Authentic Irresponsibility: Quo Vadis?

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INTRODUCTION

We have all heard the repeated, urgent calls for leaders to be authentic and responsible in their organizational decision-making. Nevertheless, too often executive leadership scandals have dominated the business news. Egregious acts committed by leaders we believe we can trust, e.g., Bernie Madoff's notorious Ponzi scheme: up to $65 billion in actual and projected losses, Allen Stanford's misplacement of $8 billion intended for CDs that ended up in high-risk hedge funds, and the unfortunate decision on the part of Lance Armstrong to both use and then lie about his doping habits are only three of many uncovered within organizations and by leaders previously thought to be successful and credible models. Often these "infractions" are seemingly committed with little guilt or remorse ... dare we say with a naturalness that conveys a sense of authenticity. Recently, researchers Craig Pearce and Charles Manz went so far as to coin the term Corporate Social Ir-responsibility (CSIR) concerning executive behavior that is unethical and disregards the welfare of others, such as when powerful leaders seek personal gain while harming employees, shareholders and even society at large.

When applied to leadership, CSIR involves particular destructive potency, since central leaders can shape workplace cultures and role identities for others as they model and essentially condone irresponsibility. In this article, we address challenging and important questions. Is authentic irresponsibility emerging as a new leadership paradigm? And if so, how can this trend be reversed and what advice can be offered to leaders to help them avoid consciously or unconsciously becoming part of the problem?

Authentic Irresponsibility — An Oxymoron?

It is an eye-catching phrase—authentic irresponsibility. We hear both of those words often, but it is a reasonably safe bet

to make that they are not commonly heard in the same sentence, as they seem contradictory. It has become popular to talk about the benefits of leader authenticity particularly as we search for prescriptions for better and more effective leadership. It has also become common for the words "irresponsible" or "irresponsibility" to be used to describe some of our more notorious leaders and their actions.

The simple truth is, we use both of these words and their antonyms—authentic and inauthentic, responsibility and irresponsibility—frequently, and quite often without a real thought as to why we would choose to label a person responsible or irresponsible. We just instinctively believe it is better to be called authentic and responsible than the opposite. However, in real life, we behave in ways that are responsible and some that might not be responsible. Thus, we believe that it is not possible to label most people as being wholly one way or the other—we believe that people are generally a mixture of both. However, we also believe that people have choices about the behaviors and actions they take, and are often not aware of the antecedents, motivations and desires that form the basis for their actions, nor the impact of specific contexts which can greatly affect behaviors.

We have three goals for this paper. First, to briefly define what it means to be authentic and inauthentic and to describe responsibility and irresponsibility as it relates to leadership, emphasizing the importance of social identity to both concepts. Second, to explore the relationship between authenticity and responsibility in organizational contexts, highlighting the interaction between the two. Finally, we will provide some short examples that will illustrate how it is possible for a leader to be authentically irresponsible, inauthentically responsible and so forth. While this may be an unorthodox way of looking at authenticity and responsibility, we believe it is a powerful framework to explain some of the behaviors we find to be out of character for respected leaders. Being able to understand the causes of irresponsible

behavior can aid in developing ways to identify and remedy the potential issues in our own organizations. In order to fully appreciate the complexity of issues surrounding authenticity and responsibility pertaining to leadership, we believe it is important to bring to light some of the behaviors that exemplify the complexities. Of course, we realize that this all seems like an odd way of looking at authenticity and responsibility—our goal is to simply raise the veil on some of the behaviors of leaders.

WHAT IS AUTHENTICITY AND WHY DOES IT CHANGE?

There is no dispute that being characterized as an authentic leader is considered a positive. However, what does it mean to be authentic, and can being authentic in certain situations actually be a negative and contribute to irresponsibility? Authenticity can be seen as being true to one's own self, or acting in accordance with one's beliefs and values. Inauthenticity, on the other hand, is acting in ways contrary to one's beliefs and values. Why do people act inauthentically at times and authentically at other times? Social psychology points to the role of social pressures, cultural norms, and specific contexts which all play a major part in influencing people's actions.

Our identity, or who we believe we are or should be, is a strong indicator of our predilections for certain types of action. Identity has many different aspects which are influenced by our social roles. While our personal identity relates to our morals and values, the identities we hold in social situations reflect the expectations of how we should "be" in certain situations, or the role we are expected to play. For example, we have roles related to our family (i.e., father, sister, aunt) and roles related to work contexts (i.e., boss, leader, follower, manager, coach), among others. The values and behaviors we hold in relation to these different identities vary over time and can be heavily influenced by the specific contexts in which we are called to act. Additionally, both our own and others' expectations for our role as a leader may change over time. Often, these shifts in expectations are dependent on both the internal and external situation and other individuals involved.

These role identities are shaped by our experiences, cultural knowledge associated with the role, as well as interacting with others while in this role. For example, our understanding of what it means to be a leader has been informed by our experiences with leaders in our earlier careers, popular views of leadership, maybe even a class we have taken on leadership. Over time, we have incorporated certain aspects of our understanding of "leadership" into how we act as a "leader." However, our social identities are continually in a state of flux, constantly being influenced by new and changing information.

As the qualities or properties of our identities change, so does what it means to be authentic. If authenticity reflects an adherence to our identity and the underlying characteristics associated with specific role identities change, our "authentic" behavior will change as well. For example, a new employee may enter the organization with great enthusiasm for performing his/her role; she may personally value a strong work ethic and possess a certain drive to perform. But

what happens when the environment he enters is populated by apathetic, indifferent and even uncivil staff members who just work to get the job done? If the person remains with the organization, the eventual role identity taken on by the new employee will match the current characteristics of the organizational environment and its cultural norms. So her authentic behavior in this new situation will match her role identity characteristics, values and norms, which may be distinctly different than those she holds in her personal identity and follow in other contexts (such as how she acts in her family roles).

In organizational contexts, the role identities we incorporate into our social identity reflect the expectations, norms and values associated with the context and is often labeled as an organizational identity. For example, if leaders in the organization emphasize—through rhetoric, e.g., organizational mission statement, values, credos or even processes and procedures—the importance of specific behaviors related to ethics, an organizational member will identify those values and behaviors as being part of his organizational identity, or how he is expected to "be" within the work environment. This, in turn, impacts the significance of elements of his social identity tied to the organization.

An organization's culture helps to shape the organizational identity by providing consistent messages related to behavioral expectations. In fact, a great deal of individual and group behaviors can be explained by the norms and expectations that are part of an organization's culture. However, it is a leader who is often looked to as a model of how to successfully exist and develop an organizational identity using these cultural norms and expectations.

The various components and salience of different elements related to an identity can shift over time, depending on the messages being received. For example, in order to instill a strong customer service oriented culture, an organization can expect individuals at any level to be proactive in understanding and solving customer needs. At Zappos.com, leaders understand that the people who are actually leading the relationship development process with their customers are their front-line employees. Thus, each new hire is expected to spend at least three or four weeks in the call center, learning about how to effectively serve customers. After a few weeks in the call center, each employee is offered around $3,000 to leave the company. Zappos.com figures if people haven't learned about the culture, and if they do not feel committed to the organizational goals, it is better for them to leave.

If and when leaders stress ethical and moral aspects of behavior within the organizational context, those elements of a social identity as it relates to organizational success within a culture become more salient, allowing employees to quantify their own social and moral identity within the environment in which they work. Effectively, the contextual culture as modeled by the leader becomes a set of moral boundaries, limiting or enabling behaviors and decision-making processes. Conversely, if ethical aspects of behavior are never discussed, the moral identity and values structure may not be salient in the situation, leading to a neglect of ethical issues in the organizational context.

As we have discussed, authenticity related to identity is malleable depending on the roles an individual plays as well as the social context. There are two ways organizational contexts can influence social identity: the salience of certain

elements of identities and the actual qualities of the social identity tied to a person's role at work. These are key to understanding how leaders can develop and maintain authentically responsible versus authentically irresponsible organizations.

RESPONSIBILITY VS. IRRESPONSIBILITY

Our interest in leaders and their behavior is not new—Aristotle and Lao Tzu were offering advice before any of our modern countries or organizations were even a dream. And, if we look back at history and through to modern times, we can easily see that some leaders were just bad, and some were (at least to our eyes) unfailingly good. However, there are really very few in both categories—most leaders fall somewhere in the middle—and we typically sort them based on their positive or negative actions. It is human nature to categorize people as good or bad, responsible or irresponsible, as it provides a way to compare ourselves to others and evaluate actions; but we would argue that it is a more valuable exercise to understand why leaders act in certain ways within the specific context of the situation in order to more fully understand responsible and irresponsible behavior.

First of all, it makes sense for us to provide a definition for the concept of responsible leadership. Responsible leadership reflects a certain level of care and concern for others, taking into consideration the impact of decisions on others, both inside and outside of the organization. Leaders who take responsible actions are influenced by a sense of accountability toward others, revealing an other-regarding orientation as a central value. Responsibility reflects an understanding of the interconnected nature of society— the potential for impacting others by our actions, either positively or negatively. There is also a notion of ethicality implicit in responsibility. We can include a sense of morality in our notion of responsibility. A person's moral identity (or how they see themselves as a moral person) contributes to their overall understanding of what it means to be responsible. Most people have multiple personal codes that govern different aspects of their lives, making it possible for them to act responsibly in some situations and not in others. As an example, a person might adhere to a religious code, adhering to the obligations as set forth by that religion, but they might be entirely irresponsible when engaging in their normal business transaction or activities. Within a context that the person sees as being religious in nature, his or her understanding of morally and ethically acceptable behavior may be different than within a business-oriented context, which has a different set of ethical codes.

Typically, a person who is responsible in one facet of their life is also generally responsible in others, and vice versa, where his general predilection is that he is consistent with his actions in various types of positive and adverse situations. However, there are also those who, while they articulate a high level of personal morality, are, in fact, only half-heartedly controlled by their moral codes, thus habitually acting irresponsibly through their demonstrated behaviors and actions. This has been linked to the notion of centrality of a person's moral identity. Some individuals prioritize moral and ethical values as an important part of their personal and social identities, leading to a more consistent behavioral pattern related to ethical and moral issues. Other individuals have a less centralized moral identity, meaning that moral and ethical issues are not necessarily a main driver of their behaviors, but may be an afterthought, unless the ethical nature of the situation is made more relevant within the context.

"I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts."
— John Locke

We tend to think of a leader's actions in black and white terms... as good or bad, responsible or irresponsible. But often, the world is gray and leaders are regularly called upon to determine what shade of gray will serve them or the organization best. These actions, whether positive or negative, can also be characterized as responsible or irresponsible depending on the viewpoint of the person reviewing them. Classifying individual actions as one or the other—responsible or irresponsible—allows us to assign culpability in a more specific way to an individual.

In some instances, the failure to act causes the decision to ultimately be irresponsible. The decision to not do something can be as harmful—one only has to look at the recent scandal surrounding the Penn State University football program under the leadership of the legendary Joe Paterno. An independent investigation found that Coach Paterno, Athletic Director Tim Curley, University President Graham Spanier, and University Vice President Gary Schultz had known about the allegations of child sexual abuse against Assistant Coach Jerry Sandusky as early as 1998. In not taking appropriate actions and reporting the alleged abuse, the leaders at the university revealed a lack of responsibility toward the welfare of Sandusky's victims, the University, their players and their own role as leaders. This seems antithetical to the organizational identity associated with the Penn State football organization. Paterno was known for his strong leadership style and commitment to the performance of his players both on and off of the field, stressing the importance of blending athletics and academics, creating a program with higher graduation rates than the average Division I teams. While his leadership within the football program reveals a sense of responsibility, his actions related to the scandal reveal a darker side. Could it have been that a responsibility to the University overrode a sense of responsibility to the victims?

While this is an extreme example of the perplexing complexities of leader behavior, we can observe parallels in our daily lives when assessing whether we consciously opted to not take a stand on an organizational or personal issue, even when we knew we should. For example, when we see people at work being bullied by a person with stronger positional power, or when decisions are made to use lower quality (and perhaps), less safe construction materials in order to save money, or the temptation to use non-organic ingredients when we run out of our normal inputs—even though our mantra is that our products are organic.

What about the scenario where acting responsibly costs more? Upon further reflection, it becomes obvious that we can all think of examples where doing the right thing was more expensive—directly or indirectly—often without being about to truly calculate the cost (either financial or some other costly consequence). It is not an outlandish assertion to

say that sometimes, an act that is perceived as irresponsible by one group of organizational stakeholders might yield an economic return that is viewed as eminently responsible by another group of stakeholders and/or shareholders and vice versa. It is complicated and not unusual for our personal moral codes to come in conflict with the realities of external expectations for situational performance. In relation to the Penn State scandal, could the pressure to cover up the situation for the good of the University have contributed to the decisions made by the various actors involved, which ultimately led to a costly (both financially and socially) outcome? Socially, the damage to the individual victims and their families was devastating and financially, the damage to the University football program, fundraising, legal costs, as well as other less obvious costs was substantial and long lasting.

IS IT OUR HUMAN NATURE TO BE IRRESPONSIBLE OR DO WE JUST THINK IT IS?

Despite the apparent increasing occurrence of leadership scandals, supporting the timeliness of our question regarding whether "authentic irresponsibility" is emerging as a new leadership paradigm, some historical views have suggested otherwise. For example, researchers have long argued that altruism may be a natural part of human nature apart from "selfish" motives. Even recent research on infants has revealed that a capacity at a very early age for recognizing and preferring aspects of right over wrong—such as choosing supportive and caring behavior over uncaring behavior that hinders others—may be biological, unlearned and universal from birth as part of human nature.

So often when we talk about leaders and responsibility we neglect to link the unavoidable dependence of individual action and outcome to the interaction between a person's motives, values, expediency, choices and her understanding of customary conduct in the situation. There is a general tendency toward attribution bias in evaluating actions of others. We tend to attribute others' actions to dispositional factors (who they are as a person) while we focus on the situational factors when explaining our own behavior. For example, if we see someone trip while walking down the hallway, we assume he is clumsy; but, if we trip, we look for the flaw in the floor. But when we do not make the connection that a person's actions are influenced by the situation, we allow for the easy vilification of an individual and miss the systemic or contextual issues that may be influencing responsibility. It is easy to point to someone who has acted irresponsibly and identify her as an irresponsible or bad person, reinforcing the notion that it is human nature to be irresponsible. However, the factors contributing to the irresponsible behavior are more complex.

When we think about the actions of leaders and judge the responsibility or irresponsibility, we tend to look at the specific behavior and outcome, attributing the actions to the fundamental nature of the person, minimizing the importance of the situation. By attributing the behavior solely to the nature of the person, we miss the complexities of context that has just as much influence on leader behavior. If you were to question your inclination toward being responsible versus being irresponsible, you most likely would point to situational variables and not to your actual nature. But asking

the question on a more general level, especially in a business environment, tends to trigger the bias toward a person's nature as being irresponsible.

If we consider responsibility to be driven by our ethical and moral identity, how the situation influences that identity, either through making it salient or actually changing the qualities of that identity related to the role, is a critical component in understanding responsibility and irresponsibility. Leaders play an important part in developing the qualities associated with being an organizational member, or the organizational identity.

According to Tom Davin, the chief executive officer (CEO) of 5.11 Tactical, who in just over four years has taken a small clothing company with around $30 million per year in sales to a global company with sales well over $250 million, irresponsibility occurs when people are not true to the values that are part of their social contract. Their behavior is not consistent with the expectations that are part of this implicit agreement, either at their work or their own moral code. The fact is, most of the people who are irresponsible, really don't know what their moral code is, other than it is based on expediency—the path of least resistance.

> "Look, I'd love for you to model some of my behaviors, but be yourself, not a copy of me." — Tom Davin

Authentic irresponsibility is possible when being irresponsible becomes a part of the organizational identity. For example, in the years before the financial crisis of 2008, there was a fundamental shift in the mortgage industry. It had became normal for mortgage lenders to approve loans with little to no supporting documentation required related to the borrowers' ability to repay the principal and interest. Within the industry, this represented a 180° change; previously, underwriters were accustomed to requesting copies of pay stubs, W-2s, bank statements and more in order to assess the risk of the loan, but once the loan originator was no longer concerned about the level of risk, underwriters were instructed not to worry about the documentation. Once the mortgages had been funded, they were bundled and sold off as mortgage backed securities, so the original lenders took no risk for these loans. However, the institutions purchasing the securities assumed that the borrowers who owed on the individual mortgages had met a basic level of financial standards that were in place requiring documentation of ability to fulfill the terms of a loan repayment and had no knowledge of the relaxed standards. Members of the specific department responsible for verifying income and assets of the borrowers experienced a change in their expected behavior, creating an organizational identity which stressed irresponsibility.

For some, this created a moral dilemma. The underwriters who once were expected to minimize risk were now instructed to ignore them as those risks were being passed onto other institutions. The moral dilemma might have created more uneasiness for individuals with higher moral centrality. It is important for us to consider our moral nature, or character, and the relation our morality has with personal and professional responsibility. Morals are the inner forces or inclinations that amplify, control, modify or inhibit our behaviors, actions, impulses, or desires. Moral identity can be a more or less central aspect of a person's identity. A person whose moral identity is central to their overall idea of

self will typically use those internal guidelines to choose the behaviors and actions that will most consistently reflect his or her personally held standards, regardless of the situation or context. If a person's moral identity is less central to his identity, the result is a person who doesn't necessarily see the ethical or moral issues easily within the situation.

Once we begin to observe the differences between a person's moral position and her actions, we can also note that there are some codes that many people have in common based on laws, culture, citizenship, or religion. Since these codes are usually also quite public in their nature, they tend to become self-perpetuating—by their very nature they imprint themselves as the general guidelines that define responsibility and irresponsibility.

However, this is when it gets interesting. Often, those who most loudly espouse some lofty morals and their adherence to the common codes, are those who when, faced with a difficult decision or action, take the more irresponsible path. A great example of someone who does this quite well is Nigeria's President, Goodluck Jonathon. He won election by pledging to fight the endemic corruption that is embedded in almost every aspect of Nigeria government and society. Yet, in the years following his election, Nigeria's perceived level of corruption (as measured by Transparency International) has remained stable—no improvement. President Jonathon, even as his people continue to call for an end to nepotism, approved the appointment of his own wife as permanent secretary of Bayelea State, even as many people questioned her qualifications for administration at such a senior level.

So too, does it become more difficult or blurry when a person has many, sometimes competing, moral codes. To illustrate, how does a person balance family, parental, civic and organizational responsibilities when one of these important constituents requires a decision that potentially requires one set of responsibilities to supersede and even possibly harm another? We can return to the example of Joe Paterno to look at competing interests. It is possible that he prioritized responsibility to the university and the team over a responsibility to protecting potential victims. Perhaps his perception was that if he pushed the issue of child abuse, losing a coach would damage the team that he so loved or that the university would be harmed by the resulting scandal. We will never actually know, of course, what influenced him to take the action, or non action, that he did, but we will forever use him as an example of someone who did not act when needed. In the eyes of many, all of his other good has effectively been canceled out.

Leaders are faced with many different stakeholders who have varying expectations regarding their priorities, and balancing those priorities can involve competing moral and ethical issues. People are complicated, and their moral structures are reflective of that fact. As well, many organizational or personal decisions also appear to be inescapably complex and unrelentingly full of a myriad of variables that need to be taken into account before making a decision. This simple fact of this inevitable complication leads to the reality of both responsibility and irresponsibility in those who are our leaders. They are plagued by dilemmas that chip away at their general sense of responsibility, particularly as they become more and more frustrated with the perceived complexity of their responsibility to themselves and/or those

around them. What ends up happening is that they sometimes make poor (irresponsible) decisions out of a simple desire for expediency—driven by lack of knowledge, time constraints, external or even irrelevant factors, or other real or seeming pressures.

ADVICE FOR LEADERS

It is well established that organizational leaders play an important role in creating and maintaining various features of an organizational identity that organizational members integrate into their sense of who they are, influencing their behaviors within the organization. This also bears out in anecdotal evidence, for example:

> "*I think the key to leadership responsibility may be for leaders to explicitly recognize the critical role they play in forming culture, and in establishing structure. Leaders establish the behavior of everyone in the organization, and they should not be surprised when their messages replace behavioral norms that people may have had beforehand.*" — Eric Ball, Controller at Oracle

All leaders do possess some form of moral code that governs what they do and *how they do it*, even if that means that they do bad things. As they continue to rise in an organization (any type of organization) they must also be governed, at least ostensibly, by some additional codes of the organization. These organizational codes are accrued from many sources: regulatory, cultural, and other intangible forces that, while not as obvious as a law, or rule, are no less of a factor in determining behavior or activity based norms.

Knowing this, we should look at some examples of people and organizations whose behavior/actions can illustrate the concepts we share. Our primary example is Tom Davin, CEO of 5.11 Tactical. When asked about leadership, responsibility and authenticity, he emphasized the importance of modeling expected behaviors, reinforcing exemplary practices, and the importance of the social contract of responsibilities. He talks about how:

> As leaders, we hope that people will want to model our behaviors. The fact is, we do not have to worry about whether or not people will mimic our actions—there is plenty of research that supports the fact that people will model their behavior and actions on those of their leader. So it is not as much a matter of figuring out how to get them to follow us, it is much more. . . what do we actually want them to follow? What are the things that we want *them* to do—and that we have to do first?

> This is why there are no reserved parking spots at 5.11. If there is trash in the parking lot or on the sidewalk by the building, I will pick it up. If there is something that needs care at the front of the building, instead of waiting for someone else to do it, I do it, from straightening how the flag is flying to cleaning dishes in the kitchen. People mimic behavior, and I want people to see that I firmly believe that we all are willing to do the real work of building a great company.

Tom also believes that it is important for people to care about the many small details that contribute to a sense of mission and purpose. He suggests that a good way to achieve this is by demonstrating an attitude of less judgment and of leading by example. This is a very simple thing; really, since he doesn't feel like he can expect people to care about keeping things clean, or working hard, especially if they don't see him doing the same thing. It's a simple matter of him modeling behaviors that are valuable for the ultimate success of their work at 5.11. He explains:

> Try "hero-izing" the people who are already doing things that are consistent with the culture you want to extend to the rest of the company or group. I learned that if you wanted to find the gaps, the opportunities for performance and innovation, you should actively look for and then call out the people who are doing things that you want to amplify and replicate. This works well because it gives people something concrete to follow rather than only a (nebulous) theoretical idea. Then they can build on that success in their own way. It is about providing a framework for people, and then telling them to build.

> A lot of behaviors can be trained, or reinforced by activities. But sometimes, just sitting quietly by yourself and just thinking about what works and what does not, helps. It's different for everyone, but I know that my job as a leader is to consistently model the behaviors I want others to follow. I think of responsibility as the implied or explicit social contract to care. At work, we know we are supposed to care about results—getting things done, including our financial results. But I also believe that we are called on to care about our world at large in a more active way than what we might typically see demonstrated. Our social contract needs to be broader and be aligned with the values we *say we have*.

Two pieces of advice: make ethics salient in all things, knowing that each decision and interaction will impact not just the person making that decision, but also those around them. Thus, keeping a strong focus on influencing and clearly communicating with those individuals with lower moral identity centrality—people who are more easily swayed or who feel, for various reasons, that they are less able to stand up for a moral cause or who perceive themselves as more vulnerable to influence. Second, make responsibility a key characteristic of organizational identity. Find specific and simple ways to delineate how responsibility is expected and will be rewarded. Focus on linking responsible behaviors with the articulated culture and mission of the organization, and communicate clearly how actions are part of what it means to be a productive member of the organization. Finally, focus on eliminating instances of poor or uncivil behavior. Unkindness, intolerance, rudeness, knowledge hoarding and other general examples of bad behavior as exhibited by a leader will only translate into lower levels of productivity and poor organizational citizenship.

Story — a manipulating CEO:
The + that turns into a —
by Tom Davin, CEO, 5.11 Tactical

I've been fortunate to work in general management for the past 20 years, holding positions from Regional Vice President to CEO and Chairman. Along the way I've worked for many talented leaders and some who had tremendous capabilities offset by significant emotional challenges. I worked for one CEO who was an inspirational speaker and teacher. He was able to "inspire the troops" as well as anyone I've worked for in business or the military. He had brilliant ideas and great energy. I learned many things from working for this leader. On the other hand I committed that I would never make people feel the way he made me feel; that I had to change who I was to truly be on his team

I felt this CEO needed people to not just affirm him but to model themselves to be like him. He didn't seem to like dissent among his senior leaders. He'd ask for debate and diverse points of view but he become upset if his idea wasn't what the team recommended. He talked openly about "bringing people along" but in fact, my experience is more that he brings people along until they show true independence and then moves on without them.

This seemed to be a curious emotional issue for someone so talented and successful. I believe the people who worked best with this leader acted like they were debating him, but ultimately went along with his ideas. Ultimately this company has been successful, but it hasn't produced a deep bench of leaders.

This experience is one of the key reasons why I do my best to explain to people on my teams that I want them to share our purpose and values, to embrace our culture, but not attempt to "fit in" or be like me. I want them to be who they are. In fact my goal is for 5.11 Tactical, or any other business, to help people actually discover and express their best self as part of pursing the mission of the company.

"My goal is to create and lead an environment where people embrace the culture, not where they try to fit into the culture. This means that they are excited about the traits that the culture stands for, and they don't actually have to make an effort to change who they are in order to feel like they are part of the culture."

CONCLUSION

There are always going to be more things to say about the concepts of authenticity and responsibility and their

relationship to how leaders behave. A hundred years from now, it is likely we will be examining our leaders' actions and wondering why they are not more authentic and responsible. In large part, we can lay the blame, for good or bad, at the feet of our personalities and our nature as humans. We all fail at times.

However, our possibility for growth and evolution lies in our human ability for cognition—our ability to decide to take one path or another. We can decide to espouse a set of moral codes that meet or exceed our societal standards and then we can also decide whether or not we actually will behave in alignment with those codes. Or, we can just say we will do something and then go in a different direction. That is not uncommon.

As we can see, our examples focus on the effect that leaders' behavior has on their followers. This is because they both have a clear understanding that their actions, not just their words, really do influence how others behave. They know that the Emerson quote: "Your actions speak so loudly, I can't hear what you are saying" is a simple, yet powerful summary of the disconnect that leaders have between their words and actions. For some reason, it seems that leaders, to everyone's detriment, forget this connection.

We strongly encourage leaders to remember that their words, particularly the things that they say about responsibility, ethics and values, should also be reflected in their actions and behaviors. This is the essence of authenticity. One of the most valuable pieces of advice someone ever passed along was that learning to lead from a boss or other person was just as much about learning "what *not* to do" as much as "what *to* do." Seeing someone act irresponsibly or inauthentically and mimicking them is a choice, and holding them responsible for their behavior is all of our responsibilities.

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