

**E**xecutives and managers are wise to invest time and energy in developing the leadership skills most required in these times: teamwork, communication, and judgment, to name a few. But leaders will undercut their work in these areas if they are not, first and foremost, authentic leaders. More than anything else, leadership success starts with authenticity—and that means doing your job well

## From the President



without compromising your values or personality. That trust makes it possible to get things done.

When leaders operate with a consistent set of principles in the office and at home, people learn to trust them. That trust makes it possible to get things done. During the financial crisis of the past year, we've endured a painful lesson in the chaos that ensues when leaders on Wall Street and elsewhere put profit above all principles. It's more obvious than ever why authentic leaders are needed in every sector. But finding them isn't always easy because being truly authentic isn't easy either. It's tempting, for example, for leaders to keep up an executive image of being all-knowing and decisive when what they really need to do is listen carefully to their men and women on the front lines. Fearing a bad outcome—a negative response from investors, criticism from the board—can also prompt leaders to shade the truth or otherwise cut corners. Perhaps the biggest danger of all is failing to maintain self-awareness.

Executives often don't want to hear the truth about their plans and actions, and the people reporting to them are reluctant to share it. I had the privilege recently of discussing that reality with a group of young American military officers who had just returned from serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. We agreed that the best way to develop self-awareness is to get feedback from people you trust and who don't mind telling it like it is. These officers have had plenty of mirrors throughout much of their lives—parents, coaches, teachers, clergy, peers, and senior officers who will look them in the eye and tell them when they are doing well and when they're not. But as people age and move up in their careers, those mirrors tend to fall away. The people around them become more inclined to tell them what they want to hear—and that comes at a cost both to leaders and to their organizations. The best leaders find ways to get accurate and timely feedback from multiple sources, including colleagues, mentors, spouses, and friends. In looking for ways to drive growth in our organizations in a postrecession world, smart strategies and first-rate talent will matter a lot. Authenticity, however, will serve as the bedrock of success—and there's no time to waste in strengthening that foundation in ourselves.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Ryan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

*John R. Ryan, president and CEO, CCL*

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