
*Welcome to the
School of Senior Leadership Studies*

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC
KEY EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS





AMERICAN UNIVERSITY
WASHINGTON, DC

Fostering a Culture of Candor in Difficult Times

Wednesday Webinar Series 2020

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The Leadership Imperative

“We won’t be able to rebuild trust in institutions until leaders learn how to communicate honestly—and create organizations where that’s the norm.”

James O’Toole & Warren Bennis

O’Toole, J. and Bennis, W., “A Culture of Candor.” Harvard Business Review, June 2009



Essential Dimensions of Authentic Leaders

As Bill George asserts, authentic leaders:

- Understand their purpose
- Practice values
- Lead with heart
- Establish connected relationships
- Demonstrate self-discipline

George, B., *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value* (2003)



Questions of Character

As Joseph Badaracco reminds us: “Leaders are tested, again and again, throughout their careers, and the self-knowledge gained from these tests of character is the heart of leadership...the difference between success and failure is not skill, technique, credentials, networking, or even experience. It is clarity about who one is. This self-knowledge is often the critical factor enabling leaders to do their work, meet their responsibilities, and live rewarding and useful lives.”

Badaracco, J.L., Questions of Character (2006)



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Silence is Complicity

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



No Shame In Having Your Feedback Rejected

“Only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth, and that is not speaking it.”

Naomi Wolf, Political Advisor



Don't Be Guilty of Woulda Coulda Shoulda

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story.”

Maya Angelou, American Poet



Yes-People Are Poison

“I don’t want any yes-men around me. I want everybody to tell me the truth even if it costs them their job.”

Sam Goldwyn, American Film Producer



Nurturing a Culture of Candor

O'Toole & Bennis recommend the following steps to create and nurture transparency:

- Tell the truth
- Encourage people to speak truth to power
- Reward contrarians
- Practice having unpleasant conversations
- Diversify your sources of information
- Admit your mistakes
- Build an organizational architecture that supports candor
- Set information free



Leveraging Emotional Intelligence

- Daniel Goleman defines Emotional Intelligence (EI) as the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationships.
- How we manage ourselves and relationships predicts success in life, work performance & effectiveness as leaders
- But, EI can be a double-edged sword because savvy employees appreciate what makes them vulnerable



Reasons Why Information Flow & Transparency Get Stunted

For better or worse, the following three reasons can be directly or indirectly attributable to EI insights:

- Fear associated with speaking truth to power
- Hoarding information as a source of power
- Protecting sunk cost projects



Tips Leaders Should Consider

- Encourage employees to share information openly and offer candid feedback, as appropriate
- Reach out to all levels of the organization to solicit intelligence
- Accept, and even welcome, troubling information when employees come forward with it
- Reinforce and incentivize candor to surface unpleasant news and information
- Create internal systems designed to ensure good information flows to those who need it
- Make it crystal clear to everyone that they are not interested in “happy talk” and false reassurances



The Leader's Action Logic

“...what differentiates leaders is not so much their philosophy of leadership, their personality, or their style of management. Rather, it's their internal 'action logic'—how they interpret their surroundings and react when their power or safety is challenged. Relatively few leaders, however, try to understand their own action logic, and fewer still have explored the possibility of changing it.”

Rooke, D. & Torbert, R., “Seven Transformations of Leadership.”
Harvard Business Review's 10 Must Reads on Leadership (2011)



Courageous Authenticity

The leader's willingness to take tough stands, bring up the “undiscussables” (risky issues the group avoids discussing), and openly deal with difficult relationship problems.

The Leadership Circle



The Creative Leadership Competencies

- **Relating:** the leader's capability to relate to others in a way that brings out the best in people, groups and organizations
- **Self-Awareness:** the leader's orientation to ongoing professional and personal development, as well as the degree to which inner self-awareness is expressed through high integrity leadership.
- **Authenticity:** the leader's capability to relate to others in an authentic, courageous and high-integrity manner.



The Creative Leadership Competencies

- **Systems Awareness:** the leader's awareness is focused on whole system improvement, productivity, and community welfare.
- **Achieving:** the leader offers visionary, authentic, and high achievement leadership



The Reactive Leadership Styles

- **Complying:** the extent to which a leader gets a sense of self-worth and security by complying with the expectations of others rather than acting on what s/he intends and wants.
- **Protecting:** belief that the leader can protect himself/herself and establish a sense of worth through withdrawal, remaining distant, hidden, aloof, cynical, superior, and/or rational.
- **Controlling:** the extent to which the leader establishes a sense of personal worth through task accomplishment and personal achievement.



The Creative Leadership Competencies

- **Relating:** Caring Connection; Fosters Team Play; Collaborator; Mentoring & Development; Interpersonal Intelligence
- **Self-Awareness:** Selfless Leader; Balance; Composure; Personal Learner
- **Authenticity:** Integrity; Courageous Authenticity
- **Systems Awareness:** Community Concern; Sustainable Productivity; Systems Thinker
- **Achieving:** Strategic Focus; Purposeful & Visionary; Achieves Results; Decisiveness



The Reactive Leadership Styles

- **Complying:** Conservative; Pleasing; Belonging; Passive
- **Protecting:** Arrogance; Critical; Distance
- **Controlling:** Perfect; Driven; Ambition; Autocratic



Leadership Authenticity

“A genuine leader is not a searcher for consensus but a molder of consensus.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Practice Loyal Dissent When You Disagree

- Know your boss
- Provide alternatives to the position you are challenging
- Carefully choose your time to challenge
- Recognize when you have pushed to the limit
- Always remember that you may be wrong, you may even be ideologically biased
- Accept defeat graciously, i.e., don't pout and be a bad sport if your "sage wisdom" doesn't "carry the day"



Practice Loyal Dissent When You Disagree

- Choose your issues carefully
- Do your homework and think it over carefully before you challenge
- Clearly take ownership for your dissent
- Don't personalize the challenge—focus on the issue
- Be objective and balanced in your analysis of the issue
- Don't paint your supervisors into a corner by challenging their judgment in public
- Do not expect radical change in opposing views



Ethical Enablers to Assist You With Your Dissent

You Control:

- Finding allies
- Getting more information
- Understanding stakeholders
- Reframing the problem as opportunity instead of reproach
- How you select/sequence audiences

Organizational Context:

- Organizational policies, values, practices
- Organizational values on ethics, debate and discussion
- Existing mechanisms for open debate and discussion (e.g., dissent channels)



Ethical Enablers to Assist You With Your Dissent

You Control:

- Proceeding incrementally
- Questioning assumptions, rationalizations
- Finding a win-win solution
- Appealing to shared purpose/values
- Using your strengths

Organizational Context:

- Systems for raising questions (e.g., ombudsperson)
- Organizational history of doing the right thing
- Modeling by leaders of ethical behavior



Stephen Carter's Six Criteria for Speaking Truth to Power

- 1) It must be truthful
- 2) It must do no harm to innocents
- 3) It must not be self-interested (the benefits must go to others, or to the organization)
- 4) It must be the product of moral reflection
- 5) The messenger must be willing to pay the price
- 6) It must not be done out of spite or anger



Before Whistleblowing Ask Yourself!

- Is the violation serious enough to warrant the risk of going external to you and the organization?
- Are you fully prepared for the action to become known externally and for your sense of heroism to mutate into perceived betrayal?
- Are you sure of your facts? Are you sure your perceptions are reasonable?
- Are you sure leadership is not already aware and trying to correct the situation?
- Is your motive purely in the public interest?
- Are you ready to accept the consequences if you misperceive the situation and are wrong?



As James Detert (2018) reminds us:

“Most acts of courage don’t come from whistleblowers or organizational martyrs. Instead, they come from respected insiders at all levels who take action—be it campaigning for a risky strategic move, pushing to change an unfair policy, or speaking out against unethical behavior—because they believe it’s the right thing to do. Their reputations and track records enable them to make more headway than those on the margins or outside the organization could...when they manage the process well, they don’t necessarily pay a high price for their actions; indeed, they may see their status rise as they create positive change.”



Courage Is Foundational

“Courage is the first of human qualities because it is the quality which guarantees the others.”

Aristotle



Competently Courageous People

- Learn how to be courageous with effort and practice
- Come from all levels of the organization
- More often than not create positive change without ruining their careers
- Create the right conditions for action by establishing a strong internal reputation and by improving their fallback options in case things go poorly
- Choose their battles carefully



Competently Courageous People

- Discern whether a given opportunity to act makes sense in light of their values, timing, and broader objectives
- Maximize the odds of in-the-moment success by managing the messaging and emotions
- Follow up to preserve relationships and generate commitment



What Do You Want Your Legacy to Be?

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



A Caution To Remember

“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



QUESTIONS?



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