**Moral Leadership**

1

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on July 31, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

As I strolled by my Agriscience classroom one Monday morning, my teacher, Mr. John Altizer, asked me to step into his office. Confused, I obliged and watched Mr. Altizer lean back in his chair. “Barrett, I heard you broke a rule today,” he said in his deep Southern drawl.  My stomach dropped and my mind began to race through my every action. In my feeble thirteen year old voice, I whispered, “I can’t think of anything, Mr. Altizer. Well, the principal did ask me to spit out my gum this morning. But that’s no big deal.”

“No big deal?” he replied sternly. “Barrett, if you are an officer in my FFA chapter. You need to understand that if you are going to be a leader, every single choice you make, good or bad, big or small gives permission to others to do the same.”

“Yes sir, I’m sorry,” I said meekly. At the same time I thought, “this dude needs to calm down! I mean, what is the big deal? It was a piece of gum!” It was not until two years later, when I began to notice my beautiful little sister making the same poor decisions I was making, that I understood the challenge.

Many of us live extremely busy lives. It is precisely at the chaotic, time-pressured moments that it is most difficult to display consistent moral leadership7. So, let’s examine the impact of moral leadership and chat about how we can continue to develop as a moral leaders.

**What’s the big deal?**

A reverend once posed the following question to a group of children: “If all the good people in the world were red and all the bad people were green, what color would you be?” One little girl thought for a long time. Then her face brightened as she exclaimed, “Reverend, I’d be streaky”4. Unfortunately, each of us can relate to this little girl in that the role model we desire to be is not **always** the person we are. The incongruity of a leader’s words and deeds has profound costs on those around us and the organizations we help lead as it renders leaders untrustworthy and destroys their credibility10. What defines moral behavior is a steadfast conviction to do right regardless of whether it is personally beneficial9. Moral leadership is critical because without credibility, we have little to no influence. Little to no influence leads to little to no leadership. In fact, Kouzes and Posner describe credibility as “the foundation of leadership”3.

**How can I grow?**

Jim Collins describes “Level 5 Leaders” in his book *Good to Great.* Collins revealed these leaders possessed a unique combination of humility and tenacity. Moral leadership requires an appreciation for the tremendous influence that forces beyond our awareness may be exerting on our behavior. Simultaneously, moral leadership calls for a sense of one’s capacity and need to exercise conscious control over one’s choices and behavior. Keeping both the impossibility of perfection and the consequence of moral leadership in mind can help you rise above indiscernible, corrupting influences in your life, on the one hand, and make tough choices, on the other7.

Pastor Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle advises his congregation to “wake up each morning with the understanding that you have the potential to be an absolute fool today.” Unfortunately, each of us will fall well short of perfection. There are forces, some at a subconscious level, which can easily undermine your moral leadership. One such force is cognitive dissonance2. Whenever our actions and principles disagree with each other in a way that threatens our self-image as a “good person,” an inner tension known as dissonance develops. We possess a fundamental drive to reduce dissonance. How can we lessen the strain? Since we cannot change your past conduct, we (often unconsciously) change our beliefs. Hundreds of experiments over a period of fifty years confirm the reality and potentially negative impact of cognitive dissonance6. Understanding this human tendency, Benjamin Franklin stated, “tis easier to suppress the first desire, than to satisfy all that follow it.”

Establish guardrails in your life – things you will not do or participate in; so you and those you serve will not suffer as you crash and burn. Share these commitments with friends and family. Being explicit about what you believe and value, makes it much easier for others to hold you accountable and offer encouragement5.Another often hidden challenge to moral leadership is the self-serving bias, that is, the tendency for people to seize credit for successes and shirk responsibility for failures8. Be purposeful in taking a little more responsibility and a little less credit. Finally, when you do mess up, allow humility to dominate your approach to conversations that are sure to follow. Be honest, contrite, and fight against the tendency to get defensive.

What is one area in your life and subsequently, your leadership, which you know could stand to change? I issue the same challenge to you that Mr. Altizer shared with me: every decision you make, good or bad, big or small, gives your others permission to do the same. Embrace this opportunity to foster growth in the lives of others by earning your credibility and thus influence. Remember, credibility is the foundation of leadership. Your commitment to serving others through humility and the tenacity needed to consistently make the right decision will be a key factor in determining the level of your credibility and impact.

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2

# Get Your Mind Right! The impact of mindset on leadership

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on July 31, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

It was a sultry summer day at the University of Florida. The sun was beating down on my sweaty and (even then) growing forehead.  I reluctantly scanned the student numbers to locate my final grade for chemistry.  The sweat on my brow was as much from worry as it was from the heat waves dancing like the buzzards fluttering in my stomach. As my eyes moved grudgingly to my grade, the buzzards seemed to crash in the pit of my stomach as quickly as my hopes of graduating on time.

I walked to the nearest bench and buried my head in my hands. I had not only failed chemistry, I flunked it even after CHEATING off my friend’s test earlier in the semester.  I was not only an idiot who could not understand chemistry if my sweet mother’s life depended on it. I was an idiot without integrity. I sobbed unashamedly for ten minutes as other weary students trudged past.  Since then, I have been convinced of my inability to understand chemistry. It was not until seven years later–that I understood my fear of chemistry was founded more in my mindset than my actual ability.

One question about leadership that has been asked over and over is “Are leaders born or made?” The general consensus seems to be a resounding “Yes!” Our genes and our experiences both matter, but most leadership “experts” tend to lean towards believing nurture is more important than nature. Bruce Avolio, one of the current giants in leadership, “firmly believes” leadership is 70% developed by experience and 30% determined by our genetic traits and tendencies1. Believing that our traits, abilities, skills, etc. are not fixed has been found to significantly impact overcoming shyness4, academic achievement and enjoyment in learning2**,** as well as effective responses to setbacks9**,** depression3, and difficulties in our relationships5. Also, developing a deep belief that we can grow through new experiences, especially those that hurt, can wreak havoc on our insecurities, our defensiveness, and even cockiness.  Following failure, the chief focus of people with growth mindsets is often the invigorating process of determining how to bring about improvement and growth3. When individuals with fixed mindsets experience failure or setbacks the natural reaction is to attempt to lessen the significance of this failure, working through the negative emotional impact, and finding something or someone to blame4.

Through experience, reflection, and feedback one can develop some clarity on your areas of strength and weakness. Hopefully, you have a pretty good idea where you are strong and where you are weak.  Of course growth will come much quicker and be more enjoyable in those areas where you are already strong. However, Carol Dweck at Stanford and Bob Kegan and Lisa Lahey at Harvard5 have proven over the past few decades that people, even older adults, have the tremendous capacity to significantly change and grow.

As leaders, our mindsets tend to overflow into the lives and our perspectives of people we serve, which facilitates similar mindsets within them as well.  One specific approach to encourage the development of continuous mindsets within those we serve is to praise others for their effort and strategies, instead of their traits, skills, or abilities. Students that were consistently praised for their skills and abilities developed fixed mindsets and struggled with low self-esteem, lessened enjoyment in their work, and lower performance when challenges appeared8. So, when you are offering words of encouragement through Facebook, email, an old-school card, or in person, highlight the effort, the persistence, the willingness to serve, etc., but stay away from directing your praise at specific traits and abilities, unless it is to point out an area of potential growth and impact within that student.

Especially if you find yourself debating the importance of fixed and growth mindsets, pause and give some serious thought to two skills, traits, abilities, or habits in your life for which you have developed a fixed mindset instead of a growth mindset.  How has having a fixed mindset in these areas held you back? How has this limited your effectiveness as a leader?

To explore how you can develop continuous mindsets in your life and those you serve moving forward check out Carol Dweck’s book: *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*4*.*

3

**Leading with Purpose and Passion**

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on July 31, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

One day while in his seventh grade history class, 12 year-old Zachary Hunter learned of his impending doom. The time of the year for “projects and presentations” had arrived. For Zachary, a nervous, introverted 12 year old, the thought of even speaking in class — not to mention speaking **to** his class — brought about as much excitement as having his struggles with an occasionally squeaky transitional voice follow him throughout adulthood.

Zachary was assigned the issue of slavery. With his hands, heart, and stomach trembling Zach began formulating a plan. He would look back throughout history to the first known slaves all the way to when slavery was officially outlawed in the United States in 1865. Zachary was stunned and distraught when he discovered slavery still exists today. In fact, it is rampant and seemingly growing through much of the world. Zach learned that almost 30 million people like you and I are still enslaved!

While several children in Zach’s class seemed to casually present tragic realities throughout history, something different happened within Zach. An anger about the current realities of slavery took hold of young Zachary’s heart. Incredibly, Zachary channeled this emotion into simple, yet beautiful action. He started a program at his school called “Loose Change to Loosen Chains.”

The program spread throughout his county and then, throughout much of the developed world. Within two years, the same boy that could hardly manage to utter a single word in class was speaking to groups of 20,000. Zach’s program has raised millions of dollars to fund organizations that work to end slavery throughout the world. Before graduating high school last year, Zach published his third book and continues to speak throughout the world — including two speeches at the White House, encouraging young people to identify their own purpose.

One of my favorite analogies in leadership is that we must first clean the inside of the cup, so the outside may be clean also. However, based on my 14 years studying about, attempting to lead, and teaching more than 290,000 people about leadership, I am convinced that many leaders confuse outside attributes such as achievement, ability, and personality with leadership. However, in 1845, Ralph Waldo Emerson identified a source of incredible power left untapped in many of our lives when he wrote the following words in his personal journal, “the eloquent man is he who is no beautiful speaker, but who is inwardly and desperately drunk with a certain belief.”

Bill George in his incredible book *True North*, said “Understanding our role in the world by asking questions like ’What is the meaning and purpose of my life?’ or ’Why am I here?’ is the most personal and profound area of our leadership development.”

Rick Warren begins his incredible book, *Purpose Driven Life* with the words, “It’s not about you. The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions.” Zachary’s life was absolutely transformed by the identification of his purpose, the greatest source of passion in his life.

In a world filled with pain, hurt, insecurity, and oppression, we unfortunately have incredible freedom regarding which ways we serve and lead moving forward. You are here on this earth for something much greater than attaining a particular title or level of status or esteem, being CEO of a major company, or having complete awareness of self. You were created to be a man or woman of deep and abiding impact!

Irish playwright and co-founder of the prestigious London School of Economics shared profound wisdom for developing when he penned the words: “This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”

When we do not clarify a sense of purpose, we are at the mercy of our circumstances to guide us they may. Rick Warren says that without a purpose, we are driven by the need for approval, guilt, materialism, resentment, anger, or fear. Undoubtedly, leaders throughout history have struggled with finding our very self-worth in the approval of others. Identifying and pursuing our purpose can help free us of that need and the insecurities that are fostered and can dictate much of our decisions as “leaders.”

More than additional training in speaking, building relationships, or leading teams, identifying an area or issue through which you can begin serving will allow your leadership to form and extend from “inside the cup.” The Book of Matthew says that self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, to finding yourself, your true self. Whether it is serving your sister, your grandfather, new members in your organization, your nation, widows in a local nursing home, a single mother, at-risk students, childhood abuse victims, sex slaves, or orphaned or abandoned children the gap between interested and committed is filled only by action.

What will you choose today to begin a new journey to impact your family, your community, our country, or our world?

4

**If you could change one thing about yourself…**

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on August 14, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

If you could change, I mean really, actually change and grow in one area, what would that area be?  You have passion to serve others, talents, experiences, and abilities to give.  At the same time, each of us, struggles with selfish tendencies, insecurities, and aspects of our character that are far from 100%.  As leaders, we are ironically both the greatest source of and the obstacle to the impact we have on others.

Perhaps you tend to dominate conversations, are reluctant confront others when needed, procrastinate, or have a highly flammable temper. Or maybe you found you could not relate to any of these struggles, so maybe humility may not be your forte!  We all have areas in which we can and need to grow.  For example, as a young leader, I still wrestled with the remnants of the racial prejudice I was subject to growing up.  Until I understand how I was controlled by racial prejudice and made this reality an object I could make decisions to reject or modify, its control over me was stronger than my control over this horrible beast in my life!

The distance between knowing how we need to change and actually being able to do it is often huge!  The vast majority of the time, personal growth plans or even tearful commitments to loved ones fall short of bringing about actual sustained change.  Harvard Professor, Ronald Heifetz, identified a crucial reason for why our efforts to change are typically more frustrating than fruitful in distinguishing between “technical” and “adaptive” change.  Professor Heifetz said that we usually make “technical changes” by simply changing our behavior instead of digging deeper to change the sources of our behavior – or “adaptive change.”

We learn and practice a new skill at leadership conferences or we change our behavior (ex. Stop being rude, stop talking over people, etc.).  However, unless the deeper issues leading to those behaviors are unearthed and addressed, negative behaviors will continue to pop up regardless of how many “technical changes” we make.  Understanding the difference between technical and adaptive change is relevant for your own growth and for your attempts to lead and those you lead with! When was a time in your life when you tried to change by changing your (or someone else’s) surface behavior?  How was that process for you?  Rather than simply implementing “technical changes”, leadership experts such as Ronald Heifetz, Robert Kegan, and Lisa Lahey suggest that we engage in a much more involved and typically substantially more rewarding process of “adaptive change.”

As you lead, you are (or should be) getting to know those you serve well.  At the same time, they are beginning to get into nitty gritty of who you are as well.  This is both beautiful and challenging.  It is difficult to find the balance between giving each other grace and helping each other grow.  In their book *Immunity to Change*, Kegan and Lahey offer a process called the “Immunity X-Ray” which is designed to foster adaptive change. This process is a tool that can help guide you and those you serve make an “adaptive change” by identifying the underlying sources of the behaviors that are limiting each of your abilities to lead your members. The x-ray guides us in a process of self-reflection to identify and helps us move past the barriers to personal change.

Think of this final section as a brief introduction to making an adaptive (actual) change.  I definitely recommend that you purchase *Immunity to Change.* If you are intere and consider leading those you serve through this incredible process as a team. If you would like for me to provide coaching during this process, please let me know! Most importantly, attempt to fully grasp the depth of the work that often must be done for deep, lasting change to occur.

First, seek feedback (from who? How?) to help you decide what is the “one big thing” in your life that can and should be improved.  Getting this feedback is both difficult and crucial.  Your goal should be important to you, important to others affected by the behavior, and be positive in nature (ex. “I will” instead of “I will stop”).  Next, think deeply about what you are doing or not doing to prevent the goal from being accomplished.  Actually list every actual behavior you are doing that wars against you being able to do what you desire to do as possible.  Be brutally honest, avoid justifying the preventing behaviors, and seek feedback on your new list of limiting behaviors.  Third, write down the concerns associated with doing the opposite of every behavior described in step two.  Fourth, identify the “Big Assumptions” by asking what assumptions a rational person with each of the concerns you listed might hold.  These assumptions are not automatically all true or all false (the correctness of an assumption is often true or false depending on the context).  By identifying and testing your assumptions in diverse situations, you can transform these potential barriers to your growth from into objects to be evaluated and confirmed or thrown out.  The final step involves purposefully testing the big assumptions.  If you struggle with delegating, you may find that your concern that if you don’t do it no one will, may be completely invalid.  This can free you to trust others! Being free from the assumptions that are fostering the concerns that can lead to behaviors that have prevented you from making the change you need to make will liberate you to be able to do what you need to do to grow as a more character-driven, effective leader!

**Being a Transformational Leader**

5

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on August 19, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

“We see all this hype at convention; with months and months of practice and preparation, and members that are determined to win. But my question is this, ‘…Do we practice all this time, put in all this effort to have this be our very best?’ Because if it is…shame on us because the skills that we have learned and developed are not meant for simply bringing home a plaque or walking across the stage! These skills that we learn are for something more…It’s time for us to use these skills and become positive advocates for agriculture!”

With these few words, a friend of mine, Mr. Ken Quick, created an opportunity for transformation within the lives of everyone present. Ken confronted the tendency that is pervasive throughout much of the Western world to confuse leadership with achievement and called for each person to transcend self-interest for the benefit of something larger than ourselves. This shift is at the heart of the approach to leadership featured in the post – transformational leadership.

Since its introduction in the late 1970’s, transformational leadership has been one of the most widely researched and utilized theories in leadership5. Transformational leaders have been developed and studied in military, government, education, manufacturing, technology, church, correctional, hospital, and volunteer organizations. In short, this is an approach to leadership that brilliant minds have promoted and refined for the past 30 years3. Yet somehow, the transformational leadership approach has not found its way into most of the attempts at leadership development in our companies, schools, etc. In this brief post, we will dive into a snapshot of this approach and begin making decisions on how you can become a more transformational leader.

Transformational leaders seek to understand the needs and motives of others and make conscious efforts to assist others in their own development4.  This often leads to higher levels of motivation and morality in both the leader and the participants and increases performance beyond basic expectations (Bass & Avolio, 1990)2.  There are multiple perspectives on and aspects of transformational leadership, but we will focus on four components highlighted by the Full Range of Leadership Model: *Idealized Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualized Consideration*1.

**Components of Transformational Leadership**

Leaders high in *Idealized Influence* tend to relate to and connect with others easily. However, *Idealized Influence* extends well beyond WOO (Winning Others Over) or charisma. These leaders also consistently display integrity, which fosters trust and influence. The late, great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden repeatedly told his teams, “Ability might take you to the top, but only character will keep you there!” An example of this reality is that the impact of Ken Quick’s speech was determined not only through preparation and skill, but by every interaction he ever had with every person in the audience prior and after his inspirational talk – because true impact is found is often find in the depth of relationships fostered over time. The objective is to continue to hone the skills you have gained through life experience and purposeful leadership training to connect with others, while keeping in mind that the basis of your leadership effectiveness is found more in who you are than what you can do.

In the excerpt above, Ken cast a vision specifically directed at the student leaders in the audience.  These students were leaders in the New York FFA Association, a student organization for students in Agriscience classes.  These students are called to more than personal glory; they are encouraged to take a passionate stand for agriculture. Ken described with incredible detail how they are to “honor agricultural opportunities and responsibilities” in a way that resonated deeply with those in the audience. Ken spoke of the impact collective and decisive action could have on their communities and our world. Ken caused a momentary pause in the individualistic culture that permeates our society and raised the leaders’ perspectives to a higher plane. This is the very picture of the second component, *Inspirational Motivation*.

Ken’s speech even tackled the enormous issue of global hunger, but reframed and brought the issue to a more personal level by having every student with a post-it note on the chair in front of them stand up, representing the one in seven American households that doesn’t have enough food to eat. When we choose to lead through *Intellectual Stimulation* we encourage others to be innovative and creative while investigating our current personal and organizational realities in new and critical ways. When we display and facilitate *Intellectual Stimulation* we do not accept things the way they are. We continually investigate potential change and growth opportunities understanding that structural and policy changes can bring about long-lasting and much-needed transformation.  The depth of this mindset attacks the typical selfish tendency for leaders to attempt to simply impress others instead of impacting the systems and lives of those we are blessed to serve.

By having the leaders consider the reality of life for each of the 1.9 billion people in this world literally starving, Ken began facilitating the final component of this approach to transformational leadership, *Individualized Consideration.* This involves purposefully seeking to understand each individual’s needs and desires for growth and achievement. One of the most important elements of effectively coaching and/or mentoring someone is understanding that some participants need more encouragement, some more freedom, others firmer accountability, and still others more direction4.When we treat those we serve as one out of one instead of one in three or three hundred, *Individualized Consideration* becomes a possibility. When we remember and follow-up on aspects of earlier conversations, care more about hearing a another’s life than sharing ours, and write a note of encouragement to a someone we serve who is nervous about a daunting upcoming opportunity, *Individualized Consideration* becomes a reality.

Take a moment to consider the following questions:

* Which of the four components of transformational leadership should I focus on developing over the course of the next couple months to be a more impactful leader?

*- Idealized Influence - Inspirational Motivation - Intellectual Stimulation - Individualized Consideration*

* If you could offer one personal challenge to those you serve and one challenge to your organization – what would those challenges be?

As Ken challenged others to focus more on leadership than personal achievement, the participants experienced not only receiving direction from an inspiring leader but also being empowered to develop into that kind of leader for others4.  In each email, conversation, and personal moral decision you make consider your opportunity and responsibility to transform your organization and those you serve into passionate and effective individuals truly “living to serve.”

**Trust me…It’s Important!!!**

6

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on August 28, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

By definition, trust represents the willingness of a party (trustor) to be vulnerable to the actions of another party (trustee) based on the expectations that the trustee will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control the trustee (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995, p. 712).  In contrast, distrust has been described as a lack of confidence in another party. This lack of confidence can be evidenced by a concern the other may harm the trustor, or the assumption that the other party does not care about one’s welfare or intends to act harmfully (Grovier 1994).

Trust is imperative for several reasons.  When leaders have to continually clarify and validate their choices and behaviors, their level of effectiveness as an organizational manager and leader is significantly weakened (Tyler & Degoey 1996).  Fukujama (1995) described trust as the credit in the bank leaders accumulate and use in when there is not the time to clarify the rationale for their decisions.  Furthermore, during times of conflict, trust is essential in the acceptance of resolution processes and outcomes.  People receive outcomes more approvingly, even if the outcomes are unfavorable when those involved trust the motives and intentions of those leading the process (Tyler 1994).

However desirable trust may be, its development is neither easy nor assured (Arrow, 1974). As Gambetta (1988) noted, invalidating distrust through experience is very problematic because people are hesitant to engage in the social experiments necessary for another to be proven trustworthy because those activities inherently involve vulnerability on behalf of the trustor.  Moreover, perceived breaches of trust have a stronger impact than the positive, accumulating effects of actions that are perceived to be trustworthy (Dijke, De Cremer, & Mayer, 2010).  Also, mistrust may foster behavior that augments the validity of distrust itself. Consequently, what was once merely one’s presumptive distrust can rapidly morph into well-deserved and often prolonged distrust (Kramer, 1999), particularly when multiple parties bring mistrust into the relationship.

Patrick Lencioni’s *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*5 is used in organizations worldwide to build strong teams*.*  The five dysfunctions are inter-dependent and vulnerability to one dysfunction could be potentially lethal to the group’s ability to grow into a cohesive team.  Let’s take a moment to review the five dysfunctions and dive a little deeper into the foundational piece: trust.

The first is an **absence of trust.**  Lencioni defines this dysfunction as an unwillingness to be vulnerable to other team members.  When state officers choose to be open about mistakes and weaknesses, the team can be completely focused on the task at hand instead of being occupied by attempts to look good individually**.**

The second dysfunction is **fear of conflict**.  When officer teams lack trust, they are often severely limited in their ability to engage in the challenging discussions that are inherent in the challenging work of leadership.  Instead, sarcasm and defensiveness fill the void.  It’s what the late leadership expert Bernard Bass referred to as laissez-faire leadership. In other words, acting selfish and not stepping up to do what needs to be done, while frustrations and ineffectiveness run wild!  Business consultant Mary Case reminds her clients, “No pressure, no diamonds.”  Don’t be the idiot who always creates conflict, but don’t be the sissy who will not address it either!

The third dysfunction is **lack of commitment**.  When state officer teams cannot respectfully discuss their preferences and concerns, team members are less likely to buy in and commit once the decision is reached.  Apathy creeps in and replaces the passion and commitment to serve FFA members.  The difference between interested and committed officers is that interested individuals take care of business when the circumstances are right. Being committed means we get the job done with no excuses.  Unleash the beast within you by doing the latter!

When people are not committed to the plan, the team, or the relationship, they are more likely to slip into the fourth dysfunction of teams, which is **avoidance of accountability**.  When state officers are not receptive of accountability in their own lives, they will be less likely to step up to the daunting task of lovingly holding teammates accountable.  Purposeful and effective accountability is essential to leader and team development.  In my own life, I meet with two guys each week that know my values, my hopes, and my faith.  They consciously seek to affirm and encourage me, but I also expect them to say what needs to be said to help me become the man and the leader I hope to become.

[](http://keeneleadership.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Five-Dysfunctions.png)When team members are not encouraged and held accountable by teammates, competing demands, laziness, and selfishness get in the way and lead to the ultimate team dysfunction, **inattention to results.**

As you tell from the diagram, **absence of trust** is the foundational dysfunction. Without trust, the figurative pyramid representing your team’s level of effectiveness is sure to crumble.  According to leading trust experts, trust is when you are willing to be vulnerable to the actions of another person because you expect the other person will perform a particular action that is important to you, even when you do not have the ability to monitor or control the other person6.  When teams are characterized by integrity, commitment, credibility, and trust, there is no need to devote our time and our attention to monitor and evaluate the behavior of others, or be worried about how our every will be interpreted.  Without trust, each teammate will attempt to protect their own interests damaging themselves and the entire team3!

7

**The Spaces Between**

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on September 5, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

After graduating from college, I moved to the vibrant, bustling and astoundingly diverse city of Miami, FL to teach middle school! Since I was starting a new program, 200 middle school students were pulled from the elective courses they had originally signed up for and were stuck in my class. I was the only white male in the school older than 14, and my Southern accent was downright confusing for many of my students, who were 98% Latino/Hispanic.

To make matters even more interesting, within the first month seven fish (including one I accidentally decapitated!) and two birds died and I accidentally poisoned (kind of) an entire class of students by having them add the rock salt to the wrong bag in the extremely uncomplicated “ice-cream in a bag” activity! Despite the challenges we faced, it just worked! We had an incredible year together and more than 80% of the students signed up for a second year of Agriscience.

After the unbelievable experience of teaching middle school in Miami, I accepted a similar position teaching high school in Tampa. Naturally, I quickly begin to employ my now tried and true methods to connect with, inspire, and challenge students. Unfortunately, instead of classes filled with engaged, excited students, my efforts were met with resistance and frustration. It was not until three years later that I fully understood where I went wrong. I incorrectly assumed that what worked for me as a leader in one context would often work in another. I assumed that the impact of my leadership predominantly consisted of my traits, abilities, and behaviors.

The vast majority of accepted theories and approaches to leadership, and consequently, most leadership training have a deep-seated weakness. Leaders all across the world are trained on what to do and how to be, with the assumption that if we develop the right skills and do the right things our attempts to lead will be successful. This approach ignores the reality that leadership is found more in the spaces between people than inside “the leader3.” Leadership expert Dr. Kenneth Blanchard echoes these sentiments by exclaiming leadership is something we do with people, not to them2. Joseph Rost even described leaders and followers as “in the leadership relationship together- two sides of the same coin4.”

In fact, it is space between an event and a person’s reaction to it – the place where others privately make sense of the speech, the conversation, or the leadership conference – is where it actually becomes an event for that person2. One of the greatest mistakes you could make in your efforts to lead others is to treat the people you are fortunate enough to lead as constant, unchanging entities3. How many times have you heard, “The first thing you should do when you…” or “Well, what people really need is…”? Each organization, team, subgroup, and person is wholly distinct. This is why a one size fits all, self-centered approach to leadership is inconsistent at best.

After being fortunate enough to experience extensive leadership training as a young leader and teaching leadership to quite a number people before I began to teach, I honestly (and obviously incorrectly) thought I had a pretty good idea of what I needed to do to lead others in a mighty way. My hope for you is that you will choose to connect with each person you attempt to lead exactly where they are, and focus more on understanding that person or group of people than displaying your skills and abilities.

Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan said, “What the eye sees better, the heart feels more deeply…Seeing better increases our vulnerability to be recruited to the welfare of another. It is our recruitability, as much as our knowledge of what to do once drawn, that makes us of value in our caring for another’s development2.” Focus first on understanding, appreciating, and connecting with people. Focusing on those we serve and the spaces between our actions and the those who internalize our actions in their own way is, instead of just focusing on ourselves, produces increased clarity into those relationships and fosters a better understanding of how we can serve more effectively2.

**Discovering Your Authentic Leadership**

8

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on September 20, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

At 20, I was faced with an incredible opportunity and daunting challenge! I was fortunate enough to be one of six young people who barely knew anything about each other thrust into being a “team” with one of the most intimidating and humbling tasks – to lead an organization of over 500,000 student leaders! We were to travel more than 120,000 miles in one year, meet with corporate leaders throughout the U.S and Japan, speak to more than 100,000 people, and handle the stress with grace and love towards each other! After the dust settled and the enormity of the job serving the National FFA Organization set in, my teammates and I often struggled with inadequacy as we compared ourselves to past leaders and even to our current teammates. I thought about Amber Miller, whose incredible heart and frequent notes of encouragement inspired so many. Chris Vitelli’s ability to speak to large groups, with a level of humor and charisma I could never muster, came to mind as well. Chris and Amber were only two of many past leaders I compared myself to with unfavorable results. It took months to free ourselves from the self-doubt that restrained our level of passion and effectiveness. When we are blessed with opportunities to lead and serve, there is NOT a day to waste. The intent of this short post is to share the highlights of an extraordinary book to assist you in moving past the comparison, insecurity, and felt need to impress others that limit leaders in every context.

While over 1,000 leadership studies have been conducted over the past 50 years focusing on personality traits, styles, abilities, and characteristics, we still have no idea what a clear profile of the ideal leader is…and that is a good thing! While you can certainly learn from other leaders, you will not be truly successful or satisfied by attempting to imitate others. As leaders, we are not called to be anything other than the best possible and most authentic version of exactly who we are. In True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership, Bill George, a former CEO of a major company and a current professor in the Harvard Business School summarizes the five dimensions of authentic leadership:

• Demonstrating self-discipline • Establishing enduring relationships  
• Practicing solid values • Pursuing purpose with passion  
• Leading with heart  
 **Demonstrating self-discipline**

There is little question that self-discipline is an essential element of effective leadership. However, perhaps its most important application is a diligent and purposeful pursuit of your development and growth. When the 75 members of Stanford Graduate School of Business’s Advisory Council were asked to recommend the most important competence for leaders to develop, their answer was almost unanimous: self-awareness. Yet many leaders find themselves struggling with a demanding, sometimes daunting schedule with little time for reflection and balance. You have the capability to impact the lives of those you serve, but authentic leadership involves devoting ourselves to modeling humility and a passion for growth.

The process of becoming an authentic leader is set in motion by making sense of the story of your life. Understanding how the highs, the lows, and the people – both tremendous and despicable – can provide you with insight and inspiration as you embark on an incredible year of service. I encourage you to write down a list of every significant experience in your life along with notes on each incident. I did this during the first three months of the leadership opportunity I mentioned above. This process continues to revolutionize my presentations and conversations. Additionally, it has produced an increased level of clarity concerning the how and why of my life and my approach to leadership.  
 **Practicing solid values and principles**

Think of your role as a leader as a house, with a living room to spend time with those you serve in your work, a game room to chill with friends, a dining room for your family, and your bedroom for your personal life. Take a moment and fully answer the question, “Right now, can you be the exact same person in each room?” Authentic leaders do not show up as one person in one context and another person in the next. They know what they value and have made decisions regarding the principles they stand for. Is there anything in your life you would not feel comfortable being posted to your Facebook wall? If so, remove it from your life and experience the freedom and the long-term impact that is produced by authentic leadership.

**Leading with heart**

Especially in the U.S., we have a tendency to confuse accomplishment with leadership. The typical path to leadership opportunities involves a succession of goal accomplishment and developing social esteem. Achievement-oriented leaders grow so accustomed to successive accomplishments throughout their early years that it takes a certain wisdom and boldness to fully pursue their intrinsic motivations. Authentic leadership calls for a shift from “I” to “We” as we move to focus more on how those we serve feel about their worth and role in the organization rather than how they feel about us.

**Establishing enduring relationships**

Authentic leaders invest time and genuine concern in a purposeful effort to develop trusting relationships based on mutual respect and an authentic expression of self. Also, authentic leaders build extraordinary support teams to help them stay on course. Here are some steps to help you build enduring relationships with coworkers, teammates and mentors:

-Focus on the best aspects of people  
-Be a good listener  
-Seek opportunities to learn from people  
-Share life stories.

Finally, it is crucial to seek opportunities to serve and encourage people. If we are only concerned with what we can gain, our relationships will be short-lived. It is the two-way nature of the bond that sustains it.

**Pursuing purpose with passion**

As a leader, you are blessed and expected to passionately pursue opportunities to develop those your serve as you model the humility and tenacity inherent in personal growth, make the difficult choices involved in standing solid on your values and principles, choose to serve and love others instead of glorifying yourself, and build enduring relationships. While it may be possible to produce short-term outcomes without being authentic, authentic leadership is the only way we know to create the sustainable long-term results those you serve deserve.

9

**Integrity: What is It? Why Does It Matter?**

by [Barrett](http://keeneleadership.com/author/barrett/) on October 19, 2012 in [News](http://keeneleadership.com/category/news/)

How many times do you have to tell the truth to be considered honest?

How many times do you have to tell a lie before you are considered a liar?

Coach Joe Paterno was the face of Penn State University for more than 40 years. “JoePa” personally donated millions of dollars to the university and lived with a humble, passionate life that fostered the adoration of millions. On top of his impeccable reputation, Joe Pa had more coaching victories than any other coach in the history of college football! Nevertheless, Coach Paterno’s influence and successes will forever pale in comparison to the impact of his perceived lack of leadership he displayed in response to horrific accusations against a former employee. We see this all the time: business leaders, athletes, teachers, and politicians who devote years to some pursuit, reach a remarkable level of success, and are thrown down to depths never imagined because of a decision or decisions that utterly destroy their credibility.

Does this scare you? It scares me! When we are completely honest with ourselves, we know that we are far from perfect. We continually make decisions that we are not proud of, fail to follow through on our commitments, and live in ways that are in direct conflict with the very values we say are so important. The reason the combination of the instability of our influence and our own imperfection is of paramount importance is that our credibility is “the foundation of leadership.”1

One aspect of leadership that can substantially impact our ability to build and sustain credibility in the eyes of those we serve is a particular perspective on integrity. Integrity is consistently one of the most often searched words on the Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary website. This might just be because people sense integrity is critical, but they are unsure of what it actually means!4 Ten years ago, I taught about integrity in a really fun workshop entitled, “Becoming an Animal!” The vast majority of emerging leaders I met had absolutely no clue what the word “integrity” meant. Considering the fact that integrity has been described as the most important source of a leader’s credibility1,3 and as the hardest aspect to rebuild once violated5 we need to be very purposeful in modeling and communicating more about integrity with those we are attempting to lead.

In his outstanding book, The Leadership Dividend, Cornell University Professor Tony Simons recommends a perspective he refers to as Behavioral Integrity4. Behavioral integrity is defined as the perception of the alignment over time between leaders’ words (i.e., the values one recommends or the promises one makes) and their actions4. In light of this, there are two questions that we as leaders should continually ask ourselves. “Do I consistently follow through with what I say I am going to do?” and “Is the way I am living consistent with the way I encourage others to live?”

For instance, as leaders we often talk about the importance of caring for and valuing our people. Yet when a person realizes you are way more excited for them to meet you than you are to meet them, your integrity is jeopardized by the incomprehensible but often-present need to convince others that you are in fact intelligent, cool, attractive, and/or talented. It would also be realistic for people to attribute a lower level of credibility to you as a virtuous mentor and role model.

There are a couple challenges we need to keep in mind:  
1. First, people are typically horrible self-evaluators. Making matters worse, we are typically rather gifted in the horrendous talents of justification and rationalization. This is one reason why getting feedback from others is so important! Send me an email at Barrett@KeeneLeadership.com if you would like me to help you get some feedback.  
2. The way your people perceive your level of integrity (both in how well you keep your word and how well you live out the values you and the organization you lead espouse) is both extremely complicated and important. People often possess skeptical opinions of individuals in leadership positions. Often those who may benefit the most from a solid relationship with you as a mentor can make building that very relationship extremely challenging.  
3. There is evidence to suggest the people you serve are much more likely to pay close attention and spot weak spots in your behavioral integrity since you are in a position of leadership, than you are to notice this same reality in them4. Simply put, people will be watching and evaluating not only your actions, but making judgements about your intentions as well. Furthermore, it is crucial to understand that your people will rarely actually mention anything when they notice gaps in your behavioral integrity. They are more likely to let that frustration and disappointment fester. Have you ever noticed an inconsistency in a leader in your life and filed it away for future reference instead of saying something? This is yet another reason why seeking feedback is crucial to your growth, relationships, and impact.

My hope for you is that the motivation guiding your leadership will originate from and continually grow towards a desire to serve and the continuous, challenging, and crucial pursuit of your integrity. This intentional, authentic pursuit of your integrity will build your credibility, which leads to long-term impact as a role model and leader!