

# authentically asserting authority

As CEOs we're called upon to assert authority all the time. We have "the last word" in dealing with major customers and vendors, officers and key employees. We oversee major capital expenditures, mergers, acquisitions and dispositions. We have final approval of the image our company presents to the public and of the major community causes our company supports.

We can assert our authority in numerous ways. We can pound on the table and say, "Do it!" We can charm, flatter and cajole. We can present reasoned arguments in support. We can orate, inspire and motivate. We can set an example that is difficult for our associates not to follow. We can shape a "consensus" that represents the position we would have adopted on our own. We can play the ownership card. We can politically manipulate others knowing that they have no option but to follow us. We can even hold back, knowing that others will leap forward and lead to a decision we would have made anyway.

Of the many ways to assert authority, one stands above the rest: the authentic assertion. Authenticity arises quietly from the center of our being and is so commanding that the halls hush, you can hear a pin drop, there's rapt attention, and those present drink in to their depths and absorb the message in the fiber of their beings. If this sounds like a religious moment, there are religious analogies:

*And they were astonished at his [teaching]. For he taught as one that had authority...*

Mark 1:22

*As the Lord commanded his servant Moses, so did Moses command Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the Lord commanded Moses.*

Joshua 11:15

(Holy Bible, King James Version)

If we want to have this kind of assertion of authority in our leadership arsenal, what must we do to obtain it?

First and foremost, we must see ourselves as servant leaders. Servant leaders are attuned

to and speak from a sense of destiny. Examples include Joe Jaworski, founder of the American Leadership Forum (see Jaworski, *Synchronicity, the Inner Path of Leadership*), and those described by Jim Collins in *Good to Great*.

As Jaworski's life shows and as Collins points out, servant leaders must have had some life-changing experience that burns away the dross. When the superfluous is cleared away, individuals have access to an inner core not at the mercy of their personality or ego. Such persons emanate a calm purposefulness that attracts others to follow them.

Access to this inner core gives these leaders a quiet authenticity in their expression of authority. Vijay Singh on the PGA Tour emanates this authenticity. Whether he is winning or losing, he draws quietly from deep within himself, in contrast to the self-deprecating or self-elevating emotionality or rigid self-control, which is the modus operandi of many golfers on the Tour.

So, how do we know when we're asserting this truly authentic authority?

One indication is that our voice deepens, not a la Henry Kissinger, but in a natural way. This signifies that we are accessing our depths.

Secondly, there is a natural, almost organic flow to our communication, as if the group process in some way expects the expression to arise from us.

Third, quiet descends while others contemplate the message that we have conveyed.

Finally, a straightforward way arises from addressing the tasks that are the outcome of our message. There is not the helter-skelter of reactive management, nor the rigid structure of management from overscheduled action plans.

Why would we want such a leadership skill, particularly when the life-changing experiences described by Jaworski and Collins are hardly pleasurable? Because this is the only kind of leadership allowing us to connect with our core and the core of others.

We can spout all the corporate core values we want, but none can come close to making and supporting this level of connec-

Seen in:  
Baltimore  
**smart** CEO

Required Reading for Growing Companies

Reprinted Content from

Volume 5 Number 10 October 2005

2400 Boston Street, Suite 330, Baltimore MD 21224

Phone: 410-342-9510 Fax: 410-342-9514

www.smartceo.com

Publisher: Craig Burris, Editor: David Callahan



Wayne Caskey

tion. Authentic assertion of authority occurs at the level of soul.

What does this have to do with making the annual budget or landing that big new prospect? In some ways, not a lot, and in other ways — everything. As Jaworski points out in *Synchronicity*, waiting upon the universe to support our endeavors, or as with Moses, waiting for divine direction, requires patience and intuitive alertness. And yet when the support comes, it comes big time, and we can flow with it effortlessly.

Servant leadership is available to everyone. Are you willing to seek it, to sort out those experiences where it may lie in wait for you, to learn deeply from your life and then become a true servant leader where you let the universe magnificently support your efforts?

If you are truly open and willing, those experiences that will fulfill your destiny as a person and as a leader will find you, not all at once but over time. There is a progression to them, too, so as the leader is ready, the experience will appear.

You must, however, have declared your intention to become a true servant leader. You then serve your company and all of its

constituencies. You seek to balance all of their interests fairly. And you are intuitively aware and alert to the unique potential that your company and you have for a destiny going far beyond your operational and strategic plans, beyond the industry you are presently in, serving the entire culture and all mankind.

In his recent book, *Presence*, Peter Senge and his co-authors observe:

*When we encounter the authentic whole ... we are transformed ... to active participants in ways that intellectual understanding can never achieve.*

We talk a lot about vision as CEOs. The authentic assertion of our authority requires the highest, widest and deepest vision of them all.

Wayne Caskey, a three-time CEO who is now an executive life coach. His Web site is [www.waynecaskey.com](http://www.waynecaskey.com).