

## 9.5 Application

Because authentic leadership is still in the early phase of its development, there has been little research on strategies that people can use to develop or enhance authentic leadership behaviors. While there are prescriptions set forth in the practical approach, there is little evidence-based research on whether these prescriptions or how-to strategies actually increase authentic leadership behavior.

In spite of the lack of intervention research, there are common themes from the authentic leadership literature that may be applicable to organizational or practice settings. One theme common to all of the formulations of authentic leadership is that people have the capacity to learn to be authentic leaders. In their original work on authentic leadership, Luthans and Avolio (2003) constructed a model of authentic leadership development. Conceptualizing it as a lifelong learning process, they argued that authentic leadership is a process that can be developed over time. This suggests that human resource departments may be able to foster authentic leadership behaviors in employees who move into leadership positions.

Another theme that can be applied to organizations is the overriding goal of authentic leaders to try to do the “right” thing, to be honest with themselves and others, and to work for the common good. Authentic leadership can have a positive impact in organizations. For example, Cianci, Hannah, Roberts, and Tsakumis (2014) investigated the impact of authentic leadership on followers’ morality. Based on the responses of 118 MBA students, they found that authentic leaders significantly inhibited followers from making unethical choices in the face of temptation. Authentic leadership appears to be a critical contextual factor that morally strengthens followers. Cianci et al. suggest that the four components of authentic leadership (i.e., self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency) should be developed in organizational leadership to increase ethical organizational behavior.

Last, authentic leadership is shaped and reformed by critical life events that act as triggers to growth and greater authenticity. Being sensitive to these events and using them as springboards to growth may be relevant to many people who are interested in becoming leaders who are more authentic.

### Case Studies

The following section provides three case studies (Cases 9.1, 9.2, and 9.3) of individuals who demonstrate authentic leadership. The first case is about Sally Helgesen, author of *The Female Advantage: Women’s Ways of Leadership* (1990). The second case is about Greg Mortenson and how his mission to promote schools and peace in Pakistan and Afghanistan came under fire when he was accused of lying and financial impropriety. The final case is about Betty Ford, former First Lady of the United States, and her work in the areas of breast cancer awareness and substance abuse treatment. At the end of each of the cases, questions are provided to help you analyze the case using ideas from authentic leadership.

### Case 9.1: Am I Really a Leader?

Sally Helgesen was born in the small Midwest town of Saint Cloud, Minnesota. Her mother was a housewife who later taught English, and her father taught speech as a college professor. After attending a local state college, where she majored in English and comparative religion, Sally spread her wings and moved to New York, inspired by the classic film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*.

Sally found work as a writer, first in advertising and then as an assistant to a columnist at the then-influential *Village Voice*. She contributed freelance articles to magazines such as *Harper's*, *Glamour*, *Vogue*, *Fortune*, and *Inside Sports*. She also returned to school, completing a degree in classics at Hunter College and taking language courses at the city graduate center in preparation for a PhD in comparative religion. She envisioned herself as a college professor, but also enjoyed freelancing. She felt a strong dichotomy within her, part quiet scholar and part footloose dreamer. The conflict bothered her, and she wondered how she would resolve it. Choosing to be a writer—actually declaring herself to be one—seemed scary, grandiose, and fraudulent.

Then one day, while walking on a New York side street in the rain, Sally saw an adventuresome black cat running beside her. It reminded her of Holly Golightly's cat in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, an emblem in the movie for Holly's dreamy temperament and rootlessness. It made her realize how much the freedom and independence offered by her "temporary" career as a writer suited her temperament. Sally told the cat she was a writer—she'd never been able to say the words before—and decided she was going to commit to full-time writing, at least for a time. When she saw the opportunity to cover a prominent murder trial in Fort Worth, Texas, she took it.

While covering the trial, Sally became intrigued with the culture of Texas, and decided she wanted to write a book on the role of independent oil producers in shaping the region. Doing so required a huge expenditure of time and money, and for almost a year Sally lived out of the trunk of her car, staying with friends in remote regions all over Texas. It was lonely and hard and exhilarating, but Sally was determined to see the project through. When the book, *Wildcatters* (1981), was published, it achieved little recognition, but Sally felt an enormous increase in confidence and commitment as a result of having finished the book. It strengthened her conviction that, for better or worse, she was a writer.

Sally moved back to New York and continued to write articles and search around for another book. She also began writing speeches for the CEO at a Fortune 500 company. She loved the work, and particularly enjoyed being an observer of office politics, even though she did not perceive herself to be a part of them. Sally viewed her role as being an "outsider looking in," an observer of the culture. She sometimes felt like an actor in a play about an office, but this detachment made her feel professional rather than fraudulent.

As a speechwriter, Sally spent a lot of time interviewing people in the companies she worked for. Doing so made her realize that men and women often approach their work in fundamentally different ways. She also became convinced that many of the skills and attitudes women brought to their work were increasingly appropriate for the ways in which organizations were changing, and that women had certain advantages as a result. She also noticed that the unique perspectives of women were seldom valued by CEOs or other organizational leaders, who could have benefited if they had better understood and been more attentive to what women had to offer.

These observations inspired Sally to write another book. In 1988, she signed a contract with a major publisher to write a book on what women had to contribute to organizations. Until then, almost everything written about women at work focused on how they needed to change and adapt. Sally felt strongly that if women were encouraged to emphasize the negative, they would miss a historic opportunity to help lead organizations in a time of change. The time was right for this message, and *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership* (1990) became very successful, topping a number of best-seller charts and remaining steadily in print for nearly 20 years. The book's prominence resulted in numerous speaking and consulting opportunities, and Sally began traveling the world delivering seminars and working with a variety of clients.

This acclaim and visibility was somewhat daunting to Sally. While she recognized the value of her book, she also knew that she was not a social scientist with a body of theoretical data on women's issues. She saw herself as an author rather than an expert, and the old questions about fraudulence that she had dealt with in her early years in New York began to reassert themselves in a different form. Was she really being authentic? Could she take on the mantle of leadership and all it entailed? In short, she wondered if she could be the leader that people seemed to expect.

The path Sally took to answer these questions was simply to present herself for who she was. She was Sally Helgesen, an outsider looking in, a skilled and imaginative observer of current issues. For Sally, the path to leadership did not manifest itself in a step-by-step process. Sally's leadership began with her own journey of finding herself and accepting her personal authenticity. Through this self-awareness, she grew to trust her own expertise as a writer with a keen eye for current trends in organizational life.

Sally continues to be an internationally recognized consultant and speaker on contemporary issues, and has published five books. She remains uncertain about whether she will finish her degree in comparative religion and become a college professor, but always keeps in mind the career of I. F. Stone, an influential political writer in the 1950s and 1960s who went back to school and got an advanced degree in classics at the age of 75.

## Questions

1. Learning about one's self is an essential step in becoming an authentic leader. What role did self-awareness play in Sally Helgesen's story of leadership?
2. How would you describe the authenticity of Sally Helgesen's leadership?
3. At the end of the case, Sally Helgesen is described as taking on the "mantle of leadership." Was this important for her leadership? How is taking on the mantle of leadership related to a leader's authenticity? Does every leader reach a point in his or her career where embracing the leadership role is essential?

## Case 9.2: A Leader Under Fire

*(The sixth edition of this book includes a case study outlining Greg Mortenson's creation of the Central Asia Institute and highlighting his authentic leadership qualities in more detail. For an additional perspective on Mortenson, you can access the original case study at [www.sagepub.com/northouse6e](http://www.sagepub.com/northouse6e) (<http://www.sagepub.com/northouse6e>)).*

By 2011, there were few people who had never heard of Greg Mortenson. He was the subject of two best-selling books, *Three Cups of Tea* (2006, with David O. Relin) and *Stones Into Schools* (2009), both of which tell the story of how the former emergency trauma room nurse became a hero who built schools in rural areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

His story was phenomenal: lost and sick after attempting to scale K2, Greg was nursed back to health by the villagers of remote Korphe, Afghanistan. Greg promised to build the village a school, a monumental effort that took him three years as he learned to raise money, navigate the foreign culture, and build a bridge above a 60-foot-deep chasm. His success led him to create the Central Asia Institute (CAI), a nonprofit organization whose "mission is to empower communities of Central Asia through literacy and education, especially for girls; to promote peace through education; and to

convey the importance of these activities globally” (Central Asia Institute, 2017). By 2011, the CAI had successfully established or supported more than 170 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and helped to educate more than 68,000 students (Haq, 2011).

Greg’s story seemed too good to be true. In April 2011, television news show *60 Minutes* and author Jon Krakauer (*Into Thin Air*, 1997, and *Under the Banner of Heaven*, 2003) alleged that it was. *60 Minutes* accused Greg of misusing money and benefiting excessively from the CAI. The show’s reporter visited schools the CAI had built overseas and claimed that he could not find six of the schools and that others were abandoned. The show featured an interview with Krakauer, who claimed Greg had fabricated parts of his best-selling book *Three Cups of Tea*. When *60 Minutes* approached Greg for comment at a book signing, he refused to talk to the program.

The day following the *60 Minutes* story, Krakauer published a short online book, *Three Cups of Deceit* (2011), in which he claimed Greg lied many times in *Three Cups of Tea*, starting with his initial tale of being in Korphe.

Greg and the CAI were caught in a firestorm of media and public scrutiny. An investigation into the alleged financial improprieties was launched by Montana’s attorney general (the CAI is based in Bozeman), and two Montana legislators filed a \$5 million class action lawsuit claiming Greg fooled 4 million people into buying his books.

Greg withdrew from the public eye. The day the *60 Minutes* program aired, he posted a letter on the CAI website saying he stood by his books and claiming the news show “paints a distorted picture using inaccurate information, innuendo and a microscopic focus on one year’s (2009) IRS 990 financial, and a few points in the book *Three Cups of Tea* that occurred almost 18 years ago” (Schabner & Dolak, 2011). Many criticized the organization’s founder for not more aggressively defending himself.

What many people did not know, however, was that two days before the *60 Minutes* segment appeared, Greg had been diagnosed with a hole and a large aneurysm in his heart and was scheduled for open-heart surgery in the next few months. Meanwhile, the CAI worked to ensure its transparency by posting its tax returns and a master list of projects and their status. The report documented 210 schools, 17 of which were listed as receiving “full support” from the CAI, which includes teachers’ salaries, supplies, books, and furniture and monitoring by CAI contractors (Flandro, 2011).

The attorney general investigation concluded in 2012 and determined that Greg, as well as CAI board members, had mismanaged the CAI, and that Greg had personally profited from it. In a settlement, Greg agreed to pay \$1 million to the CAI for expenses he incurred that were deemed personal. The attorney general’s conclusions did not address the allegations that Greg fabricated parts of his book. While he continues to be a CAI employee, Greg is not allowed to have any financial oversight for the organization or sit on its board of directors (Flandro, 2012).

Despite the controversy and subsequent finding of wrongdoing, former CAI board member Andrew Marcus hopes the public will consider what Greg and the organization have accomplished.

“It’s hard to imagine anyone who’s done more for education in that part of the world,” Marcus has said. “It took a real human being to do that” (Flandro, 2011).

## Questions

1. Would you describe Greg Mortenson as an authentic leader? Explain your answer.
2. In the chapter, we discussed moral reasoning and transparency as components of authentic leadership. Do you think Greg Mortenson exhibited these components as part his leadership?
3. How was Greg Mortenson's response to the allegations against him characteristic of an authentic leader?
4. How did the outcome of the investigation affect the authenticity of Greg Mortenson's leadership?

## Case 9.3: The Reluctant First Lady

Betty Ford admits that August 9, 1974, the day her husband was sworn in as the 38th president of the United States, was "the saddest day of my life" (Ford, 1978, p. 1).

Elizabeth Bloomer Ford was many things—a former professional dancer and dance teacher, the mother of four nearly grown children, the wife of a 13-term U.S. congressman who was looking forward to their retirement—but she never saw being the country's First Lady as her destiny.

As she held the Bible her husband's hand rested on while he took the oath of office, Betty began a journey in which she would become many more things: a breast cancer survivor, an outspoken advocate of women's rights, a recovering alcoholic and addict, and cofounder and president of the Betty Ford Center, a nonprofit treatment center for substance abuse.

The Fords' path to the White House began in October 1973, when Gerald "Jerry" R. Ford was tapped to replace then-U.S. vice president Spiro Agnew following Agnew's resignation. After only nine months in that role, Jerry became the U.S. president after Richard M. Nixon left office amidst the Watergate scandal.

In her first days as the First Lady, Betty became known for her openness and candor. At the time, women were actively fighting for equal rights in the workplace and in society. Less than half of American women were employed outside the home, and women's earnings were only 38% of their male counterparts' (Spraggins, 2005). Betty raised a number of eyebrows in her first press conference, when she spoke out in support of abortion rights, women in politics, and the Equal Rights Amendment.

Betty hadn't even been in the White House a month when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. She again broke with social conventions and spoke openly about the diagnosis and treatment for a disease that was not widely discussed in public. With her cooperation, *Newsweek* magazine printed a complete account of her surgery and treatment, which included a radical mastectomy. This openness helped raise awareness of breast cancer screening and treatment options and created an atmosphere of support and comfort for other women fighting the disease.

"Lying in the hospital, thinking of all those women going for cancer checkups because of me, I'd come to recognize more clearly the power of the woman in the White House," she said in her first autobiography, *The Times of My Life*. "Not my power, but the power of the position, a power which could be used to help" (Ford, 1978, p. 194).

After her recuperation, Betty made good use of that newfound power. She openly supported and lobbied for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, a bill that would ensure that “equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex” (Francis, 2009).

In an interview with *60 Minutes*, Betty drew the ire of many conservatives when she candidly shared her views on the provocative issues of abortion rights, premarital sex, and marijuana use. After the interview aired, public opinion of Betty plummeted, but her popularity quickly rebounded, and within months her approval rating had climbed to 75%.

At the same time, Betty was busy with the duties of First Lady, entertaining dignitaries and heads of state from countries across the globe. In 1975 she began actively campaigning for her husband for the 1976 presidential election, inspiring buttons that read “Vote for Betty’s Husband.” Ford lost the election to Jimmy Carter and, because he was suffering from laryngitis, Betty stepped into the spotlight to read Jerry’s concession speech to the country, congratulating Carter on his victory. Betty’s time as First Lady ended in January 1977, and the Fords retired to Rancho Mirage, California, and Vail, Colorado.

A little more than a year later, at the age of 60, Betty began another personal battle: overcoming alcoholism and an addiction to prescription medicine. Betty had a 14-year dependence on painkillers for chronic neck spasms, arthritis, and a pinched nerve, but refused to admit she was addicted to alcohol. After checking into the Long Beach Naval Hospital’s Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Service, she found the strength to face her demons and, again, went public with her struggles.

“I have found that I am not only addicted to the medications I’ve been taking for my arthritis, but also to alcohol,” she wrote in a statement released to the public. “I expect this treatment and fellowship to be a solution for my problems and I embrace it not only for me but for all the others who are here to participate” (Ford, 1978, p. 285).

Betty Ford found recovering from addiction was particularly daunting at a time when most treatment centers were geared toward treating men. “The female alcoholic has more emotional problems, more health problems, more parenting problems, makes more suicide attempts, than the alcoholic man,” Betty explained in her second autobiography, *Betty, a Glad Awakening* (Ford, 1987, p. 129).

For this reason, Betty helped to establish the nonprofit Betty Ford Center in 1982 in Rancho Mirage. The center splits its space equally between male and female patients, but the treatment is gender specific with programs for the entire family system affected by addiction. The center’s success has attracted celebrities as well as everyday people including middle-class moms, executives, college students, and laborers. Betty’s activism in the field of recovery earned her the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1991 and the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1999.

Speaking at an alumni reunion of Betty Ford Center patients, Betty said, “I’m really proud of this center. And I’m really grateful for my own recovery, because with my recovery, I was able to help some other people come forward and address their own addictions. And I don’t think there’s anything as wonderful in life as being able to help someone else” (Ford, 1987, p. 217).

## Questions

1. How would you describe Betty Ford's leadership? In what ways could her leadership be described as authentic?
2. How did critical life events play a role in the development of her leadership?
3. Is there a clear moral dimension to Betty Ford's leadership? In what way is her leadership about serving the common good? Discuss.
4. As we discussed in the chapter, self-awareness and transparency are associated with authentic leadership. How does Betty Ford exhibit these qualities?

## Leadership Instrument

Although still in its early phases of development, the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) was created by Walumbwa and associates (2008) to explore and validate the assumptions of authentic leadership. It is a 16-item instrument that measures four factors of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Based on samples in China, Kenya, and the United States, Walumbwa and associates validated the dimensions of the instrument and found it positively related to outcomes such as organizational citizenship, organizational commitment, and satisfaction with supervisor and performance. To obtain this instrument, contact Mind Garden Inc., in Menlo Park, California, or visit [www.mindgarden.com](http://www.mindgarden.com) (<http://www.mindgarden.com>).

In this section, we provide an authentic leadership self-assessment to help you determine your own level of authentic leadership. This questionnaire will help you understand how authentic leadership is measured and provide you with your own scores on items that characterize authentic leadership. The questionnaire includes 16 questions that assess the four major components of authentic leadership discussed earlier in this chapter: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. Your results on this self-assessment questionnaire will give you information about your level of authentic leadership on these underlying dimensions of authentic leadership. This questionnaire is intended for practical applications to help you understand the complexities of authentic leadership. It is not designed for research purposes.

## Authentic Leadership Self-Assessment Questionnaire

*Instructions:* This questionnaire contains items about different dimensions of authentic leadership. There are no right or wrong responses, so please answer honestly. Use the following scale when responding to each statement by writing the number from the scale below that you feel most accurately characterizes your response to the statement.

**Key:** 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neutral 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. I can list my three greatest weaknesses.                                 | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. My actions reflect my core values.                                       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 3. I seek others' opinions before making up my own mind.                    | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. I openly share my feelings with others.                                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. I can list my three greatest strengths.                                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. I do not allow group pressure to control me.                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. I listen closely to the ideas of those who disagree with me.             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. I let others know who I truly am as a person.                            | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. I seek feedback as a way of understanding who I really am as a person.   | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. Other people know where I stand on controversial issues.                | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. I do not emphasize my own point of view at the expense of others.       | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. I rarely present a "false" front to others.                             | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. I accept the feelings I have about myself.                              | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. My morals guide what I do as a leader.                                  | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. I listen very carefully to the ideas of others before making decisions. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. I admit my mistakes to others.  | 1 2 3 4 5 |

## Scoring

- Sum the responses on items 1, 5, 9, and 13 (self-awareness).
- Sum the responses on items 2, 6, 10, and 14 (internalized moral perspective).
- Sum the responses on items 3, 7, 11, and 15 (balanced processing).
- Sum the responses on items 4, 8, 12, and 16 (relational transparency).

## Total Scores

Self-Awareness: \_\_\_\_\_

Internalized Moral Perspective: \_\_\_\_\_

Balanced Processing: \_\_\_\_\_

Relational Transparency: \_\_\_\_\_

## Scoring Interpretation

This self-assessment questionnaire is designed to measure your authentic leadership by assessing four components of the process: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency. By comparing your scores on each of these components, you can determine which are your stronger and which are your weaker components in each category. You can interpret your authentic leadership scores using the following guideline: high = 16–20 and low = 15 and below. Scores in the upper range indicate stronger authentic leadership, whereas scores in the lower range indicate weaker authentic leadership.

## Summary

As a result of leadership failures in the public and private sectors, authentic leadership is emerging in response to societal demands for genuine, trustworthy, and good leadership. Authentic leadership describes leadership that is transparent, morally grounded, and responsive to people's needs and values. Even though authentic leadership is still in the early stages of development, the study of authentic leadership is timely and worthwhile, offering hope to people who long for true leadership.

Although there is no single accepted definition of authentic leadership, it can be conceptualized intrapersonally, developmentally, and interpersonally. The intrapersonal perspective focuses on the leader and the leader's knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept. The interpersonal perspective claims that authentic leadership is a collective process, created by leaders and followers together. The developmental perspective emphasizes major components of authentic leadership that develop over a lifetime and are triggered by major life events.

The practical approach to authentic leadership provides basic "how to" steps to become an authentic leader. George's (2003) approach identifies five basic dimensions of authentic leadership and the corresponding behavioral characteristics individuals need to develop to become authentic leaders.

In the social science literature, a theoretical approach to authentic leadership is emerging. Drawing from the fields of leadership, positive organizational scholarship, and ethics, researchers have identified four major components of authentic leadership: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, balanced processing, and relational transparency.

In addition, researchers have found that authentic leadership is influenced by a leader's positive psychological capacities, moral reasoning, and critical life events.

Authentic leadership has several positive features. First, it provides an answer to people who are searching for good and sound leadership in an uncertain world. Second, authentic leadership provides broad guidelines about how leaders can learn to become authentic. Third, it has an explicit moral dimension that asserts that leaders need to do what is "right" and "good" for their followers and society. Fourth, it is framed as a process that is developed by leaders over time rather than as a fixed trait. Last, authentic leadership can be measured with a theory-based instrument.

There are also negative features to authentic leadership. First, the ideas set forth in the practical approach need to be treated cautiously because they have not been fully substantiated by research. Second, the moral component of authentic leadership is not fully explained. For example, it does not describe how values such as justice and community are related to authentic leadership. Third, the rationale for including positive psychological capacities as an inherent part of a model of authentic leadership has not been fully explicated. Fourth, there is evidence emerging that authentic leadership may be ineffective with the millennial generation. Finally, there is a lack of evidence regarding the effectiveness of authentic leadership and how it is related to positive organizational outcomes.

In summary, authentic leadership is a new and exciting area of research, which holds a great deal of promise. As more research is conducted on authentic leadership, a clearer picture will emerge about the true nature of the process and the assumptions and principles that it encompasses.

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