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NEWS

To weather the health and social crises, lead with compassion and authenticity



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As the world faces an uphill battle against the pandemic and social injustices, Professor **Patricia Faison Hewlin** is calling on educators to ensure a focus on authenticity, emotional intelligence and race, equality and inclusion is present in their conversations on leadership.



The New Demands of Teaching Leadership

As the world copes with the stresses of a pandemic and social unrest, leaders must learn to be empathetic, inclusive, and authentic.

By Patricia Faison Hewlin

DURING THESE UNCERTAIN and devastating times, we are in critical need of leaders who are skilled at connecting to people in meaningful ways—building unity, allaying concerns, and showing empathy. Leaders who have placed these

skills on the lower end of their priorities are now finding themselves less able to lead effectively. The days are over when leaders could skimp on developing human compassion and working on soft skills such as building relationships.

The need for excellent leaders is especially acute in light of recent events—the differential effects of COVID-19 on segments of people across multiple industries, and the tensions and trauma in the U.S. associated with the recent killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and many others. As business school administrators and instructors, we have been presented with a very sober opportunity to reevaluate how we are teaching leadership inside and outside of the classroom. Our students will expect us to discuss these events in our courses and to facilitate learning and generate solutions.

Now is the time for business school faculty to reevaluate the content we include in our courses, the methods we use to convey that content, and the personal and professional retooling we will need to meaningfully engage our students. We also must identify the different levels of expertise among our colleagues and determine processes for training faculty members who might not have the knowledge or experience to lead class discussions on critical subjects.

While some faculty might be concerned about their ability to handle highly relevant but potentially polarizing topics in the classroom, they can't use their inexperience or lack of preparation as justifications for avoiding these topics altogether. Business school administrators and faculty must prioritize their own personal development and continual growth so they can prepare the future leaders of business and society.

I recommend that faculty move three topics to the forefront of conversations related to leadership: authenticity; emotional intelligence (EQ); and race, equity and inclusion.

In this way, students can build an understanding of themselves, of themselves in relation to others, and themselves in relation to the larger world. By focusing on these topics, we can equip students with the skills they need to handle the immediate demands of leadership today.

Authenticity: People deserve leaders who not only “walk their talk,” but do so in a respectful and respectable manner. To be authentic, leaders don't necessarily speak everything on their minds. Instead, they're genuine; they convey that they are truly interested in the well-being of others.

Research shows that authentic leaders can positively influence followers to be authentic as well. That is an important finding, because leaders need to gather honest feedback and hear diverse ideas for creating solutions, particularly in

today's climate. There's another reason for leaders to be authentic, which co-authors and I discovered when we reviewed research on the topic. We consistently found that people who displayed inauthentic self-expression suffered emotional exhaustion and lower levels of work engagement. The leaders of the future—the students in our classrooms—need to see how they can benefit from being authentic, while helping others display the same trait.

However, authenticity can be a risky option for some, especially those who hold opinions or come from backgrounds that are not typically valued by society. For example, students of color might feel uncomfortable when they are called upon to share their perspectives during discussions around race and equity. Business school administrators and instructors must create safe spaces for all students to grow in their authenticity without facing external pressures to conform.

Emotional intelligence: Although many of us have taught EQ in our classrooms, we also must display it. First and foremost, we must develop empathy—we must understand how to take the perspectives of others in our interactions with both students and colleagues.

But EQ does not end with empathy. It also includes self-awareness, or an understanding of how our emotions and actions affect others. To develop EQ, we must regulate our emotions, direct our passions, and refine our social skills. We might require peer and professional coaching to sharpen our own EQ. Then, we can purposefully model emotional intelligence in our classrooms and address the different needs of students who come from various backgrounds and experiences.

Anyone who doubts the importance of EQ should do an online search of “empathy and leadership” in the contexts of the pandemic and the death of George Floyd. After developing that understanding, instructors can add a unique richness to the classroom discussion. They can discuss different reactions to Floyd's killing and help students evaluate, compare, and contrast the different responses political and business leaders have had to each crisis. Did these leaders exhibit emotional intelligence? Did they succeed in unifying constituents and leading change? These conversations will give students even more insights into why leaders need EQ.

Race, equity, and inclusion: Even before the current pandemic and social unrest, business students were showing growing awareness of social issues related to race, equity, and inclusion. Given today's climate, terms such as *antiracism*, *institutional racism*, *inequity*, *diversity*, and *inclusion* are going to be inextricably connected to conversations about leadership.

As educators, we often take these terms for granted, assuming we know their meanings, but refreshers might be appropriate for some of us. In addition to understanding the definitions of these terms, we will need to evaluate our own biases and emotions, which could hinder us from giving proper instruction around these topics. For example, if unchecked, some perspectives from students may receive more airtime than the perspectives of others, depending upon the emotional state and biases held by the instructor. Conversely, as research suggests, it is important to be cognizant that some students may not view women and BIPOC instructors as holding expertise or impartiality when teaching diversity, equity and inclusion. This can create undue stress that is unique to these segments of instructors.

We can promote self-development in this area in many ways. We can turn to multiple online resources such as books, videos, and articles. We can listen closely when we invite guest speakers to give presentations about race, equity, and inclusion. We can be open to hearing from students who identify inequities in classroom delivery and interpersonal interactions, and we can listen to colleagues who point out imbalances in the hiring of faculty, administrators, and other staff. Moreover, we can provide support and acknowledge the intensity of emotions and perspectives often associated with teaching race, equity and inclusion.

State of Mind

Today's complex world has created new demands for leaders, and business school professors must address these demands in our classrooms. But to be successful at that task, we also must be aware of the states of our own emotional and mental health. We must consider how the pandemic and the social unrest have affected us, our families, and our colleagues. When we exercise proper self-care and display a concern for others, we will model the qualities that will help our students become effective leaders as well.

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