

Authenticity Blended with a Dose of Servant-Leadership

Leadership, especially pertaining to coaching in sports/athletics, is a multifactorial and multidimensional construct. Leadership is a process that involves the "art and science" of influencing others (Murray, Mann & Mead, 2010, p. 107). As with tools in a toolbox, it is important to select the best-fit leadership style/model in consideration of the organization/team and goal/situation. At times, the "leadership model" may even become a blended model such as Chelladurai's multidimensional model of leadership (MML) which considers leadership behavior from three perspectives: coach's behavior, the type of behavior preferred by athletes, and the type of leadership that is best for a given situation (Murray et al., 2010).

However, MML does not directly account for higher-order constructs such as motivation, inspiration, trust, and authenticity (Szedlak, Smith, Day & Greenleses, 2015). Authenticity is vital not only in all human interactions/relationships, but also in leader-follower relationships.

Szedlak et al. (2015) recruited international elite athletes representing a variety of sports who had worked consistently with strength coaches. These elite athletes responded to questions and an interview regarding their experience with a strength coach. From the raw data themes, Szedlak et al. (2015) were able to form categories of first- and second- order themes. First-order themes were: trust and respect; encouragement and support; comforting, caring, and understanding; approachability; sense of humor; optimism; consistency; commitment; balanced; flexible; role model (Szedlak et al., 2015). Second-order themes were: relatedness and closeness; authenticity and sincerity; role model, and relationship (Szedlak et al., 2015).

All the elite athletes agreed that coaching behaviors leading to a stronger relationship (athlete-coach) were fundamental to an effective coach along with closeness, relatedness, approachability, encouragement, support, and understanding (Szedlak et al., 2015). The humor quality helped to build relationships; authenticity and sincerity were rated very important as well (Szedlak et al., 2015). The elite athletes noted the coaches' ability to motivate, inspire, focus on the task, and create meaning in the task (supporting intrinsic motivation). Szedlak et al. (2015) noted that coach was a behavioral process of developing the athletes' fullest potential via authenticity, trust, and closeness.

Szedlak et al. (2015) defined "coaches authenticity" as: "being deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by the athletes, as being aware of their own and the athletes' values/morals perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate and who are confident; hopeful, optimistic, resilient and of high moral character" (p. 977). Szedlak et al. (2015) noted that coaches' authenticity was demonstrated by consistency, commitment, optimism, flexibility and balance. Any meaningful relationship must have the element of trust, and developing authenticity will increase one's trustworthiness. As Murray et al. (2010) noted: "trust is given as a gift" and must be nurtured (p. 124).

While the concept and pursuit of authenticity is noble, Berkovich (2014) presented several issues with the authentic leadership models. The first issue Berkovich (2014) presented was that in authentic leadership theory (ALT), authenticity is an essentialist entity--an innate attribute, having distinct observable features. However, "features" of authenticity are widely

debated, and authenticity itself involves the process (not just the state of being) of becoming aware of "one's true self" (e.g. including the concepts of self-awareness, self-regulation) (Berkovich, 2014). Therefore, conceptualizing authenticity as a characteristic or trait is somewhat conflicted or an inaccurate representation at best (Berkovich, 2014).

The second issue presented by Berkovich (2014) was that ALT assumed individuals could realize and develop their "innate authentic potential" themselves through a process requiring self-awareness and self-narration (p. 246). Berkovich (2014) stated that trying to create a personal narrative (in the present) based on retrospection may lead to self-deception or false self-narratives. There is a lack of recognition of external influences that could factor into self-discovery (even subconsciously or unintentionally).

The third issue presented by Berkovich (2014) was ALT assumed that authenticity (and the expression of authenticity) would produce positive/desired results. ALT's assumption was that the construct "authenticity" is related to "good things"--positively impacting leader-follower relationships and dynamics. "Good authenticity" is a large assumption just as "honesty" does not always bring about "desired outcomes".

The fourth and last issue presented by Berkovich (2014) was that leaders' self-identity and self-concept was a result of a stepped-process. ALT required leaders to have a fully-realized/developed self-concept in order to be "authentic" (Berkovich, 2014). Again, Berkovich (2014) noted some conflicting conceptualizations within the theory.

While there are some difficulties with the authenticity leadership model, authenticity blended with a dose of servant-leadership is the author's preferred model in the role of coach and follower. The author believes that "keeping it real" requires and demonstrates strength [of character and integrity]. The concept of "servant-leader" is that a leader not only leads, but also has an attitude of servitude--servant first (DeSensi, 2014; Jenkins, 2014). Qualities of a servant-leader include: "listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 12). The idea of servant-leadership can help groups/teams/organizations stay ethically grounded with a greater sense of "team" and "greater good".

References

Berkovich, I. (2014). Between person and person: Dialogical pedagogy in authentic leadership development. *Academy Of Management Learning & Education*, 13(2), 245-264.

DeSensi, J. T. (2014). Sport: An ethos based on values and servant leadership. *Journal Of Intercollegiate Sport*, 7(1), 58-63.

Jenkins, S. (2014). John R. Wooden, Stephen R. Covey and servant leadership. *International Journal Of Sports Science & Coaching*, 9(1), 1-24.

Murray, M. C., Mann, B. L., & Mead J. K. (2010). Leadership effectiveness and decision making in coaches. In Williams, J. (Ed.), *Applied sport psychology: Personal growth to peak performance* (6th ed., pp. 106-131). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Szedlak, C., Smith, M. J., Day, M. C., & Greenlees, I. A. (2015). Effective behaviours of strength and conditioning coaches as perceived by athletes. *International Journal Of Sports Science & Coaching*, 10(5), 967-984.