

Leader Tool- Authenticity as a leader

As leaders our people and teams look to us as role models, and how we 'walk the walk'. Often leaders are assessed against authenticity in how close of a match words and actions look to be. At AccessEAP we have made authenticity a part of our culture and call it out "we are what we do". As a leader, how you engage with others in the workspace shapes how your people and teams interact with each other. This can be a powerful tool for change when we are mindful in its application. Authenticity allows leaders to be real people, give direction and most importantly ask for help when it is needed.

Firstly, let's call it out – it's ok to be ok, and it's also ok to not be ok. As humans, we try to be our best to survive and thrive in life and at work. COVID-19 challenges all of us and it's normal to recognise that it is almost impossible to always be our best. Remember, just as you would remind your people, it's ok not to be ok. Recognise it, call it out and name it and help yourself find your equilibrium again. We're all human, and it is very normal to have some days that are great and others that are not. Things change, and how we feel will also change. It's an important lesson that can be harnessed to create a safe workspace. The challenge can be finding the strategies that work for us when we are not ok and following through with them so that we see an improvement. Change is difficult at the best of times, but during COVID-19 it can feel overwhelming. Having hope and remaining resilient takes just as much energy and time as falling apart.

As leaders we want to be the change we want to see in our people, teams and organisation. We start to believe that we can be beacons that help our people, be a strength they can lean on to navigate through challenging times and be a calm in the storm. When we are all constantly bombarded by COVID-19 statistics by news or social media coverage, it can make us feel negative, fearful, anxious, worried. It can also make us feel flat, bored and create a feeling of being generally over it all. These feelings are all natural responses to perceived or real threats to our safety. However, as humans we always come together to get through a crisis. Sometimes, all we need is a reminder that things are ok, that what we are experiencing is temporary and we will be ok in the future.

Here are some tips and strategies on how you can help foster a feeling of safety in your people and promote positive wellbeing at a time when we can all use a little bit of this:

Smile – there's real science behind the saying that a smile is contagious. So much of how we process communication and create meaning in our minds is shaped by the unconscious or non-verbal cues we display to others. If you find yourself constantly walking around with a frown, a look of worry or distraction, remind yourself to smile. This will help you become present in the moment you find yourself and reset your emotional equilibrium. It is also often interpreted by others that things are generally ok and can help those around you begin to become more relaxed.

Recognise and celebrate – on those days when we find ourselves as leaders feeling flat, tired, exhausted or otherwise challenged; we know that we could do with some good news. Likewise, so can our people and teams. Be open and observe how your people and teams are engaging with each other. Find those moments where things went well, people were feeling good or someone reached out to lend a hand to help someone else. Publically celebrate these wins and try to do this consistently. You'll be amazed at the outcomes your people create when you get out of their way and let them be great human beings.



Empathy – it is so important to develop empathy. Think of empathy as a skill that can be developed over time and find ways to apply empathy – even to yourself. A common feeling expressed by many leaders - now more than ever in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic- is feeling emotionally exhausted, burnt out and drained. A great place to start developing your empathy is applying it to yourself. When you are checking in with your people or engaged in conversations across the workspace with others, listen without judgement and try not to solve their problems.

Promote kindness – this applies to yourself as much as to those around you. As leaders, we often expect so much more of ourselves than those in our teams or organisation. Kindness starts within, so be mindful of those times when your inner monologue strays too far or too often into becoming your inner critic. Recognise you are doing your best each day, and what that best looks like will vary. It can help your people feel safe to share their thoughts and feelings with others, and then to engage in being kind to others. As humans, we can be our best in life and work when we feel safe enough to take a risk, do something different or even as simple as getting something done that benefits others.

Modelling – good leadership helps foster the types of behaviours that support the objectives of the organisation both now and into the future. How can you create an environment where types of positive behaviours can consistently be demonstrated in the workspace? Think of it in terms of influence and control. You can't control how others think and feel. What you can control is how you think, feel, behave and communicate. Reflect on the types of behaviours that are consistent with your organisation's values and look for little ways to live those values consistently. It's a natural human reaction to emulate behaviours we admire or respect. Embody those behaviours and try to create a space where those around you can similarly respond.

Be fair – as a leader you will have already seen the various ways your people and teams have responded to the pandemic. Often these behaviours have shifted over time. It's normal for all of us to have days where we are our best, and days where we are most definitely not at our best. Being fair to ourselves and others is directly correlated with modelling, being empathic, demonstrating kindness and consciously celebrating those times when we or our people are at their best. It's also helps people's sense of security and safety that even in those times where they are not at their best, they will have the support of the leader and their peers.

If you are unable to put any of these into practice or if you feel that you need some assistance, here at AccessEAP we can assist you in being your best self. Remember that 2020 is not at its best but still continuing to show up every day, being kind to ourselves and perhaps adjusting our expectations of 2020 to the new normal, is a great place to start.

We are here to support you so that you can better support your people. If you have any further questions or would like to discuss a specific concern contact our Manager Support Hotline or your Relationship Manager. As always, as your EAP we are here to support your people whatever the nature of their concerns, please contact **AccessEAP** on **1800 818 728**.

