T1A EP 36

**Brian:** Welcome to the One Advantage Podcast, exploring the intersections of pure power, culture, and agility. Your host, Jason Richmond, Mike Richardson and Leo Bottary, co-founders of the One Advantage Community of Practice and Advantage Peer Groups. For more information, please visit us at ideal outcomes inc com.

**Jason Richmond:** Welcome back everybody to the One Advantage Podcast, powered by ideal outcomes, and it's pretty exciting today. Leo, we have a special guest, Stephen Hart, that we're gonna introduce here in just a moment. And I don't know if you've realized this, but this is our 35th episode today. Which means we might we might have to think about doing the best of here coming up pretty soon.

**Leo Bottary:** Exactly.

**Jason Richmond:** Guys, today we're talking about the authentic leader, how to make true connections with employees to drive success. And, what separates an ordinary leader from an extraordinary one? How does one inspire, motivate, and really connect with others? In a way that drives organizational collaboration and innovation.

And I worked just last week with a client around those two topics and on this podcast, we're gonna explore the concept of authentic leadership and share ways that you can make real, genuine connections. It's really cool. So today, We have the honor. I have the honor to introduce Steve Hart. Steve Hart is a strategic partner and executive coach Steve Hart from the Professional Development Group and prior to joining the professional development group, Steve spent 34 years as the VP of HR at the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia, really driving strategic talent management diversity and inclusion programs. Employee relation programs. He's done organizational projects and initiatives, regards, regard, human capital strategy, organizational effectiveness, culture, evolutions, which is my passion and baby, and change management and change acceptance.

So Leo, everybody on the podcast, I'd like to welcome you Steve Hart. Hey, good morning Steve.

**Steve Hart:** Good morning. How are you?

It's great to be here.

**Jason Richmond:** So Steve, today we're, Leo and I are talking and Mike Richardson is on assignment today. So he is not joining us today. I'm not sure if he is in the country or overseas.

But today's topic's, the authentic leader. And I guess my first question to for our audience today is, what does that really mean? What's it take to be an authentic leader in today's workforce? Considering, coming out of a pandemic, considering new generations, considering the speed of change.

In your guys' opinions, what does it really take to be authentic as a leader?

**Steve Hart:** You know, authentic leadership can have a bit of a connotation either way. I. You look at it, somebody who's a real bully in an organization can be acting in that way out of an authentic passion. So I'm assuming that by authentic you mean somebody who is more kindly disposed to support the people that they work with, and they as somebody that pays attention to the needs of the people that they work with and that the work for them somebody that manages and. Supports the folks in their care and in their organization and gives them the kinds of help and resources that are needed for them to do the very best that the work that they can do.

So when I think of authentic leadership, it comes in my mind. It always starts with the notion that this is about a benevolence as opposed to something that is working from a different perspective. Does that make sense?

**Jason Richmond:** Yeah. Yeah. How about you, Leo? What? What's your take?

**Leo Bottary:** Yeah. To me it speaks to the Build George brand.

Of authentic leadership that he wrote about in his book. Because you're exactly right, the tendency, for example, to think well, That person can be a jerk. I don't really don't want them to be authentic in quite that way. So they can be just more of who he is or who you know, she is.

But the bottom line is, I think operating from that place of benevolence as you suggested from that servant leadership place, from a place of values and someone who not only speaks those values but lives those values. So that, that's at least how I understand. Is that fair enough, Steve?

**Steve Hart:** Absolutely. I love that, Leo. I love the fact that you brought values into this because that's the compass, isn't it? It's the values are what get us in the space in the first place. And it's, if we can work from a place of positive values for people, then I think that's where your authentic self lies.

**Jason Richmond:** You know, I when I published my first book Culture Spark, I spent. I spent over a year doing nothing but research and I interviewed over 300 executives across the world. And often people ask me, you know what? What's the through line out of all those interviews? What was the consistency that come out of that?

And I really narrowed it down to two things, authenticity and transparency. Right within effective leadership to, to drive high performing cultures. And that, that really jazzes me up about our conversation today about authenticity. Steve, I said in the introduction, you've been working with the professional development group in Pennsylvania and executive coaching and so forth.

Talk to us a little bit about how the professional executive group and your work with them. Was helping organizations drive that authenticity within their leadership ranks and their culture. Coming from an executive

**Steve Hart:** coach, this is a wonderful place for me personally to be working because my approach to coaching and my approach to organizational work is that I'm all about, Having my clients be the best person they can be in the experience that they create for the leaders as a leader in an organization.

So I love this notion of first of all, what is it that drives you as an individual from a leadership perspective? What gets you up in the morning? What are your passions? What are your. Ideals. What are your goals and aspirations that you have for your leadership? And what kind of legacy do you want to leave for the organization and the people that you work with?

And I find such great joy and great satisfaction personally from working with leaders who are willing to go on a journey like that. It's the worst kind of coaching assignment when you have to correct somebody, which you know, often happens, but the very best of circumstances is when you've got a leader.

Who is open to learning has a passion or an itch within them to be the very best representation of themselves and the organizations that they work for wants to be really valuable and useful to the people that he or she works with. I. And so the best of circumstances for me is when we get that opportunity to work with somebody who's that open to learning and abilities and wants to be questions and challenged and is willing to put the homework in to be able to find themselves.

I think all of leadership should start with who are You? A wonderful book. Why should anyone be led by you? It's a wonderful question to ask at the beginning of any kind of coaching assignment. Why should anyone be led by you? If you can ask that, ask and answer that question, I think it's a great place to start to find what it is about you that's authentic and giving and benevolent that we wanna make sure other people can discover in you.

So that's the quest I. Yeah.

**Leo Bottary:** Ja. Jason, you had mentioned this idea that in addition to change and all that, we've got obviously a whole generational transformation, quite frankly, that's happening in the workplace. We know we're looking at 65% of the workplace by 2025, or close to that will be millennials and Gen Zs about 75% by 2030.

If you combine those two generations, I think about that generation of kids growing up with a very different relationship with your parents, quite frankly, than I had with mine. When you were a kid, when I was a kid, you didn't know anything. You were just a dumb kid and you're just like, no one cared, but your opinion, they didn't wanna hear what you thought or anything like that.

Today I think parents understand how much they can learn from their kids, and I think because of that difference in how they grow up, there's a different expectation about what their relationship with the leader is going to be in their particular company. And this is where Steve, if you agree, it would seem to me that if whatever you know about athletic leadership, However, little or however much it's time to dive into that even more deeply, because it's never gonna become more relevant than it will be in the next decade.

Important because of this change that's gonna happen in terms of who we're leading in the workplace and what the expectations are. Would that be a fair assessment of that? Any thoughts around that?

**Steve Hart:** Yeah I agree with that. I think that I often think about leadership today and particularly relevant in the.

In, in the changing dynamics or demographics of the workforce, that leadership today is a curious combination of being both a warrior and an artist. On the one hand, you've gotta, you've gotta hold the line. You've gotta be tough, you've gotta share your experience. You've gotta let people learn, but you've also, at some point, gotta give them.

Their own way, find their own way through the thing, just like you would do with your kids today. As you said the relationship that we have our kids today are far more experimental. Perhaps they wanna work for somebody that really caress about them. So I feel that this curious polarity between being a warrior and an artist is a great way to conceptualize.

How we need to show up today. So you need to hold the line when things need to be decided or when you want to put the push a particular solution because it's the right thing to do. And then other times where you want to give people the opportunity for them to grow and learn themselves and find and learn their way to success.

And I think where we get into trouble is when the artist is called for, but we act as a warrior. Or the warrior is called for, we act like an artist. And so it's reading the situation, being able to be adaptive and flexible in the moment and being what I would call, as we call it, the professional development group, a people reader, the ability to show up in a way that is meaningful and purposeful to the person that you are leading in that moment.

And so it, there's a sort of a sacred obligation of leaders, I think. Not to be just one thing. To one person. I think they need to be broadly appealing. They need to find a way to work with every individual. I think that's very consistent. As you said with today's younger generation of the workforce, they want a personal relationship with the person they work with, and they want it to be somewhat authoritarian in some SI situations, but also they want to be given the freedom to learn and grow.

**Leo Bottary:** You know what you mentioned too. Just if I can just tag on that a little bit, because I love what you said about how important it can be. It reminds me actually of that Thomas Jefferson quote, right? Where in matters of style swim at the current in matters of substance stand like a rock. Yes. So you're gonna stand like a rock 'cause you're not gonna compromise your values or your commitment to quality or your purpose or all of these things is where you wanna be that warrior.

But on the other hand the artist comes in with that relationship you're talking about with your people. Allowing for that dialogue, allowing people to be heard and that leader who's willing to learn and try new things together. And that's pretty exciting stuff.

**Steve Hart:** Yeah, it really is. I feel like I have a mental model in my head or so who in popular culture exemplifies that style of leadership?

And I know it's a TV show, but it's one of my favorites, but Captain John Luke Picard of the star Trek Next Generation, to me it really exemplifies this notion of a warrior artist like leader who works from a sense of authenticity, but everybody on that crew has their own individualized relationship with him, and he respects that.

And so that comes through, and I know it's a TV show, but it's certainly become a sort of a an aspirational model in my mind as to how when it shows up, what does it look like? And it looks a bit like that.

**Leo Bottary:** And let's not forget Ted Lasso.

**Steve Hart:** Yeah. Ted Lasso. Yes,

**Jason Richmond:** exactly. Characteristics of this though.

If the how to some of the behaviors, really demonstrated To be a true, authentic leader, I believe is and we're tapping on some of those, ethical, in our behaviors, in our decision making. Everything we do, truly has to have a high level of foundational value of ethics.

And I think another thing that I'm really hearing from this conversation is a really high level of empathy and compassion. I know, Leo, you've talked about younger generations and the new generations and generations merging in the workplace. I believe that ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion for your employees and your teams, I think is a critical factor of that.

I also think behaving in a servant leadership way, really, getting rid of your own individual egos. And to be able to provide that level of servant leadership and be more interested in the people you lead than in what the people are doing for you. And I think those three things really can characterize some of the behaviors necessary to really become that level of leader that you need to be today.

Agreed disagree. What do you guys think?

**Steve Hart:** I definitely agree with that. I think I would add maybe one more, at least perhaps too first the notion of fairness. All of those things. I think that's another sort of overlay that I think is important. Maybe the other one is in the trans transparency of communication.

I think those with empathy and those other things, I feel like particularly fairness to Leo's point about today's generation of worker looks for this different, They're looking for a different level of honesty out of the organizations that they work for than perhaps they were when I started in my career, when I was just an observer and told to be quiet the younger people today are much more willing to stand up for what they believe is right, and I think we need to be ready to engage in conversations that at the sum total of which end up being fair.

Being transparent, express empathy, and all the other things that you said, so absolutely agree. I just add those two additional dimensions and you have

**Leo Bottary:** to earn their trust. Yes. When you look at millennials and Gen Zs, these aren't trust first folks. These are, you gotta earn my trust. And so I think everything you're, and that speaks really to Jason, what you talked about with regard to behaviors.

I forget who wrote it, whether it was Jay Conger or Patrick Lencioni, but there was a piece one time that talked all about values and you, and how they were etched in the granite of the lobby, of the building. And of course, the reveal at the end was that it was Enron. Yes. So clearly, as much as they are etched in granite, they weren't exactly being lived in the behaviors of the leadership.

And so that is, boy, walking the talk becomes a really important

**Jason Richmond:** part of it. Yeah. Just earlier this week I was working with a cohort of people about trust, credibility, and respect. And we were putting that in the context of Innova innovative leadership. How, that level or that building, that trust, that level of trust, credibility, respect with today's workforce, is different than it might have been 20 years.

And how can we maintain or be innovative about the way that we're building those levels of trust, but then also really focusing on those relationships where there might be a little bit of lost trust, how to regain that. And the steps, and it comes right into these authentic leadership behaviors to help regain or strengthen that level of trust within your workforce.

Yeah. It, I guess I just got I just completed that, that engagement with a client two days ago. So it was it was pretty fascinating how you see it really come to life in real life situations with a cohort of leaders, across a bunch of different business units. It was an exciting day.

**Steve Hart:** Yeah. That issue of trust is so critical, isn't it? I think. And so easily lost once you violate it. I think I think about our behaviors. Jason, to your point is that every time you act benevolently, authentically as a leader to the people you are putting deposits in, the trust bank. Yeah. And over time it, it builds to such a point that perhaps as a human being, you might make a mistake or have to make an unpopular decision, but the fact that you have so much reserve in the bank doesn't undermine your ability to lead.

If you have worked from the position of authenticity and benevolence. And built that trust over time with people because Leo said you have to earn it. It doesn't come preconditioned into the role of leadership you have. And once you have a d a change of somebody in your team and you start that deposit layer all over again.

**Jason Richmond:** Yep. It's funny, you, earlier on in our conversation here you both touched upon this, brought up but transparency and communication. Every company we work with there's a communication issue. Nobody is perfect in communication. I I was just telling this story.

I I always try to pride myself in the level of communication I have with my team and in my organization. If I did a self rating, I'd rate myself very high on my communication effectiveness and everything like that. I've always said, I'm pretty proud of how I communicate and whatever.

So in, that's how everyone feels. Last April, I had a an entire organization, ideal Outcomes Company meeting, strategy meeting. We do it every year and we're together for four days. And coming out of my, coming out of that meeting, it was very clear that one of the areas from a leadership standpoint that I need to improve in is my communication.

And it's not the volume of the communication, it's not the amount of communication. It's not what I'm communicating. It's the cadence and the timing of the communication and getting people involved. Quite often things were communicated after the fact. I. Could have had a lot of value by bringing people into certain things, communicating sooner, right?

So that, that clarification of effective communication, transparent communication, and you're in a leadership roles, getting the right people involved soon enough, to influence and inspire and communicating much earlier than what you probably traditionally would think. It was a big, less, less lesson learned for me.

It was a, it, I would say it was a defining moment. For me in regards to my daily leadership, behavior when it comes to transparent communication. It wasn't that I wasn't communicating enough, it's just I wasn't always communicating soon

**Steve Hart:** enough. Timing is important, it, one of the things I've learned from my coaching work and for many years as a business executive, the notion that the biggest problem with business communication is the illusion that it took place.

And I think as leaders we have to be very aware that just because we said it doesn't mean it's universally understood the way in which we said it. And I think another big part of leadership is being able to frame, I. Information and advice and decision making in such a way that people clearly understand it.

It's you can walk out of a room and think you've said something very clearly, wanted to find out the 17 different versions of what people think you said. So I find with leaders this can be very tiresome as a skill to learn because all, all look at all the years we have of communicating and yet as a species, we're still pretty darn poor at it.

Overall, so it, it can get exhausting to be an authentic leader who wants to have clarity of communication. But I think one way to deal with it is to give and receive feedback and ask people, don't just, I, you make a decision. You want to create a conversation. You say, how is this sitting with you?

What do you hear when I say be, adopt? Some behaviors like that as a leader, that checks in as to whether or not the message you think you're seeing. Sending is actually resonating in the way that you intended to. And I think you can save yourself a lot of time and perhaps a lot of stress and distress if you just do a few as you said earlier, be open enough and not ego-centric enough to think just because you said it, everybody universally understands it.

**Jason Richmond:** And Leo, how does that play in your world? You are the master of driving the power of peer groups, within organizations. How do you see this coming into play in your peer groups and the facilitations you do with high powered peers within organizations?

How does this relate?

**Leo Bottary:** You have to be super intentional about clarity. You just really do. And I often, Talk with folks about the fact that receipt of the message as intended is up to the sender. End of story. And you have to accept that responsibility to the leader that's on you.

It is no different than I've mentioned about when you're the relay race in track and field. You do not let go of that baton when you're passing it until that person has it within your grasp. And only then do you let them run with it. There's, that's that leadership metaphor there.

Or as I'll often do, like in a talk about operating room. Someone's handing the scalpel to the surgeon above an open wound. They don't take it and toss it in the air and hope they catch it. There's generals that have been relieved of their command, not because they gave the wrong order, but because the order was misinterpreted.

And I think until we take a hard look in the mirror, accept responsibility, number one for it, and then really take a look at how am I assuring the receipt of the message as intended. And I think that's an important aspect of things.

**Jason Richmond:** Yep. As we're coming to an end here, I'm gonna throw out a challenge and I'll start, if we can give one piece of leadership advice, one thing to leaders that are listening to us today on how to become more authentic in their leadership style, what would that be?

And to start, I'd like to say to really set your attitude to be. Open to a lot of different perceptions and thoughts and ideas and really be adaptable to your team's. Not only personality styles, but work styles, learning styles. So I think one piece of advice that I would tell every leader is to really be open and adaptable to the people that you've surrounded yourself with.

How about you

**Steve Hart:** guys? I'll take a crack at it. I agree with what you said Jason, so you stole what was in my mind when you asked that question. But some years ago I wrote an article for a LinkedIn article that I wrote, and I, I was, the time, I was very struck with this.

Notion of in the business, in the HR business, it was the buzzwords were attraction and retention. Attraction and retention. That's the way that leadership should work to do that. I wanted to reframe that a little bit and I said, I. Retention to me holds something against its will.

You are holding something back. So I want to change that dynamic. So I adopted the notion of leadership, authentic leadership is really the approach of attraction, bringing people to you, but then attention as opposed to retention. So I would say it's about being attentive to the people around you, being adaptable to their needs and everything, but.

Adopt that notion of attraction and attention as opposed to attraction and retention. All right,

**Jason Richmond:** Leo?

**Leo Bottary:** I would add that leaders should try to be interested before trying to be interesting. I. To be really engaging with people in a way where your job isn't to overtly try to make them feel good about you.

You wanna make them feel good about themselves and the contribution and the value they can make to any team in fulfillment of the purpose of the organization. I think if you could do that, if you can really give that. Feeling to people, you noticed, Jason, when we had our program just earlier this week and we talked to employees about leaders that had an impact on the leaders that had an impact on them.

It wasn't because they hit their numbers or 'cause they were smart or because they had great vision or anything, made them feel good about who they are and what they felt heard, they felt valued. They felt that they know me, not just as some, worker bee, but they cared about. My family and they cared about who I am as a human being.

You do that and I think that goes a long way.

**Jason Richmond:** Yeah. I wanna thank all our listeners today, guys and remind them that this podcast and several cultural resources and peer group resources can be found at idealoutcomesinc.com. And I want to thank our special guest, Steve Hart. And again, if you wanna look Steve up or find Steve, or connect with Steve, he can be found at the professional development group.com.

And until next time, thank you for joining.

**Brian:** Thanks for listening to the One Advantage Podcast. If you liked this episode, please consider helping us by rating us wherever you listen, spreading the word, having us as a guest on your podcast or webinar, and mentioning us in social media. Find us at the One Advantage Podcast where you can get more information about us, and this episode. Thanks again for listening, and we look forward to more great episodes to come.