

# UCLA

## UCLA Previously Published Works

### Title

Authentic Leadership: How Does It Differ From Transformational Leadership?

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8m47v669>

### Journal

AACN Advanced Critical Care, 31(2)

### ISSN

1559-7768

### Author

Blake, Nancy

### Publication Date

2020-06-15

### DOI

10.4037/aacnacc2020275

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed



# Creating a Healthy Workplace

Nancy Blake, PhD, RN, CCRN-K,  
NEA-BC  
Department Editor

## Authentic Leadership: How Does It Differ From Transformational Leadership?

Nancy Blake, PhD, RN, CCRN-K, NEA-BC

As more and more hospitals strive to be Magnet or to create Magnet-like work environments, nurse leaders are focusing on transformational leadership.<sup>1</sup> The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) has identified authentic leadership as a key standard for a Healthy Work Environment.<sup>1</sup> Are transformational leadership and authentic leadership the same? Are they different? What are the similarities? As organizations strive to be the best they can be and to do what they can to improve the work environment, leadership is important; leaders need to demonstrate the appropriate competencies to ensure nurse retention and patient safety. This column will evaluate the similarities and differences between transformational and authentic leadership and focus on what is essential to creating a healthy work environment.

### Transformational Leadership

Introduced in the late 1970s by Burns and further refined by Bass in the mid-1980s,<sup>2</sup> *transformational leadership* is identified as one of the Magnet model components.<sup>1</sup> A transformational leader, as defined by Bass,<sup>2</sup> sets clear goals, has high expectations, encourages others, provides support and recognition, and stirs the emotions of people. In 2006 Bass and Riggio added the idea that transformational leaders inspire others to achieve extraordinary outcomes, and in that journey, they transform followers into leaders.<sup>3</sup> Transformational leaders are leaders that others want to follow.

There are 4 main components in this leadership style for follower development: idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration.<sup>3</sup> *Idealized influence* is when a leader behaves in a way that others want to follow. *Intellectual stimulation* is the manner in which the leader changes the status quo by encouraging innovation and creativity. *Inspirational motivation* is the concept that the followers need to have meaning in their work. Finally, *individual consideration* is when the leader acts as a mentor to assist the follower in developing their competency as a leader.<sup>3</sup> Transformational leadership is a component of Magnet hospitals, which are constantly challenging the status quo, doing what they can to improve care for patients and the work environment for employees.

### Authentic Leadership

Developed by 2 leadership researchers, Avolio and Gardner (and further developed by others), *authentic leadership* has been described as evolving

---

Nancy Blake is Chief Nursing Officer, Harbor-UCLA Medical Center, 24719 Garland Drive, Valencia, CA 91355 (ntblake@aol.com).

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4037/aacnacc2020275>

from transformational leadership.<sup>3</sup> According to Avolio and Gardner,<sup>4</sup> the authentic leader has similar traits to the transformational leader but has 4 unique characteristics: self-awareness, internalized moral perspective, relationship transparency, and internalized moral perspective. A leader with self-awareness is aware of themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, and their impact on others. *Internalized moral perspective* means having a strong moral and ethical perspective and acting in accordance with values no matter the pressure that may come with the job. *Relationship transparency* is having the ability to connect with others and easily share thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. It is important for authentic leaders to be genuine. And last, authentic leaders demonstrate balanced decision-making, an ability to objectively seek the opinions of others and listen to all stakeholders' perspectives when making decisions.<sup>1</sup> George<sup>5</sup> described an authentic leader as someone in a position of responsibility who is genuine, trustworthy, reliable, and believable. They do not need to be in formal leadership positions. Authentic leaders are role models for others, they do what they say, and they have strong relationships with their staff.

### Similarities and Differences Between Authentic and Transformational Leadership

A leader can be both transformational and authentic, but there are distinctions to note between the 2 types of leaders. Transformational leaders are able to set the team vision, lead, and develop relationships with staff. Transformational leadership also focuses on how the leader meets higher-level needs of employees by providing mentorship, leadership, and assistance to staff to develop their competencies. In contrast, authentic leadership contributes to follower job satisfaction by encouraging followers to have a role in decision-making through giving input to decisions. The key difference between the 2 types of leadership is the “authenticity component inclusive of the character, knowing oneself, and demonstrating relational transparency that differentiates authentic leadership from other types of leadership.”<sup>6</sup> Although both types of leadership impact patient outcomes and staff well-being, they have different roles in these outcomes.

When asked, most leaders state that they consider themselves to be transformational

leaders. However, it is also important that leaders be authentic. Authentic leadership has been sometimes referred to as the softer side of the leader or the genuine interest a leader has in his or her staff. In her AACN presidential speech in 2005, Kathy McCauley<sup>7</sup> referred to authentic leadership as the “glue that holds the healthy work environment together.” Rosler<sup>8</sup> stated that sometimes leaders lose sight of the elements of authenticity on the journey to transformational leadership; self-awareness, relational transparency, internalized moral perspective, and balanced information processing are “key to the goal.” Employees want to interact with their leaders and want to know that their leaders are genuine. This allows leaders to be approachable and visible and will engage followers in joining on the path to transformation.

### Conclusion

One cannot discount the importance of authentic leaders who are visible and listen to employees' concerns and suggestions for change. If you want to know what is wrong with an organization, speak to the frontline staff. If you want to know how to fix problems with minimal financial investment, frontline staff can tell you. Someone who has been on the units and listens to staff are key qualities that staff look for in a nurse leader. Retention is higher in hospitals in which the staff have confidence in their leader. Even when things cannot change, it is important to have a leader share why things cannot change. Authentic leaders have relational transparency and share all information with their staff. This transparency is important to ensure a healthy work environment.

### REFERENCES

1. Raso R. Be you! Authentic leadership. *Nurs Manage*. 2019;50(5):18-25.
2. Bass BM. *Leadership and performance beyond expectations*. New York, NY: Free Press; 1985.
3. Tonkin T. Authentic versus transformational leadership assessing their effectiveness on organizational citizenship behavior of followers. *Int J Business Public Admin*. 2013;10(1):40-62.
4. Avolio BJ, Gardner W. Authentic leadership development: getting to the root of positive forms of leadership. *Leadership Q*. 2005;16:315-338.
5. George B. *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; 2003.
6. Shirey M. Authentic leaders creating healthy work environments for nursing practice. *Am J Crit Care*. 2006;15(3):256-267.
7. McCauley K. President's note. All we needed was the glue. *AACN News*. May 2005;22: 2.
8. Rosler G. Your journey to authentic leadership. *Am Nurs Today*. 2018;13(2):40-41.