

How We Lead

Practical Wisdom for Leaders and Coaches
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By Amiel Handelsman

Practice, Fakers and the Sincerity Police, Part 2

Practicing leadership is tough. It involves both learning something new and unlearning something habitual. Thus many leaders find practicing itself to be uncomfortable if not painful.

Last month we explored one upshot of this: Fakery, which is when people say things that are completely out of alignment with what they think and feel inside. This led to a simple injunction: Don't be a Faker.

This month, we look at different phenomenon: the Sincerity Police, which you'll recall are those critical voices inside and outside of you saying that unless you are 100% sincere, you are being fake. These voices are a tremendous barrier to practice and, therefore, to more skillful leadership. That's why I advise:

Accelerate past the Sincerity Police

Contrary to popular assumption, I believe that sincerity in communication is not all-or-nothing. At any given moment, we can be 100 percent sincere or 0 percent sincere, but these are not the only options. Sincerity actually exists along a spectrum. This is because human beings are complex. Although we live in the present, we hold within us both the legacy of our pasts and unrealized intentions for the future.

Thus, when someone points out that sincerity means believing in what you're saying, it is worth asking: which "you" do you mean?" There is the person you have been for the past five, ten or thirty years—you know, the one who (for example) keeps a mental list of grievances and invents subtle forms of revenge. But this is not the only you. There is also the person you aspire to become—the one who forgives and mends. Just because vengeance is more comfortable and natural for you today—it truly

is who you have been on some level—does this make it wrong to forgive and mend? Just because speaking new words feels awkward to you and looks forced to others, are you being insincere to try?

Let me put it another way: is it possible to develop into the kind of leader you aspire to be if you set the sincerity bar at 100 percent? This is absurd—how can you get good at something unless you practice it when you're still a beginner?

Unfortunately, the Sincerity Police don't ask this question. To these voices within and outside you, either you believe in your words 100 percent or you're a Faker. There is no other alternative. Thus their strict rule: if you want to say something but your heart, mind, and body are not in complete congruence, don't say it.

This regulation is as appropriate to practicing leadership as a 25 mile-per-hour speed limit would be on an interstate highway. Both keep us from getting to where we want to go. This is unfortunate, because it's hard enough practicing something that is uncomfortable. Imagine how much harder it is when the

Sincerity Police are standing on the side of the road pointing a radar gun in your direction.

Purchase a Sincerity Radar Detector

Solution? Get yourself a Sincerity Radar Detector (\$49.95 at www.curiousleader.com). It works like this: anytime you detect the Sincerity Police getting in the way of your practice, it gives off a beep. At this point, you can switch routes by saying something different, but I recommend speeding up your practice instead. Here's why: the Sincerity Police lack a means of enforcement. In fact, when you speed up, do it over and over again, and get good at what you're practicing, they end up admiring you. Why? Because you have become the person they wanted you to be at the outset. To return to the earlier example, by forgiving others and mending relationships over and over again, you have become a forgiving and mending leader.

Follow the 50% Sincerity Rule

Here is an even more effective solution: follow the 50% Sincerity Rule.

The 50% Sincerity Rule: Practice new language if you are at least 50% sincere.

How do you know whether you are past this threshold? There are two potential indicators:

1. The leader you are committed to becoming would say this and believe it 100%
2. Right now you like what the words mean but feel awkward saying them because you haven't said them before and/or they "don't feel like you."

Corollary to the 50% Sincerity Rule: if you are less than 50% sincere, don't say it.

Many of the leaders I work with instinctively recognize when something they intend to say is past this threshold—and when it is not. (My coaching practice doesn't attract 24/7 Fakers.) So when I suggest new language to practice for the sake of building competence, they either agree (with the caveat that "this will feel strange") or tell me that it doesn't seem at all like them. In the latter case, I ask them to discern whether they feel completely fake or just uncomfortable—in other words, whether they are past the 50% Sincerity threshold.

There are more Fakers than Sincerity Police

In the real world, there are a thousand times more people who are either faking or grudgingly/cynically tolerant of Fakers than there are Sincerity Police. So why so much talk here about the Sincerity Police? Because I assume that the readers of this newsletter either genuinely want to become better leaders or are helping others toward this end. For all of us, the path to excellence and fulfillment is best served by accelerating our practices and steering clear of the impediments along the way.

Warm regards,

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