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Trying to work out what to do with your leadership day? Try random acts of authenticity

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ITNow Leadership Insight Column

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You might like this from the Center for Management & Organization Effectiveness: *How leaders spend their time.* Apparently, the average successful leader starts their day at 6:15 with 45 minutes of exercise, spends 2 hours 25 minutes on email and texting during the day, as well as strategising for around 25 minutes with snacking. And while only 71% of leaders eat breakfast (possibly so they dont throw up after their morning exercise?), 93% do enjoy their dinner. Oh, theyre allowed 8 hours per week with family and friends, too.

Seem like a plan to you?

Or not...

Now, Tom Ilube, who is someone I really look up to for his deep understanding of leadership, never goes into so much detail. Tom, who helped set up the internet's first bank, Egg, in October 1998 and has gone on to even bigger digital things since, including the amazing African Science Academy, Africa's first all-girls science and maths academy, has always stressed the importance of being an authentic leader. In fact, he mentioned it again in the ITNow June column dedicated to his ideas about leadership, culture and strategy. If you didn't read it, just go do it now, and thank me later.

Google trends suggests that authentic leadership has been a popular topic since 2004, with interest growing. Its so popular, in fact, that academics have tried to understand it type "authentic leadership" into Google Scholar (`https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q="authentic+leadership"`) and you'll get around 38,000 hits. One academic talks about needing "a theory-driven model identifying the specific construct variables and relationships that can guide authentic leader development and suggest researchable propositions." If thats your cup of tea, then so be it (and if we do want authentic leaders, I guess knowing how to develop them is important).

But authentic leaders like Tom walk the walk, and any amount of talk theory isnt going to change that.

So, what is it exactly that authentic leaders do?

I asked some of my favourite practical authentic leaders. If they kept a diary, their answers might look like this.

Dear Diary,

Its been a good week: I worked out every morning, ate my snacks before dinner and spent the full 8 hours with my family and friends!

There was some random stuff too:

On Monday I held a virtual town hall meeting and was very honest about how Im feeling in the current situation, and reassuring the extended team that its OK to focus on their non-work priorities at this difficult time. The response surprised me: theyre telling me how they feel and how it is for them, and we seem to have hit a new high together.

Tuesday am I had a long 1:1 with Jane whos dog has just died; she really loved that dog! Shes also caring for her father, too, which makes it doubly difficult for her. Tuesday pm I spent time finishing the slide deck for the BCS IT Leaders Forum SIG presentation that night. Good questions from the audience made it really worthwhile.

On Wednesday I spent an hour working on Kates reference for the new job. I know shes leaving, but its the least I can do

On Friday, I made sure I was first to complete our new Cyber training for the board. The team have done a great job: extremely well presented and engaging and I think well get the message across that theres no turning back. I fired off an email just to say thank you to the team (along with some minor tweaks they could make).

These may appear trivial details in a week when the board are expecting you to deliver that project, that feasibility report and that training, as well as the three new projects starting in your portfolio, but leadership sweats the bits as well as the bytes.

And because you understand that, although tech is the thing that means you can warp speed your organisation, its the people, the culture that you build, that means your USS Enterprise runs smoothly. So its worth the human stuff needed to keep it running.

I dont know what Tom Ilube eats for breakfast, but I do now how he develops his followers. If youre stuck for something to do today, do something good for your team with a random act of authenticity.