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Moral credibility: The lynchpin of authentic leadership

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We seem to be in an era for the quest for more ethical, moral and values-based business practices and leadership development. It behooves us to take a closer look at the moral aspect of leadership as the hub rather than the spoke of the leadership “wheel” of roles and positions. For me, it all begins with moral credibility.

Components of moral behavior

James Rest, an American psychologist specializing in moral psychology and development, has described four components of moral behavior, which for me, are the cornerstones of building one’s moral credibility.^[1]

1. Moral sensitivity

This means that the leader must have insight into the issue before taking action. One must first be able to spot moral issues when they present themselves. Being morally aware inherently means to be able to discern sensitive issues and take action as part of one’s decision-making to carry the process to the resolution.

2. Moral judgment

Once one has recognized an ethical/moral problem, then one needs to make a thoughtful, reflective, and informed decision based on being able to give good reasons for its resolution. Possible consequences need to be part of the decision-making process as well as gauging reaction to the decision. Go slow and choose well!

3. Moral motivation

Once one has recognized that an ethics issue exists, one must think through well enough the possible options. Those options need to reflect the values, behavior, and situation involved in this process. To make a good decision, two questions will still remain:

- Why do the right thing?
- How do you get yourself to do it?

4. Moral character and action

One must implement the decision and put it into action; however, the basis of that decision must revolve around its purpose. The purpose needs to focus on this: *Knowing* the right thing to do and *doing* the right thing are not necessarily the same. Now what?

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