online. Of these, 406 were identified as 'Engaged Britons' using a proprietary methodology that identifies the segment of the population who are most engaged with and interested in topical debates and current affairs. For more information on the methodology used, please go to www.populus.co.uk

QUALITIES OF CHIEF EXECUTIVES



Which words or phrases would you use to describe the most important qualities required to be the **ideal** chief executive of a typical large company these days?



- Socially Responsible (31%)*
- Intelligent (30%)*
- Principled (28%)*
- Respected (23%)*
- Fair (17%)*
- Good Listener (17%)*

Which words or phrases would you use to describe most chief executives of big businesses in Britain **today**?



- Ruthless (37%)*
- Thick-skinned (28%)*
- Single-minded (27%)*
- Determined (20%)*
- Tough (19%)*
- Intelligent (17%)*

PERCEPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL LEADERS

Which words or phrases come closest to describing each of the following people?
(size of type based on percentages)



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Members of The Leadership Council

Lord Browne, Managing Director Riverstone Holdings LLC, Chairman Cuadrilla Resources

Brigadier (Ret'd) Ed Butler CBE DSO, Executive Chairman Salamanca Risk Management

Jonathan Chenevix-Trench, co-founder African Century

Simon Davies, Firmwide Managing Partner, Linklaters LLP

Iain Ferguson CBE, Chairman of Wilton Park, Chairman Berendsen plc

Val Gooding CBE, Chairman Premier Farnell plc

Anthony Gordon Lennox, Director, AGL Communications

Lord Hall of Birkenhead CBE, Director General BBC

Hon. Mary Jo Jacobi Jephson, Non Executive Director The Weir Group plc

Lord Janvrin (Chairman), Deputy Chairman of HSBC Private Bank (UK) Ltd.

Lady Judge, Chairman UK Pension Protection Fund, Chairman Emeritus United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

Sir Michael Lockett, Board Member, Oracle Cancer Trust

Martin Newman (Director), founder of The Newman Partnership and Stand Consulting Japan

David Richards CBE, Chairman Prodrive

Sir John Scarlett, Senior Advisor, Morgan Stanley

Sir Tom Shebbeare, Chairman Virgin Money Giving

Three principles of *authenticity*

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