

## **Essence of a Leader**

*By Rick Wright, Executive Coach*

Leadership doesn't start with your resume or skills. Rather it begins with your essence—what you value, what you believe in, and what motivates you. As this year ends and a new one begins, it is a good time to look inward and be honest.

There are many great leaders but more importantly, what are YOU a leader for or about? Do you truly contribute to others? Do you empower others and lead by win/win or does your fear and greed drive you? Stop and take an inventory of yourself! What is your essence as a leader?

What values and passion mold your leadership? Ask yourself, “Why do I do this?” Is it just for myself or for a larger purpose? Have I compromised or lost touch with my personal values as I climbed the organizational ladder?”

How can you tell if your essence and your leadership style are aligned? Simply put—is your behavior aligned with your values? Ask yourself “Am I consistently choosing to do the honorable thing? Am I accountable for my actions—even the littlest things? Am I living a life that I value?”

Look at the leaders in your life who have inspired you. We all have personal heroes along the way. Sometimes they are globally inspiring leaders like Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Sometimes they are personal leaders like the boss who knew how to elicit our best and be proud of it. Mirror those behaviors that you admire most—those behaviors that are our own best values. When you compromise your own value, you lose touch with yourself and, thus, your own essence. How can you inspire others if you are not inspiring yourself?

In ascending the organizational ladder, it is so easy to get bogged down by little day-to-day decisions—the ones that get us ahead, but leave a twinge in our stomachs. We have a gnawing feeling that if we didn't have that deadline or financial goal looming over us, we might have handled some situations differently. Those little compromises, over time, diminish our essence. Try for one day (or just one hour) being the most inspiring person that you can be with your staff and co-workers.

Do you cut people short, to make a point and move on because there is just not enough time in the day? Practice listening. For one day or one hour, take time to sit with people and hear about their world.

Do you remember why you chose to be involved with the organization you lead? Do you believe with all your heart that it is making a positive difference in the world? What difference can you make in the organization, in its people, that would ensure its vision becomes a reality? Organizations are living breathing organisms made up of people. Just like people, living breathing organisms are made up of energy. That energy is nurtured by your essence, your values, and your daily decisions. So if you spend time to remember and nurture your essence – to feed your own soul – then you will have energy available for the people around you. Imagine how inspiring it would be to work for someone like you! Nurture the people that make up the organization, so it will breathe with a collective vision of what is possible in the world. But if the example that you lead by is burnt out, uninspired, and overwhelmed, how can you expect anything else from those who look to you for leadership?

The great news is that organizations, just like people, can change. If the person or the organization is given what it needs to change then it will change and grow. It all starts with leadership. That means it all starts with you and your essence. Take the time right now to live your own essence. Everything begins in this moment. Will you choose to live your essence as a leader?