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How To Lead With Authenticity — And Authority!

Shannon Waller: Are you comparing yourself to someone else, especially in your leadership role? Would you like a new take or a new way to think about it? Stay tuned for Staying Out Of The Leadership Gap.

Hi, Shannon Waller here and welcome to Team Success. I was having a conversation with one of my very, very favorite clients and thinking partners. He and I are just very creative, especially when it comes to teams. We have a similar passion, which I love. It's so great to have kindred spirits with whom to share ideas. One of the issues that he pointed out that I thought, "Ooh, this would be such a great podcast" is something that he's experiencing. What he's experiencing is that most of his leadership are comparing how they lead to him. He's an incredibly effective leader, very conscious, very conscientious, very thoughtful. He and I both agree that to know thyself is one of the very, very first most important things you can do. He knows exactly what his strengths are, what his non-strengths are. He works very hard to be the very best leader he can be to help grow his team.

What he's finding is that his leadership team is comparing themselves to him. Now, what do we know when you compare yourself to somebody else? You're probably going to fall into what we call "The Gap." The Gap is measuring yourself against an unrealistic ideal. That's so critical because anytime you're measuring yourself against an unrealistic ideal, you're going to fall short. You're going to feel disappointed. You're going to try and contort yourself and be somebody you're not and berate yourself. That, frankly, does not make for a happy human being to be around or to be led by because you're always second guessing. You're always comparing yourself to an external reference point. Now, as fabulous as my friend is, is he perfect? I don't think so. I know I'm certainly not. Now, is he exemplary? Is there a lot to learn from him? Are there things you can be inspired by? Absolutely. I'm inspired by him. But that doesn't mean you need to compare yourself to him.

I think this is a really common danger, and it's an interesting one because it's actually the downside of being a really great leader. Now, other not-so-great leaders, people go, "Okay, I'm not going to be like that person." They're going to do the exact opposite. But when you're a strong leader, people will try to emulate you and be you rather than using you as simply a source of inspiration. I think this is an underside of success. It's the downside of success to some extent.

Now, let's talk about, first of all, why this is an issue. First of all, as I talked about, when you're in The Gap, not good. Just think about yourself. Do you ever compare yourself to a really great leader? A lot of people do this. They compare themselves to great sports leaders and great coaches and great other professionals, and they're like, "Oh, I aspire to be like this person." Then they do everything in their power to—again, the word that comes to mind is contort—to make themselves into an image of the person that they respect and look up to so much. There's some parts of this that are not terrible. You can learn a lot, like how someone



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communicates, how they listen, what kind of inspiration they give to their teammates, their players, their colleagues, all of those things. But it doesn't work when it takes you out of being you.

The question that I want people to really ask themselves is, "How can I be my best, most authentic self as a leader?" It means knowing what you're really great at, knowing what you're not great at, knowing your strengths and weaknesses, as the expression goes, or I sometimes like to say non-strengths, and where you automatically just gravitate to. It's your Unique Ability. You have insight into a particular area of business. Some people have incredible insight into people. They know how people are feeling. May not be quite as strong on strategy. Other people are brilliant at analytics, but they're not so strong on the people side. They might be good at planning, but they don't necessarily automatically tune into how people are around them. In fact, they could be kind of blind to that.

It is so critical to actually start with yourself. If you don't, you end up being fake, inauthentic, not real, and you're not a strong leader in your own right, and you can't really be somebody else either. So, you fall short on a couple of different levels. Not only are you not your own best self, but you're not even like the person you're trying to copy. So, you're really in The Gap at that point. That's not where you want to spend time, nor is it where your power is. Your power is going to be as the most self-aware human you can possibly be, being incredibly conscious of who you are, then really getting to know the people who work with you, who've said yes to actually giving you their time and their attention and their creativity and their energy and their effort. When you can do that, then you will actually be a great leader.

I know what my strengths are. I'm also very cognizant of my weaknesses, and I'm very open about that. I try to be as transparent as humanly possible and share, "This is where I can help. This is where I'm not strong. This is where I need support. Here's how I want us to work together." Some people take me at face value. For other people, it takes a lot longer. Still true. But it's very liberating for me. I'm going to put mental energy where it makes sense, where that investment will pay off. Where it's not, I just make really good friends with people who can do all of the things that I can't because together, we're stronger. As a team, we can pull off the results we need. But as any individual, not so much.

It's not about climbing a ladder; it's really about just being the best leaders that we all can be. Strategic Coach has a really interesting take on leadership, and this is where our concept of Unique Ability comes in. When you are doing what you're unique at—in other words, you have superior skill, you're better at it than most people, and that's other people telling you that, that's not your ego, when you also love it, when it gives you energy, you always see room where you can improve—that's your Unique Ability. There's almost an automatic leadership that comes with that. This is how you create value. This is how you give direction. This is how you solve problems for other people.



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In every area of Unique Ability, you are going to be a leader. I know for me, just don't try and lead or provide direction in an area that you're not good at; that doesn't work out so well. I know because I've tried. Where it's your Unique Ability, absolutely step into that. Where it's not, be very humble. Be very aware that this is not a strength of yours, and ask for help. You may feel as though that makes you weaker or not as strong in the eyes of your team. In my experience, people are like, "Oh, here's how I can help." They actually feel included. They feel cared for, they feel appreciated because their talents are complementary to yours.

So, instead of comparing yourself to somebody else, use them as inspiration. Write down, what do you really like about that person? How is it that they operate that you're like, "Ooh, I could learn from that." I get inspired all the time, and I'm like, "Ooh, that's not factory installed. How can I use my intellect to learn more about what they know? How is it that I can use my strengths and my capabilities to produce that result in a different way? In my way. How can I show up as being really real for my team? Because that's how I want them to show up to me." Those are the questions I ask, but I'm inspired by other people.

If you're a student of human nature like I am a bit, it's really interesting to see all of the different types of leaders. There are quiet leaders, there are vivacious leaders, there are compelling and charismatic leaders. There are very thoughtful, analytical leaders, but they lead because people trust them, because they're being genuine, because their visions are great, they're inspiring. They compel people to want to put their, again, time, attention, energy, and effort into that bigger endeavor, and because that leader believes in them to contribute their best selves to the effort. That's exciting. That's what a really great leader does. But you can't do it by pretending to be somebody else. You can't be it by faking. I think it actually distracts you from figuring out how you can be your best self. That means, obviously, do all the profiles, as I always recommend: CliftonStrengths, Kolbe obviously, we love our PRINT profile, which is absolutely so insightful to see what motivates people from the inside, deep down, unconscious motivators, whatever other profiles you like. I like the Big Five as well. There's so many.

Know yourself and then analyze how other people operate. It is so fascinating to learn about how people who are totally different than me see the world. I'm like, "Whoa, that's fascinating." I'm surrounded by people who are so much more on the feeling side of things. They've got those kind of strengths. Not that I'm unfeeling because I'm not, but my bias is towards action. Other people's bias is towards thinking. Other people's bias is towards feeling. Understanding and taking the time to listen and to truly appreciate how other people see the world is fascinating, absolutely fascinating. But it means getting out of myself. Once I know myself, then I can start to get really curious about other people and what makes them tick. How do you see the world? How can we line up our motivations? How can we line up our efforts to get where it is that we want to go and keep providing that vision?



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My basic bottom line message today is, please be your best self in a leadership role, which means knowing yourself, not comparing yourself to others. Please be inspired. Use your brain, use your intellect, learn what you need to learn, but just trust that you have what it takes. You don't need to be somebody else. You can be your own best self as a leader and be inspiring to other people to encourage them to align with you to take action, to get where it is that you want to go. That's going to be your path to success rather than trying to be somebody you're not. I hope this is helpful for your way of thinking and your approach. If you have any questions or comments, please let me know at questions@strategiccoach.com. Thanks so much for listening and, as always, here's to your team's success.