

# Authentic Leadership in Performing Arts

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*OPINION*

2024/01/24

By: Michael Morris



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The purest authentic leadership experience can be found in theatrical or role play contexts. The inspiration for this position came from personal experience writing and directing stage productions for my university Fringe Festival. The event involved student run, low-to-no-budget, theatrical plays and musicals. A more accessible context, for aspiring leaders to practice, is role playing games (RPG) such as Dungeons and Dragons (Lasley, 2022). The theater and role play contexts allow for the rawest form of

authentic leadership for several reasons. The Writer/Director of an imaginative project must be passionate about the intended vision. They must also be intensely self-aware of their own character to build trusting relationships with others. Furthermore, inclusivity of input strengthens the buy-in and experience for participants. Finally, self-discipline is an essential leadership requirement when modeling standards for others to emulate. Live theater and role-playing games offer great forums for aspiring leaders to develop their unique and authentic style.

Leadership in the Fringe Festival was my greatest experience as an authentic leader because I was passionate about artistic expression. Passion and individualized style are essential elements to effectively share big ideas. As the Writer I had total creative control on the source content for my productions. In an RPG, the story is only limited by the players' imaginations. There can be nothing more authentic than a dramatic production of one's own imagining. Leadership in the context of the stage aims to express a relatable idea through the filter of the script and performances. A production is successful when the audience believes or identifies with the content. In the RPG context, shared imaginings are referred to as collective creativity in the theater of the mind (Lasley, 2022). In both circumstances, the leader's vision must be clear in order to be effectively communicated. These creative settings are great opportunities for aspiring leaders to practice shared world building. Imaginative contexts are especially good for developing authentic leadership because there are no constraints on the ideas that might be evoked. Dramatic arts and role playing can express any inspiring story or message.



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Self-awareness and guiding values are also important traits of an authentic leader. These characteristics are the foundations of a trusting relationship. The Performer-Director relationship must be based in trust because actors should be willing step in front of an audience. Players must trust that their Director will coordinate the production coherently. Similarly, success when role-playing hangs on the skill of the lead story teller to predictably shape the parameters of the game. Players return to storytellers that are consistent with their leadership. A reputation of trust emerges for leaders that apply self-awareness and constantly monitor integrity to guiding principles. As a leader in the theater, I endeavored to be transparent about my vision and values as they coloured the intent of the project. The best RPG leaders build believable worlds by insisting that players remain true to their individual ‘calls to adventure.’ Narratives, in any context, are more believable when the characters are true to their backstories. Participants and audiences are more inclined to believe consistent character development. Conversely, plot holes shatter trust in any audience. And so, practicing character growth in RPGs or the

theater is excellent for building self-awareness. Admittedly, these settings are fictional but the learnings available in role play can be applied to real world leadership situations (Lasley, 2022).



Image 3 Generated with midjourneyai.ai

Authentic leadership requires inclusivity to create an atmosphere of respect while simultaneously demonstrating confidence in the guiding vision. In the theatrical world, effective collaboration is required because no two troops are the same. The Director must adapt to the personalities and skills of every ensemble (Knopf, 2017). This was true in my Fringe Festival experience. As the writer, I had a very specific vision, but as the Director I was required to adjust for the available actors. Likewise, role-playing games often include players of varying styles and interests. Participants in these settings are usually creative and appreciate the inclusion of their own ideas. Authentic leadership can use dramatic contexts to practice guiding collaborative improvisation. Inclusion in the creative process improves the experience for participants by reflecting their own ideas in the finished product.



Image 4 Generated with midjourneyai.ai

Finally, self-discipline is an important quality shared by authentic leaders in dramatic settings (George, 2007). The success of a production rests with the Director so this role must aspire to the highest standards. Simply put, the Leader is responsible for the outcomes of the project so they must take interest in all aspects of the endeavor. As a Director myself, I coached and rehearsed every scene with groups or individual players. I coordinated additional assistance for set design and stage management. I was required to sacrifice more effort and time to the production than any other participant. This is also true in the RPG setting. The lead storyteller must be attentive to every interaction between all players. Individuals do not have the same level of involvement as the Leader. A high level of self-discipline is easy for leaders that are genuinely passionate about their projects. Followers are inspired by the authentic leader who enjoys the responsibility inherent to the creative process.

Theatre and role playing games are excellent opportunities to practice authentic leadership. It is easy to become passionate about projects in these contexts because the individualized vision of a production is limited only by the imagination. Collaborative team building is essential to the success of stage productions and role playing. In these situations, leaders can practice their own guiding principles or explore the values and motivations of any number of characters. Anyone seeking to develop leadership qualities should consider joining the local theatre group or try a role playing game with friends.

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