

11-17-2010

3rd Place Essay: Authenticity in Leadership

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Recommended Citation

Smallegan, Victoria, "3rd Place Essay: Authenticity in Leadership" (2010). *Reed Leadership Student Essay Contest Winners*. 1.
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Victoria Smallegan

Authenticity in Leadership

The essence of leadership is authenticity; a leader must display consistent attitudes and actions. This principle applies to both a leader's public and private life. Overarching public opinion, which says that a person's private life does not have anything to do with their public persona, is wrong. Truly effective leaders at all levels are effective simply because they are respected. Any leader's reputation is tarnished if they are revealed to be immoral or inauthentic. Nothing we do in our private life is ever truly private; there is a God who knows everything about us. Shellenberger's quote encompasses the truth about how leadership is all about being authentic.

Since leaders are in a position of trust, they need to be careful to maintain that trust people have placed in them and their word. The best and easiest way to keep a person's trust is to be filled with both integrity and authenticity. Those who trust their leaders do not want to have to worry if the person they first trusted was the real image of the leader. Moral integrity is an important part of that authenticity because in private life it can be really easy for someone's morals to be compromised. The sign of a great leader is a person who refuses to let this happen; instead, they stay true to their word and the values they believe. Leaders who fail to be authentic and morally sound generally deal with a loss of trust and loss of their position as a leader.

Though ludicrous, society's values say that a leader's private life has no bearing on what they do in the public sphere. If this idea were true, it would not be front-page news when a public figure is exposed to be fraudulent in some area of his or her life. Leaders are getting caught in lies and exposed all the time, but the true leader has none of these problems. A leader, who is honest and consistently authentic in all areas of his or her life, is able to spend more time on their

duties as a leader rather than covering up compromises and indiscretions. This makes for more effective leadership and tends to garner even more trust from those around the leader. A person's public image is not immune to the problems in their private life so it is very important for those in leadership to remain true to who they say they are at all times.

Christians who are in positions of leadership should be even more concerned about the necessity of being an authentic leader. Not only could the decisions we make in our private lives put our Christian testimonies on the line, but those choices might displease the One who sees everything. There is never a time in our lives, even when we think we are alone, that God is not aware of our actions and thoughts. Christians who fumble positions of leadership with bad private decisions disappoint and even alienate fellow believers. This is not to say that there is not forgiveness for mistakes, but the integrity of a person's leadership is compromised by bad choices. Because of what Christians know about God, Shellenberger's quote would be more accurate if it said, "A good leader doesn't compromise integrity or character when no one except God is looking." God installs people into positions of leadership and expects leaders to maintain good character.

A true leader feels the necessity of being authentic in every area of life, even those that are private. Double lives cannot be easily hidden, eventually a person slips and is exposed or their behavior catches up with them in a variety of ways; since people want to trust their leaders, effective leadership is difficult from that point on. Maintaining integrity and authenticity on every level is how a leader can keep the trust of others. Poor private decisions are never totally hidden because God is all-seeing; Christians know that God is privy even to our most tightly held secrets. Good leadership equals an effort to stay authentic in both the public and private spheres.