



BONE OF CONTENTION

Imagine an employee who goes to work every day having to hide the fact that they love dogs? Some days it does not matter - loving dogs has nothing to do with completing their spreadsheet - but on other days, it requires them to stay silent, change their behaviour, how they interact and even lie to protect their "secret". What would that feel like? How would it impact their psychology?



ARTICLE BY TONY HOLMWOOD, CULTURE AND CHANGE STRATEGIST -
OUTPERF4M CONSULTING

Think of John, a fictional gay man, who works as an investment banker in London's financial district. The bank has a long tradition of servicing London's social elite. John does not feel comfortable being himself at work, because he feels he may be judged and passed over for promotions. So how is John's learning impacted when his interactions are focussed on protecting his esteem? How is his happiness impacted when this internal discourse denigrates his self-worth? Not being able to express his true feelings and live openly at work means John's wellbeing and work performance will likely suffer. Living transparently brings rewards beyond feeling more authentic at work. Being open about who you are, will help you succeed as an authentic leader. The stark reality is, more than 50 percent of LGBTQI+ people do not disclose their sexuality at work¹. Frustratingly, well into the 21st Century, revealing your sexual identity in the workplace still carries risk in more traditional organisations, where self-awareness and individualism may not be valued. Surely, being authentic and comfortable in your own skin is a basic human right?

Authenticity is a product of knowing who you are and being your true self and any LGBTQI+ people carry the shame associated with growing up different and trying to fit in - and this is true for many minorities - whereby people feel they need to conform to a conventional lifestyle, in order to fit in. But surely, in the true meaning of the phrase diversity & inclusion, minorities should be highly appreciated for the true value they bring in not conforming and equally, appreciated for their differences. An individual's struggle to come to terms with who they are is a valuable leadership insight, when reassuring employees that they are in a safe place. Appreciating a whole lifetime of experiences, actions, decisions and learning defines our capability and indeed our identity. Once we are self-aware and we understand what fulfills us - what we like and what we dislike - we can direct our capability objectively, by setting big audacious goals. The more we are genuine and trust in who we are, the more we learn to be true to ourselves and to deliver on our purpose. We have only one version of ourselves, so why not present our whole unique selves? This process of self-acceptance, deconstructing the ego and bringing understanding to our inner child,

resolves our unconscious bias and the need to protect our self-worth². A transformed sense of self allows us to be more accepting and respecting of others and coming to terms with who we are equips us with the life skills to help deal with adversity. If we grew up thinking we were too short, we would develop complementary skills to deal with it and, when we understand how our strengths and weaknesses define us, we are more positive, which allows us to focus on the future.

LGBTQ leaders have several options for how they control their stories; they can be artificial or authentic, private or transparent. For instance, someone might choose to be private at work, but out among friends. Embracing our unique qualities, values, learnt experiences and expressing our true feelings as a leader is authenticity and, as an authentic leader, you are a "servant first" - you focus on the needs of others before you consider your own. Authentic leaders are generalists and build

decision to come out and to live more authentically. Some industries and organisations may be less open and accepting as others, but how open a culture is to accepting minorities will determine whether employees can bring their whole unique selves to the workplace. Living transparently reduces the psychological trauma of having to mask your identity or having to conform to other values and ideals. Therefore, as a minority, if you cannot influence a more respectful culture, then find an organisation that values your openness and diverse perspectives. Indeed, having a voice is an absolute requirement for developing leadership qualities. For organisations, there is one simple truth to retaining authentic leadership potential: "Continue to meet my needs and I'll stay. Keep seeking ways to enhance our relationships and I'll not only stay, but I'll bring others to you too and I'll do more, willingly. But if my needs are taken for granted, I'll be off!"

unconscious awareness and cultural perspectives. Marginalisation of minorities expresses the social inability (intolerance) and unresolved childhood insecurities of the beholder - racism is most prevalent in countries where social development is denied or feared. The truth is every life should matter and be valued - however power, privilege and partisanship - one upmanship built on childhood insecurities and pre-judgement - prevents the development of our adult social skills. For as long as we classify inequality as externalities like; gender, race and sexuality - we are missing the point. Conventional attitudes and mindsets need to change.

It is self-awareness that allows us to be more trusting, compassionate and understanding and to manage our emotions appropriately. These positive Ei skills, also equip a leader with observation and listening skills, to coach for employee self-value, to reason through complexity by instinct and to encourage social engagement. Developing self-awareness is the key to developing cultural awareness or environmental understanding and a by-product of developing deeper relationships is learning more about ourselves. Social skills and cultural awareness go hand-in-hand and social connection is how we humans move beyond limiting beliefs to find security. Organisations must appreciate a meaningful life is bound in long-term social objectives but all too often we are distracted by materialism, instant gratitude and short-term profit motives. We are seeing a systemic shift in the way businesses are organised, so every employee has an opportunity to contribute collectively. In this rapidly unfolding new world order - genuine, authentic leadership who are simply true to themselves and can employ storytelling and wisdom are leading a new social paradigm. Where social development is valued for bringing out the best in people and where diversity and inclusion is genuinely respected. ●

Tony Holmwood is the author of the awarded book *Best Behaviour*

1. Authenticity Can Help LGBTQ Leaders Be More Effective, October 4, 2016 | by Katherine Conrad, Stanford GSB
2. Don't Allow Your Past to Control Your Future, Leon F Seltzer Ph.D. Psychology Today, Jul 2019

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DEVELOPING SELF-AWARENESS IS THE KEY TO DEVELOPING CULTURAL AWARENESS OR ENVIRONMENTAL UNDERSTANDING AND A BY-PRODUCT OF DEVELOPING DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS IS LEARNING MORE ABOUT OURSELVES

competence in relationships with people who, together with the leader, produce the results and conditions. Together they continually strive for both personal and organisational potential. The bottom line is, we will continue to find difficulty in fulfilling our leadership potential until we really desire to learn to be true to ourselves and to serve others. Yet desire alone is not enough, you need to genuinely commit to wanting to lead in this way and adapt an adult sharing mindset and there must be a determination to change attitudes. Finally, there must be development in utilising the principles of authentic leadership.

Because members of the LGBTQ+ grow up feeling different and may have struggled for acceptance, they tend to be more open minded and adaptive to change. The choice to develop the characteristics of an authentic leader may not be too dissimilar to the

So how can we support authentic leadership in the workplace? The best way to create authenticity in an organisation is to remove the vertical authority and hierarchy that creates silos and compartments in the mind. HR departments must also question why instilling HR practices, standards and compliance in organisations, has seen no associated increase in productivity. In fact, employee productivity has been declining in the OECD since the 1970's. Regulation, technology, outsourcing and now the digitisation of workplaces has confounded capability and growth. So, how can we make workplaces more organic and human centred? Allowing people to partner and work collaboratively in purpose defined environments with mutual responsibility and accountability and promoting purposeful social causes deepens our relationship and social skills. Supporting meaningful relationships both inside and outside of work, develops our