

Enabling a life of purpose

by Charmain Pieterse

“In my opinion, authentic leadership is about understanding yourself and being true to that understanding.”

This is the view of Riana de Bruyn, Deputy CEO of Regenesys, a private, higher education institution. “It is about having an intimate understanding of your passion, your values and your vision, and expressing yourself in a truthful manner. In essence, it is about being ‘real’ as opposed to being ‘right’. The level of your authenticity - your ‘realness’ - is dependent on your level of emotional and spiritual intelligence, that is, your ability to listen to and follow your ‘inner voice’, which is the centre of your truth.”

In 2006, de Bruyn pursued her vision of becoming a stronger role-player in the tertiary education sector by joining Regenesys in a leadership position. In this position she is looking forward to making a significant contribution to higher education in South Africa.

“Regenesys wants to be a leading management school in the world by 2020,” highlights de Bruyn. “It is my vision to be a part of this growth and transformation and to help build a pioneering management school on the African continent. I have no doubt that, with our true passion and commitment to the holistic development of people, we are able to achieve this in a unique way, driven by our very particular authentic leadership style.”

De Bruyn explains that her leadership style is firmly based on the belief that, regardless of the challenges that face a leader, their behaviour must never contradict their own values or the foundation of their being. She notes that, should leaders behave in contradiction to their stated values, it will inevitably result in confusion and a lack of trust. “People depend on leaders to be able to adjust their style to the challenges facing them, without sacrificing their belief and value system,” adds de Bruyn.

In reflecting on her own attempts at promoting and implementing authentic leadership, de Bruyn comments that she has an earnest desire for people to be the best that they can be. She recognises people’s need to find their purpose, a reason for their existence, especially as they hear how these qualities lead to emotional and even financial fulfilment.

“These people are looking for others who are proof of this alleged formula – people who pursue their purpose and passion and are rewarded,” continues de Bruyn.



Riana de Bruyn, Deputy CEO

“Therefore, one way of developing authentic leadership is by offering a role model of purpose-driven behaviour, and to encourage purpose-driven behaviours in others. As a result, staff become more productive, motivated and less likely to leave. As part of their retention strategy organisations should provide staff with an environment within which they can express themselves in a truthful manner and pursue their own purpose.”

Developing one’s leadership role is not without its challenges, and de Bruyn humbly identifies two distinct areas she has had to work at. Firstly, she highlights the fact that, being an authentic leader, means placing one’s ego aside. “It is not about you; it is about a greater purpose that you serve through your leadership.”

Secondly, she has had to learn how to accept the label of being a leader. According to de Bruyn, allowing ‘leadership’ to become part of one’s identity involves a process of reflection and self-review and should be pursued, irrespective of the associated fears and anxieties.

“All the moments of significance in my life required me to first understand the fear that was holding me back, acknowledge it, and address it before I could move on,” continues de Bruyn. “Too often, fear is the biggest obstacle preventing people from pursuing their passion and living a ‘real’ life.”

De Bruyn ends off by saying that she would like for people to reflect on her as a person who had the best interests of others at heart and who knew how to serve through her leadership. “I am committed to human development and awakening potential; it is the growth of my staff and the organisation as a whole that ignites my passion and drive,” she concludes.

