

Know and Show Yourself—Enough

LEADERSHIP BEGINS WITH YOU—and you will not succeed as a leader unless you have some sense of who you are. Your colleagues—potential followers—have a simple but basic need: they want to be led by a person, not by a corporate apparatchik. It is unlikely that you will be able to inspire, arouse, excite, or motivate people unless you can show them who you are, what you stand for, and what you can and cannot do.¹

Consider Sir Martin Sorrell, the leader of the world's largest communications services company, WPP, which owns, among many companies, the JWT ad agency. Sorrell runs an organization full of creative talent. Creative people are notoriously difficult to lead or

even manage but are critical to WPP's success. Indeed, WPP's mission and strategy statement begins, "To develop and manage talent; to apply that talent throughout the world."

Sorrell is a bundle of energy. He is opinionated, forthright, and clever. Over a twenty-year period, he has applied these talents to build a formidable global business. And over the years, he has learned to use some of his personal differences as a leader. Ask his colleagues about Sorrell, and a fairly consistent picture emerges.

First they will tell you of his legendarily rapid response to e-mails—whenever, wherever. It's not unusual, for example,³ for Sorrell to spend a working week in the United States but remain on U.K. time for those he works with in London. All of Sorrell's fifteen thousand colleagues have access to him. His message is clear: I am available. You are important. As he told us, "If someone contacts you, there's a reason. It's got nothing to do with the hierarchy. It doesn't matter if they're not a big person. There's nothing more frustrating than a voice mail and then nothing back. We're in a service business."

But this is not the only difference that he communicates. "I am seen as the boring, workaholic accountant and as a micro-manager," he told us. "But I take it as a compliment rather than an insult. Involvement is important. You've got to know what's going on." Anyone receiving a visit from Sorrell can expect some tough, one-to-one questioning—on the numbers as well as the creative side of the business. Sorrell's difference reminds people that, central though creativity is, WPP is a creative *business*.

When we talked to Sorrell's colleagues, the other thing they noted is his permanent state of dissatisfaction. He is justifiably proud of WPP's success, but constantly reminds people that "there's an awful long way to go."

Sorrell is not the most introspective character in the world—he is far too busy for that. But he knows enough about what works for him in a particular context. He uses his leadership differences—accessibility, close involvement in business detail, restlessness—to balance the creative side. These leadership assets are a foil for, on the one hand, the hierarchy and complacency that can strangle large, successful businesses and, on the other, unrestrained generation of new ideas that can lead creative organizations to lose business focus.

Private Dancers

Of course, knowing and expressing your real self is easier said than done. Workplaces often make it difficult for individuals to easily express themselves, without fear of ridicule or failure. The result? Individuals spend much of their waking hours in organizations that inhibit their authentic selves. They save their “real” selves—and much of the energy that goes with them—for their families, friends, private lives, and local communities.²

Although it is rarely discussed in these terms, this inability to be ourselves at work is an important element in the work/life balance debate. Our workplace cultures make it very difficult to reconcile our working selves with our private selves. Work/life balance means much more than spending time at home—it means transforming workplaces into arenas for the display of authenticity. And even in organizations where self-expression is encouraged, individuals may not be equipped to respond. Their experiences may have already damaged their capacity to both know and show themselves.³

The fact is that showing people who you are requires a degree of self-knowledge (or at least self-awareness) *as well as* self-disclosure. One without the other is hopeless.

We have observed individuals who know themselves well but fail to communicate this to others. Since their colleagues are not mind readers, these individuals often remain frustratingly enigmatic unless, through choice and skill, they can overcome their predilection to nondisclosure. Some introverted executives fall into this trap. The problem is made worse by the speed with which leaders are required to make an impact. Organizational time moves faster and faster. We observed a highly talented Silicon Valley executive who spoke to us of her compelling vision for the capacity of technology to transform human lives for the better. She seemed to burn with passion at the prospect. But when we asked her followers what they thought she stood for, they just didn't know. She had not found an appropriate vehicle for self-disclosure.

Equally, there are others whose efforts at self-disclosure are fatally undermined by their lack of self-knowledge. They communicate—but the image of themselves they project appears false. Colleagues typically perceive them as phony or inauthentic. You can't fake sincerity. In one case, we advised a Boston venture capitalist to spend more time with his team, who saw him as distant and aloof. He decided to take them for drinks after work on Fridays, where he exuded false bonhomie. He thought it was working well, but his followers saw him as a fake.

So to *be* yourself, you must *know* yourself and *show* yourself—enough. (Put another way, you must be sufficiently self-aware and also prepared to self-declare.)

Just as self-knowledge is never complete; neither is self-disclosure. *Effective leaders know enough and show enough* to maximize their leadership impact.

A great deal of academic attention has been *focused on* personal identity. We are not about to revisit and rework these theo-

ries. We are neither equipped to do so nor do we see it as central to understanding effective leadership. There is already a rich and extensive psychological literature that addresses, for example, the related concepts of “self,” “identity,” and “personality.”⁴

Even if you do not know the research, you are probably familiar with one of its spin-offs: the extensive range of popular diagnostic instruments and psychometric tools that can help you to understand “who you are”: your particular strengths, weaknesses, aptitudes, personality attributes, and so on.

Self-assessment instruments are often helpful. They can help us understand, for example, the kinds of activities, jobs, or careers we might find most fulfilling. But taken to extremes, they can also be limiting. How we as individuals—and our identities—develop is rarely as “planned” as those who promote the assessments suggest. Discovering who we are is likely to be a lifetime process involving continual testing and learning, trial and error, and many twists and turns along the way. Every twist results in learning, and learning is always done in conjunction with others.

These primarily psychological approaches to personal identity have their limits if we are trying to understand leadership. Leadership is a relationship. Inevitably, you show what you know about yourself *in context, to others*. This opens the possibility that you will show different aspects of who you are at different times and in different places—and that the creation of self is also a lifelong process.

What Works for You?

Given this lifelong journey of exploration, it is clearly unreasonable to expect that skillful self-disclosure should rest upon complete self-knowledge. Effective leaders rarely have perfect

self-insight. Some are too fixed on their overarching purpose to worry much about themselves, while others display narcissistic properties that badly distort their sense of self.⁵ They are only human.

What characterizes effective leaders is a sense of *what works for them with others*. As we noted earlier, this does not necessarily require that they have a deep understanding of how and why it works. What we observe in effective leaders is primarily a matter of self-awareness. As they interact with others, leaders seem better able to learn how they are seen and how they can actively shape others' perceptions in the formation of their identity.

Think back to an experience that is certainly not unique to those who go on to become great leaders. Most of us can probably recall from our early teenage dating years a time when, excessively concerned with dress and appearance, we had favorite items of clothing. Remember the lucky shirt, the winning shoes, the special perfume, that seemed to work for us? You may even recall your anger when the special shirt had not been ironed or the favorite perfume ran out.

Your investigations may have gone further. You may have sought to test, for example, where your differences had their greatest impact: on the dance floor, in the coffee bar, or walking in the park? In fact, your adolescence probably marks the first time that you consciously thought through and tried out how to make the most of your differences in a way that might excite others.

Effective leaders keep working at this art. They develop a close understanding of their differences. In particular, they become aware of what is different about them that makes them attractive to others. They learn to use these differences to their advantage in a leadership role.

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Consider Bill Gates. What is different about Gates is that he is the ultimate computer geek. He has taken a pejorative stereotype and turned it to his advantage. When it comes to the computer industry, Gates knows what he is talking about. He knows the technology inside out. Gates's consistent display of his "geekiness" tells us something very important about him and his company. Over time it has become an increasingly skillful use of self-image.

Think back to Sir Richard Branson, skillfully using his physical appearance to communicate personal identity in an attractive way. One way in which former President Clinton communicates his personal appeal is through a handshake held for a fraction of a second longer than expected. Those who experience this invariably notice and comment on it.

In the United Kingdom in the 1980s, John Harvey Jones—the boss of the country's largest manufacturing company, ICI—was famous in the business world for his long hair and loud kipper ties. Did this uniquely explain his success? Of course not. But it demonstrated his clever ability to develop differences that communicated that he was adventurous, entrepreneurial, and unique—he was John Harvey Jones. Was it a deliberate strategy? To begin with, we doubt it—more a matter of personal taste and preference. But over time, we suspect Harvey Jones began to realize that these were differences that worked for him. They helped him stand out from the crowd—and they sent the right messages.

Even in societies that, through Western eyes, appear to stress homogeneity and conformity, there are opportunities for leaders to skillfully express their difference. For example, take the legendary figure of Akio Morita, the founder of Sony. He was widely known for his boundless energy. At 72 he was still playing tennis at 7:00 A.M.—often with much younger people. He challenged entrenched beliefs

in Japanese society. In his book *Never Mind School Records*, for instance, he argued that school achievements are not important in judging the ability to do business.⁶ He completely rethought the nature of U.S.-Japan economic relations, and Sony became the first Japanese company to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange. More than that, he was perhaps the first significant business leader to understand the idea of an organization that served customers, shareholders, and employees on a global basis irrespective of the company's nation of origin.

But remember, leadership is nonhierarchical. We have observed people using their differences in order to build their leadership capability at all levels of the organization. Consider Carol Browne, a nurse we encountered in a New York hospital. She is interpersonally highly skilled. Indeed, you could describe her as charming. What is really remarkable is that she uses her charm to weld together a team of nurses, administrators, doctors, and paramedics built around care for patients. Carol's charm is real and used for an overarching purpose.

To begin with, this is unconscious. But at some point, individuals make conscious choices about what works for them and how much they are prepared to adapt.

Consider the case of Paulette. She runs a sales force for Procter & Gamble. At first meeting, she seems a shy, rather retiring kind of person. Indeed, our first observation was that there was nothing exceptional about her. And then we observed her with her team. Two powerful leadership differences were on display to great effect. First, the sheer analytical power of her intellect: every aspect of the market, the competition, and the products had been analyzed, to the delight of her followers. Second, her passion for winning excited everyone around her to higher performance. Rarely have

we seen a leader in whom this obsession was so effectively translated into a leadership asset.

Broadcasting Leadership

One of the leaders we have spent the most time with is Greg Dyke, the former director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the United Kingdom's publicly funded broadcaster. Along with the National Health Service, the BBC is often seen as the jewel in the crown of modern Britain, an achievement the nation can be proud of.

Indeed, the BBC probably attracts more press coverage than any other organization in the United Kingdom. Running a national institution is a big, difficult job. The BBC employs approximately twenty-five thousand people and has an annual income of around £3 billion. With all this money and attention comes a certain amount of criticism. As Greg Dyke observed, if your programs get more viewers, you are accused of "dumbing down," and if they do not, then you are accused of "wasting taxpayers' money."

Dyke's tenure at the BBC was characterized by significant change. He increased expenditure on programs and cut costs on administrative support (symbolically reducing the BBC's fleet of chauffeur-driven cars). But most impressively, he transformed the morale of the staff, encouraging them to put "creativity and innovation at the heart of everything we do."

Physically, Greg Dyke does not look like a typical BBC boss. He is compact in build, with a distinctly receding hairline. (In fact, it has retreated rather a long way.) He dresses sharply and in a slightly showbiz style. All his suits come from the same tailor and definitely don't look "old school." He walks quickly and purposefully. His whole demeanor radiates energy—he was once a promising 400

meters runner. Even in his early fifties, he communicates a restless vibrancy, like a boxer before a fight.

He tends to make direct eye contact (except when delivering bad news). He talks with a definite London accent, not a Cockney accent; he is actually from West London, but his voice is certainly characterized by the urban rhythms of a born Londoner. He has a cheery, hail-fellow-well-met demeanor, and his passions include science education, museums, and, perhaps above all, soccer, especially Manchester United (of which he was formerly a director).

In other words, he is not at all as you would expect a director general of the BBC to be. Greg Dyke is definitely not of the Establishment. He is clearly different. And yet, Greg Dyke utilized these aspects of his real self, in context and skillfully, to communicate a different vision for the BBC from that of his predecessors. He set about creating an organization that was highly stimulating and a fun place to work, where making and broadcasting programs that enrich peoples' lives was rediscovered as the core purpose. His failure—he was forced to resign in 2004 after a high-profile political face-off with the British government—cannot be attributed to an absence of leadership. (The reasons for his departure are explored later.)

Observing Dyke carefully, you realize that his presentation of self is both knowing and skillful. He knows and shows adroitly. He has learned, over time, when to use his clear differences to greatest effect. There is even a degree of playfulness in the aspects of himself that he reveals to those he aspires to lead. His energy and personality are communicated to his followers.

On the evening he left the BBC, staff gave him an unprecedented and emotional departure. A large crowd of employees gathered in the BBC building to applaud. Many were in tears. Dyke was

a leader they believed in and were prepared to follow. The reasons for the emotional outpouring, as we shall see, lie with Dyke's authentic leadership style.

Different Strokes

You don't have to be a corporate superman to be a great leader. The late Darwin E. Smith, for example, was the CEO of the paper company Kimberly-Clark for twenty years. He was described as shy, unpretentious, and even awkward. With his heavy black-rimmed glasses and unfashionable suits, Smith looked more like a small-town hick than a corporate titan—an image he used to his advantage, both to stay close to the business and to deflect unwanted outside attention. Smith was a geek before geeks became fashionable. Yet, under his quiet rule, Kimberly-Clark outperformed not just competitors like Procter & Gamble, but also GE, Hewlett-Packard, Coca-Cola, 3M, and every other star of corporate America.⁷

Many more leaders maximize the impact of their difference. Think of the current mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. He dresses like a slightly careworn school teacher, speaks in a distinctive nasal way, and has a passion for newts. He makes a point of regularly commuting to work on the public subway system. On at least two occasions, he has used his leadership to change London's transport system—by dramatically reducing fares and, more recently, by introducing congestion charging for central London road traffic. Few other politicians could have introduced such a potentially unpopular idea without losing office. Livingstone was returned to office in 2004 with a comfortable majority. He succeeds because people believe that he really identifies with Londoners. They may

disagree with his political beliefs, but are still prepared to vote for him because he radiates concern about London.

Sometimes the personal differences perceived by colleagues as important are not quite what you might expect. Take Franz Humer, the chairman of health-care company Roche. In our work with hundreds of his colleagues over recent years, we have often asked them about the differences he communicates. They list many characteristics, among them his entrepreneurial flair, marketing insight, and passion for innovation. But what do they put at the top of the list? His communication of emotion—particularly through the use of his piercing blue eyes. This observation is all the more surprising coming from rational Swiss scientists.

Our first meeting with Humer was revealing. One of the authors was ushered into his large office overlooking the Rhine and shown to a table in a far corner of the room. A polite opening question was addressed to Dr. Humer. He rose silently from his desk and strode to the window to gaze for several moments at the Rhine. Then he returned to his desk and lit a large cigar. He walked slowly to the corner where we sat, drew upon the cigar, peered carefully over his lowered half-glasses, and finally answered the question.

From question to answer was probably around a minute, but it felt as if two hundred years had passed. At first sight, this might appear to be yet another CEO using the trappings of office as an excuse for arrogant behavior. But this would be a misinterpretation. As his colleagues later confirmed, Humer is a master of using silence and facial expression to communicate his emotional intensity and thoughtfulness. These are appropriate leadership values if you are running a complex, knowledge-based business.

Franz Humer also believes that personal passion is what drives innovation. Watch him make a public presentation, and you witness

a carefully honed performance. His personal emotions are skillfully revealed to engage and energize others.⁸

“At a senior executive meeting, we ended the day by enjoying a wonderful concert,” one of his colleagues told us. “The violinist was a beautiful woman, and the performance was excellent. At the close, the audience warmly applauded. Sensing a greater acknowledgment was in order, Humer rose from his seat, walked over and scooped up the contents of a vase of flowers adorning the baby grand, and presented them to the violinist. His panache, creativity, and impulsiveness were captured beautifully in an instant. The act brought yet another round of applause and genuine laughter. This memory for me is the best of Franz— impulse, act, and outcome all beautifully aligned.”

Reality Testing

There is an almost endless list of differences that individuals might communicate. But any attempt to create the definitive list of leadership attributes is futile. This is because the differences must be authentic to you as a leader. They must be significant, real, and perceived.

Think back to Martin Sorrell. Does he show his personal differences knowingly? Yes. Are they significant in the context of WPP? Undoubtedly. Are they real? Utterly.

Clearly, all of the leaders we have cited so far are using difference to signify something about who they are and what they stand for: Branson's challenging nonconformity, Clinton's interpersonal charm, Harvey Jones's entrepreneurial pizzazz, Bill Gates's technological “geekiness,” Carol Browne's care for patients, Greg Dyke's man-of-the-people approachability, Darwin E. Smith's modesty, Ken Livingstone's identification with Londoners, and Franz Humer's emotional intensity.

In all these examples, leaders are using personal differences that work for them appropriately in context. They convey the right message—and they are real. Ultimately, it is this sense of authentic self-expression that makes them so convincing.

But how do we know they are real? This is a difficult question to answer. There are large and complex philosophical issues here. Ultimately, we are helped by the tremendous human capacity to instinctively recognize behavior that is not authentic. And when followers spot this, it is very hard for leaders to recover.

This, of course, is the problem with many of the leadership recipe books written by successful executives. Even if it is unintended by the authors, there is a significant risk that readers conclude that by mimicking what worked for others, they too can become great leaders. Nothing could be further from the truth. Only one person does Jack Welch convincingly—and that's Jack Welch. Ditto Lee Iacocca, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Richard Branson, and all the other "legendary" figures held up before us as leadership role models through the years. The challenge for all aspiring leaders is to become more knowing and more skilled at disclosing themselves, rather than trying to become someone else.

This means digging deep, using what you have, and keeping a continual reality check with others about how you are perceived. Digging deep often means going back to your origins, a theme we will explore in some detail later in the chapter. It's no surprise, for example, to learn that Martin Sorrell explains his view that people all over the organization should be listened to by reference to his father's strong ideals. He believed, Martin told us, "that every one has value." Similarly, Greg Dyke feels he inherits his "man of the people" style from his father, who would "talk to everyone, including the road sweeper, and would laugh at people who took themselves too seriously."

Authentic leaders are not imitations. To remain real in their relationships with followers, they also take constant reality checks. As Roche Pharmaceuticals CEO Bill Burns told us, "You have to keep your feet on the ground when others want to put you on a pedestal. After a while on a pedestal, you stop hearing the truth. It's filtered by the henchmen, and they read you so well, they know what you want to hear. You end up as the queen bee in the hive, with no relationship with the worker bees. My wife and secretary are fully empowered if they ever see me getting a bit uppity to give me a thumping great hit over the head!"

But of course, this is not the only way in which Bill seeks feedback. For several years now, we have worked with him and his top team using extensive 360-degree interview and questionnaire appraisals of individual leadership style. As with all the most effective leaders, there is a continual attempt by Bill to open all channels, formal and informal, to learn about how others see him. This is not a Machiavellian maneuver, but a simple desire to learn more about himself and how he comes across to others.

On the Leadership Stage

Bill Burns's wise practices remind us of the care that effective leaders demonstrate in checking how they are perceived by others—and which differences are attributed to them.

There is inevitably a theatrical element to leadership: it is a performance for the benefit of followers. Playing to your differences—and finding ways to effectively display them—is, in varying degrees, a conscious performance with an end in mind. But this does not make it insincere. Good leaders want to do well for themselves and their followers, and they will invest themselves in their roles. But as these examples show, they will always reserve enough

space to see themselves in the role, to assess their performance and how well it fits the needs of others and the context.

Sometimes the surprise element of communication can be devastating. We met a social worker in Brazil who decided to enter the world of the local gangs by starting and coaching a soccer team. The gangs initially viewed this gentle philanthropist with great suspicion. What worked for him was that he was one of the hardest tacklers around. He showed even the hardest that he was tough; and despite the emphasis on silky skills in Brazilian football, there is nothing more admired than a strong tackle. He won first respect and later love.

Consider Jean Tomlin. At the time we interviewed her, she was HR director at the retailer Marks & Spencer.⁹ Jean is a black woman in one of the most senior HR positions in the United Kingdom. She reflects, with much insight, on the appropriate presentation of self:

Before I go into a situation, I try to understand what it is they will be thinking. I prepare what I am going to say and who I am going to be in that context. Going to a function or into a room full of people I don't know, I try and do a bit of homework to understand what I am going into. I want to be me, but I am channeling parts of me to context. What you get is a segment of me. It is not fabricated or a façade—it's the bits that are relevant for that situation.

I have a particular way of being when engaging as a leader. I have been told my eyes become more focused, I speak more slowly—it's clear we have a task to discuss. I take on another aspect—clear, focused, seriousness of face—but it's just part of the spectrum, and people that know me understand that.

In our conversations with John Latham, the head teacher of an award-winning school, we encountered a similar thoughtfulness about when and how to display differences. Despite all his natural enthusiasm, vision, and passion, Latham started in his new role as head of the publicly funded school in a deliberately low-key fashion. His predecessor had pushed for fast change over a four-year period. This left many staff concerned about yet another “shake-up” on Latham’s arrival.

“I spent a long time thinking about my first sentence as head teacher,” Latham told us. “My predecessor had used his surname and was seen to be in a hurry. ‘My name is John,’ I began. I explained that teaching and learning were my drives—and that I found them difficult. I listened to what excited them and what held them back—and I went to their classrooms to listen. Lots of them said we want the door handle fixed, or the clocks aren’t working. And that’s where I started, with the small things. I fixed some of that the first afternoon, before I went home. It quickly removed some of the barriers. I wanted to get a reputation for getting things done.”

John Latham illustrates the care effective leaders take to communicate the “right” differences as fast as possible—in his case, a huge personal passion for education and development, but combined with humility, preparedness to listen, and a willingness to personally address the mundane details that affect day-to-day performance.

Impressions formed early are often hard to shift. When Simon Gulliford became marketing director of Barclays Bank, he found it difficult to fit his Welsh charm and directness into the company’s somewhat political culture. Simon is an ex-rugby player from the industrial valleys of South Wales. He still speaks with a marked Welsh accent, not the fashionable, polished kind either, but closer

to the tones of his firebrand grandfather. He planned a series of road shows to take his ideas out to the branches, and we urged him to advance his schedule for them because we knew he would be effective. He is one of the most electric presenters we know, a speaker whose timing, personality, and wit are guaranteed to win over any audience. And sure enough, after the road shows, staff were eating out of his hand. Gulliford used the presentations as a way of demonstrating his vision and his extraordinarily engaging and persuasive communication skills.

Well Cast

Peter Brabeck, the CEO of Nestlé, is pictured on the cover of a Nestlé environmental report sitting in the Swiss mountains wearing climbing clothes. In another publication, the Nestlé *Leadership and Management Principles*, he is dressed in a dark suit outside the corporate headquarters. As he told us, "I wanted to use the image of the mountaineer because water and the environment are emotional issues. But the photo is not artificial. That's what I wear at weekends. I'm a climber. It has to be authentic. You can't try to be something else. In the mountaineering picture it's a human being talking. In the suit in front of our offices I am talking for the institution. Both photographs work well. But they are different. And neither is artificial."

As the identification and transmission of personal differences is refined, it is likely that both the leader and the followers implicitly acknowledge that a role is being played. But skillful players will show enough of their real personal differences to demonstrate their authenticity. They will also create situations that enable them to demonstrate their differences.

When he was senior vice president for operations at Lufthansa, Thomas Sattelberger said, "I had to create my own stages," to

get the airline's message across to its twenty-five thousand employees. Sattelberger is a very talented public speaker, who seems to maintain eye contact with everyone in the room. He says he is most effective not face-to-face but "face to many faces." So he chose a format of town meetings, at which he could address up to two hundred employees at a time. "People look at my eyes," he says. "So I usually take a chair and put it in the middle of the stage. I don't want the table and the overhead projector. People react to my face." He's right, and his performance makes him an effective leader.

Of course, such role playing has to be handled with care. The danger is that leaders are thought to be showing off their superior strengths. This normally produces failure rather than success. This is what seemed to happen during Robert Horton's tenure as chairman and CEO of BP during the early 1990s. Horton's conspicuous display of his considerable—indeed, daunting—intelligence sometimes led others to see him as arrogant and self-aggrandizing. His confident approach had worked well for him during his stint in the United States, but it was less well received back at corporate offices in the United Kingdom. Indeed, these personal differences eventually contributed to Horton's dismissal just three years after he was appointed to the position.

Similarly, there is a story that the former England national soccer coach, Glenn Hoddle, once asked his star player, David Beckham, to practice a particular maneuver. When Beckham couldn't do it, Hoddle—once a brilliant player himself—said, "Here, I'll show you how." He performed the maneuver flawlessly, but in that moment he lost the team. The other players saw it as a public humiliation of Beckham. Hoddle was subsequently named "chocolate" by his players because they believed that he thought of himself as "good enough to eat."

This is the familiar trap of the narcissistic leader, a well-worked theme in the leadership literature.¹⁰ What our colleague Jay Conger calls the “shadow side of charisma” leads individuals to become self-serving and to have an exaggerated sense of their own abilities and self-importance.¹¹ In our terms these leaders are aware of their differences but distort them, eventually blowing them out of all proportion, often with disastrous consequences. The list of examples is long: from Edwin Land with Polaroid in the 1970s to Steve Jobs at Apple, Jan Carlzon at SAS, and Pehr Gyllenhammer at Volvo.¹² All developed a sense of infallibility that put their companies at risk.

There Is a Leader in the Team

Effective leaders deploy their differences to serve both their own *and* the team’s interests. In effect, they convey the reassuring message that “if you fall, I will catch you.” Their people know the leader has the strengths to carry out the task but that he will also step aside and let them develop their own strengths. In effect, this is what typically protects such leaders from the charge of “showing off.”

The yachtsman and adventurer Pete Goss is a powerful example. He is perhaps best known for his heroic rescue—in the teeth of a hurricane—of a French competitor in the Vendee Globe single-handed round-the-world yacht race. For this, Pete was awarded the Legion d’Honneur, France’s highest award for gallantry. He has also been awarded an MBE (Member of the British Empire) and been named Yachtsman of the Year. Pete has a string of other achievements to his name, including the development of a revolutionary catamaran sponsored by Team Philips.

There is no doubt that Pete is a big character, driven by a fierce personal passion and a determination to succeed. Once he has set

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his heart on something, he will move heaven and earth to make it happen. Read his résumé, and you will see he has plenty to boast about. But he is not the larger-than-life figure that you might expect. Meet him face-to-face, and you will encounter a modest, self-effacing, and (by his own admission) shy man. He will tell you how he was terrified of standing in front of a crowd of strangers to make a speech and how much he has learned from other people; the novices he has trained on boats, the corporate representatives who helped him with fund-raising, the journalists who interviewed him. He will tell you in a matter-of-fact way that the point is to get on with things and enjoy it. "It's not a question of is the glass half full or half empty. What we say is drink the bastard anyway!" And above all, he will remind you that a "single-handed" yacht race is a misnomer, that all his achievements have been built upon the efforts of a "very large family" whose complementary strengths are what eventually produce success.

It has become popular over recent years to brand the style exemplified by Goss as "quiet leadership."¹³ There is no doubt that Pete is able to impose himself and communicate his leadership assets in a low-key, understated way. But more than this, we would argue, he personally exemplifies what he encourages in all those around him. His differences are significant. He is living proof that modest individuals can achieve great things if they set their hearts upon it, that we all "have a giant within," to use one of Pete's favorite quotations.

Listening to Learn

Our overwhelming impression is that in developing their self-awareness, effective leaders pursue a clear and simple strategy: they try things out and get feedback. Many years ago the psychologist David Kolb mapped out the preferences that individuals have

for particular ways of learning. He describes learning through concrete experience, reflection and observation, active experimentation, and, finally, abstract conceptualization.¹⁴

Our observations are that effective leaders rely heavily on experience and experimentation. They do engage in reflection but rarely arrive at their leadership capability through theory. It is ironic, then, that classic business school classroom experience is geared mostly around abstract conceptualizing with a little reflection and observation.

Peter Brabeck of Nestlé observes, "I have difficulty in explaining leadership in an entirely rational or analytical way. There's a part of it that you cannot explain. Yes, you can improve techniques, of course—I am not against it. But leadership has to be based on experience and situations. When I was a young lad, I had to do military experience. Think of it. I was seventeen years old. It was a very interesting experience. Basically, for the first time in your life, you are being treated like dirt! And it's interesting how you react. We had some trying to commit suicide. They couldn't take it. How you digest those experiences is important, and it teaches you a lot about yourself."

Other leaders seem to be able to build wider experiences into their daily working lives and careers. David Gardner, former European CEO of Electronic Arts Inc. (EA), the electronic games developer, is a long way from his California roots, yet he relished the differences he encountered across the various EA territories for which he was responsible. In our discussions he regularly talked with enthusiasm about the challenge of translating and applying the EA culture in the contrasting contexts of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. In his work schedule, he made a point of regular visits to each of the EA European offices, listening to as many people as he could—all over and beyond the organization: the sales

force, office staff, engineers, and customers. He deliberately avoided being captured by the local senior executives. At the point we interviewed him, he was about to take a sabbatical—time for some more new experiences—with plans including time in Japan and some business school teaching.

Of course, trying things out—active experimentation as the learning theorists call it—often means operating outside your comfort zone. Head teacher John Latham describes the atmosphere at his school as “a little on the edge,” “a bit risky,” “not entirely comfortable”—and much of this comes from his own drive to keep trying new things. Not all his initiatives are greeted with universal enthusiasm. When he suggested children set their own tests, they thought he was “off the planet.” One of his teaching colleagues described his empowerment philosophy as “claptrap.” None of this dampened John’s missionary zeal—it simply taught him to make adjustments in his style, pace, and approach as he has sought to deploy his unique differences.

Similarly, David Gardner’s major concern when he came to Europe was that his staff might mistake his genuine concern for people, his desire to foster involvement and celebrate teamwork, as cynical, American corporate brainwashing. He deliberately set out to adapt his style to allow more questioning and debate of his own and the wider EA values.

When David announced he was about to take a year’s sabbatical, one of his creative staff accused him of “forgetting” about his colleagues—proof he was no more than a representative of the company machine. David began a dialog with him, explaining his apprehension and uncertainty about his year off. His colleague was stunned by his honesty—and quickly forgot the stereotype of the corporate man.

In each of these cases, there is evidence of leaders learning to use their differences—David Gardner's concern for people, John Latham's passion for empowerment—such that they work for them as positive attributes in different contexts.

Socially Authentic

Authentic leaders are prepared to go beyond their comfort zones. But what is also notable is that most successful leaders we have observed and interviewed seem to be very "grounded" individuals. They have a very clear sense of who they are and where they come from. They are comfortable with their origins.

Greg Dyke, for example, is forever retelling stories of how his father would talk to everyone as an equal. He tells the stories with intense pride, as if they explained who he has become. Simon Gulliford at Barclays often talks of his grandfather. He amusingly tells how his grandfather retains the view that he is utterly irresistible to women even though he is well into his seventies. Gulliford explains his own powerful sense of self-confidence as deriving from his grandfather's faith in him.

Our observations have led us to the view that an authentic sense of self arises from individuals coming to terms with their own biography—and a critical part of this is to understand how their origins have come to shape them. Origins, of course, can be conceived of in many ways. For some, family origin is most salient; for others, it may be class, gender, ethnicity, social status, religion, or geographical locale.

The ways in which individuals conceive of their origins may vary between cultures. For example, in the United States, locale may act as a particularly powerful source of identity, while in many European countries, class and status remain highly salient, often in

mysterious ways. In many parts of Asia, family remains the most significant way of conceptualizing origins.¹⁵

Despite these aggregate cultural differences, our evidence suggests that leaders conceive of their origins through multiple lenses, where all of the variables operate in a kind of palimpsest: one factor layered on top of another. Thus each individual may be the subject of multiple determinations.

Rick Dobbis (of whom you will hear more later) had a highly successful career with Sony Music. He is a Jewish, Brooklyn, New Yorker, and he never forgets that he is all those things. He is not an Orthodox Jew, but the central ritual of Yom Kippur is honored in a traditional yet somehow intensely contemporary way: "It's a good thing to think about all the things you could've done differently—made peoples' lives a little better. It's a religious tradition in a thoroughly modern context." His desk is a shrine to the original Brooklyn Dodgers (Dodger is also the name of his dog). He showed us a photograph of his grandparents' bakery in Brooklyn.

His sense of origins goes even deeper. In a discussion about new patterns of migration from eastern Europe into the United Kingdom, he pointedly reminded us of his own eastern European origins and the human reasons for migration. As C. Wright Mills memorably observed, something special takes place at the intersection between history and biography.¹⁶

Rob Murray, CEO of one of Australasia's biggest beer companies, Lion Nathan, is an accomplished executive and a leader of considerable power. His educational achievements took him to Cambridge University. His career has taken him all over the world. But he has never lost touch with his own British working-class roots. He still has the same direct and forthright manner of speaking. His beloved soccer team is still Walsall, a lowly team from a

town in the heart of the industrial Midlands. From the other side of the world, he still makes a point of tracking their results each weekend throughout the season. Like Rick Dobbis, he is another leader who, despite his considerable success in business, is at ease with his origins.

And it's not just those at the very top who use biography to lead. In a small office in a suburban Chicago bank, sits Claire—a long-term bank employee who has made it to back-office supervisor. The walls are covered with photographs of her family—all from in or near Chicago—and her early experiences as a promising swimmer. She uses these icons of her life to explain to her staff who she is and what she stands for.

Where and Who

However, whatever the complexities of the cultural variation, we have been consistently struck by the ways in which effective leaders can articulate the relationship between where they came from and who they are. Many of the observed exemplify this point. Niall FitzGerald, former cochairman at Unilever, speaks often and with insight about his Irishness and the influence of his mother on both his moral and political worldview. Anthony Bergmans, his cochairman colleague, remains obstinately the Dutch farmer despite his elevated status as joint chairman. It is demonstrated in his dress, even his gait; and though Bergmans is less open about its influence than Fitzgerald is of his own origins, it is clear that, for Bergmans, his origins are a matter of some pride. They are part of who he has become.

Ian Powell, leader of the Business Recovery Services U.K. practice for the global professional services firm PricewaterhouseCoopers, is equally aware of how his social origins have made him who he is.

He hails from the United Kingdom's former industrial heartland: the Black Country. It has left him with a distinct West Midlands accent, not often heard in the boardrooms of major U.K. companies. His family came from the respectable working class, and his father eventually became a works manager, only to give it up to become a schoolteacher. It seemed a more interesting, even honorable way to use one's life, he explained. His family was Methodist, and this too has left its mark on his moral position. To observe Powell now in a leadership position is to see these complex factors rearranged in a skillful way: the disarming accent, the humility, the openness, the ease with popular culture—sport, rock music—all known to himself and disclosed to his followers.

In stark contrast, Sir Christopher Bland, chairman of BT and former chairman of the BBC, is equally unashamed of who he is: a patrician, Tory Ulsterman, who "likes to be in charge." It doesn't work for everyone, but at least he is clear about exactly where he is coming from—speech ringing with social-class markers and littered with Latin phrases expresses exactly who he is. Take it or leave it. It must be authentic, whatever it is.

Other examples are more complex. Patti Cazzato, a senior executive working with retailing giant Gap at the time we met, is from rural Kansas. In her job she has to deal with sophisticated, urban New York designers. Patti told us that when she began these working relationships, she felt slightly overawed by the encounters—as if she were still wearing Kansas dust on her clothes. She felt gauche and inhibited among her new colleagues. It took a trip back to her roots for her to rediscover herself and bring her own authenticity back into her leadership: to be herself in the new context.

Comfort with origins, then, is one aspect of people who combine self-awareness with the ability to disclose. But it is not the

only one. As individuals move through life, they experience mobility—social and geographical, within and between organizations, across and up and down hierarchies. And this experience of mobility can disrupt an individual's sense of self.

In the United States, for example, high levels of social mobility have been associated by some social critics with societal symptoms of rootlessness and alienation. This was memorably captured in David Reisman's classic study, *The Lonely Crowd*.¹⁷ In contrast, our observation of effective leaders is that as well as being comfortable with their origins, they are also at ease with mobility. They take themselves with them to new contexts. They adapt, of course, but they retain their authenticity in the new situation. (This is discussed further in chapter 5.)

Growing Your Own

If comfort with origins and ease with mobility help with authenticity, how can aspiring leaders grow these capabilities? What follows is a list of pragmatic suggestions drawn from our interview material. Not all of these will work for everyone; try to find techniques that help you. But if you cannot develop a refined awareness of what works for you, then your leadership abilities will be limited.

- **Seek out new experiences and new contexts.** This can involve changes as small as seeking to lead outside your function or as large as seeking to lead in an entirely different context. We interviewed a tough CFO who worked in a drug rehab unit on a one-month sabbatical. He reported that it forced him to reexamine his own leadership behaviors and to reconnect with his fundamental values. One

critical characteristic here is that his hierarchical position as CFO meant nothing in the new context. There was just him and those he sought to lead and help.

A corollary of this is that to develop self-knowledge, you should avoid comfort zones and routines. Developing self-knowledge requires active experimentation. Routines, in and of themselves, inhibit this experimentation drive.

- **Get honest feedback.** Effective leaders seek out sources of straight feedback. We have had very good results from carefully collected workplace feedback (including 360-degree feedback). But there is also a role for coaches who can give an external perspective. But perhaps the best feedback comes from honest colleagues and those who know us best: our family and friends.
- **Explore biography.** Many of the leaders we have both interviewed and observed have had a deep and intimate knowledge of the contexts that made them what they are. Explore these; talk to others who may share the same experiences. Self-knowledge grows from coming to terms with the events that make us what we are.
- **Return to roots.** Patti Cazzato's trip back to Texas reinforced the sense of self. Simon Gulliford takes a short golfing holiday every year with a group of old friends from Pontypridd, the Welsh town where he grew up. Spend time with people who know you without the trappings of organizational power.
- **Find a third place.** The American writer Ray Oldenburg has put forward the convincing argument that after work and

family, we all need a third place: somewhere we can make associations and develop a sense of self, freed from the obligations of work and family roles.¹⁸ For the fictional characters in the U.S. comedy drama *Cheers*, the bar illustrates such a third place.

Knowing yourself, being yourself, and disclosing yourself are vital ingredients of effective leadership. In chapter 3, we show how, on the basis of this knowledge, you can start to take leadership risks.