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WANTED: AUTHENTIC EMPLOYEES

People increasingly project idealized images of themselves in today's world – those who manage to remain authentic make for highly sought-after employees.

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The modern-day world, increasingly dominated by Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sources, encourages people to develop and project an idealized, often quite illusory, image of themselves. This aspiration to be perceived as being different (i.e. better) than one really is often applies to people working at a company. Here, however, the strategy of “wearing a mask” is very short-term. Eventually, the “bubble” will burst – sometimes even during the recruitment interview, leading mutual disappointment in its wake.

The truth

So, what can be done to avoid such a situation? The answer lies in *authenticity*. Employers increasingly

emphasize that this is one of the most desired traits in both current and potential employees, recognizing that it usually goes hand-in-hand with high-quality productivity. An employee is seen as authentic if there is a certain consistency between their actions, behaviors, and internal convictions. Authentic employees not only manifest their inner values and beliefs at work, but also act in accordance with who they truly are, without hiding their weaknesses. They are characterized by honesty, openness, and sensitivity. They take responsibility for their actions, including their positive as well as negative outcomes. They can own up to their own mistakes, treating them as valuable lessons for the future. They do not seek to blame others, but consider what steps to take to avoid future problems. In other words, they handle failures constructively. An authentic employee is usually more committed and derives greater satisfaction from their work. This translates into a sense of happiness and better maintenance of work-life balance. It also increases the sense of psychological security.

An authentic employee is someone aware of his or her competencies as well as the things he or she needs to improve upon, and therefore enthusiastically



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strives to pursue personal and professional development (Table 1).

Note that most employees themselves also value authenticity. It allows them to exercise greater autonomy, and consequently – to better perform their professional duties, take initiatives, and take innovative approaches.

Employees who are frank and honest with themselves usually have a better understanding of their own competency matrix (as laid forth, for instance, in the “Johari window”). This allows them to work better, be more independent, control their emotions, and smoothly accomplish tasks. This, in turn, earns them a better position within the company. The above-mentioned psychological security makes authentic employees more willing to share their observations and ideas. They speak honestly, inspire trust, and build relationships within the team. They therefore develop closer relationships with their coworkers, which translates into increased team productivity. Moreover, teams in which a certain natural synergy can be observed operate more freely, their members are calmer and more composed, which translates into a better capacity to handle urgent and difficult tasks.

Note that employees described as “authentic” typically point out several factors that a company should provide to increase the authenticity of team members: including flexibility in work methods, individualized dress styles, and a cozy workplace atmosphere.

Encouragement

It is, therefore, possible to influence the level of authenticity among a staff of employees. One particularly helpful approach is known as *coaching*.

Coaching is a process of supported development, based on a mutual relationship between a coach and an employee (the “coachee”). The coach helps the employee identify and achieve their goals, as well as discover their own potential. The coaching process encourages the employee to communicate openly, to answer difficult questions that foster reflection and change. Through this, the employee better understands the mechanisms of their own action mechanisms and what determines them (Table 2).

In summary, coaching can have a significant impact on employee authenticity. By strengthening self-awareness of both personal values and profes-

TABLE 1 **Benefits of Authenticity in the Workplace**

Benefits	Characteristics
Higher quality of work	Authentic employees are more committed to their tasks, which translates to higher-quality work.
Greater creativity	Accepting their own strengths and weaknesses allows employees to approach problem-solving more creatively.
Better team relationships	Honesty and authenticity in communication foster trust and better relationships among team members.
Greater satisfaction	Authentic employees experience greater job satisfaction, as they identify with the tasks and results achieved.
Better self-esteem	Awareness of being authentic translates to a positive self-view.
Greater ability to cope with stress	Being true to oneself helps in coping with challenges and pressure at work.
High motivation for self-improvement	Authenticity creates conditions for a better understanding of one's goals and striving to attain them.



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TABLE 2 Impact of Coaching on Employee Authenticity

Action	Type of Impact
Understanding the employee's values and goals	By asking appropriate questions (including Cartesian ones), the coach helps the employee identify key areas of action and motivators. This knowledge allows for authentic decision-making and functioning in line with recognized values.
Identifying the employee's strengths and weaknesses	Knowing or confirming one's own strengths and weaknesses allows for the best, more authentic choice of directions to seek development, in line with one's capabilities.
Strengthening self-confidence and trust	Increased belief in one's own capabilities due to the coaching process enables the employee to take on more responsible tasks and ambitious challenges. It also contributes to easier collaboration with others.
Improving communication skills	Through coaching, the employee develops better skills at listening and asking questions, which translates into greater openness and better understanding of others.
Managing own stress and coping with pressure	Skills developed in the coaching process, for handling difficult situations and using stress reduction tools, ensure that the employee will react to challenging situations and obstacles in an authentic and calmer manner.
Increasing emotional self-awareness	Better self-understanding and emotion control translates into responsible, mature, and authentic relationship-building with others.

Guidelines for being authentic in the workplace



sional goals, coaching contributes to fostering an authentic attitude. Therefore, investing in the coaching process can be a beneficial solution for a company.

Alongside coaching, *mentoring* is another approach that can positively influence employee authenticity. The mentoring process involves a mentor, with extensive organizational experience, and a "mentee." The mentor shares stories of situations exhibiting good practices and also situations that did not end so well, thereby exhibiting and exemplifying authenticity. This helps the mentee to better handle their own professional challenges, to recognize the importance of being authentic and its benefits, both for themselves and for the company.

In summary, the flowchart on the right lists a variety of steps for maintaining maintain greater authenticity in the workplace. ■

Further reading:

"17 Examples of Authenticity"
[opexmanagers.com/
 examples-of-authenticity/](https://www.opexmanagers.com/examples-of-authenticity/)

"Why Is Authenticity at Work so Hard? 5 Ways to be More Authentic"
[https://www.betterup.com/blog/
 authenticity-at-work](https://www.betterup.com/blog/authenticity-at-work)

Reis G.G., Braga B.M., Trullen J.,
 Workplace authenticity as an
 attribute of employer
 attractiveness, *Personal Review*
 2017.