

Andrew Faas on the ABC's of Leadership: How Believable Are You?



Andrew Faas

“To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; credible we must be truthful” – Edward R. Murrow

This is a second of a series of articles on the A-B C's of Leadership, in which I outline the characteristics for effective leadership. I am of the view that everyone plays a leadership role in various capacities. To understand and relate to the characteristics, I encourage the reader to understand the importance of self-awareness and what we all learned in Kindergarten – the Ethic of Reciprocity – “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. I challenge the reader to intense self-reflection rather than rationalizing your attitudes, biases, actions and words.

In the first segment, “A is for AUTHENTICITY” I dealt with the importance of self-awareness and being one's self. The characteristics that follow must be considered in the context of consistency of the application of each, with the intention of becoming a better person.

Today we are living through a worldwide nightmare because the most powerful person in the free world is not believable; he

is not believable because he is not credible; he is not credible because he is not truthful. Ironically in trying to persuade people that he is credible, he has resorted to belligerently calling his opponents and the media liars and crooks. As an expert in adult bullying, I assert this is a common tactic used to manipulate, deflect, deceive, distort and deny. Another bullying dynamic is normalizing the abnormal, senior presidential aide Kelly Anne Conway's term "alternative facts" is a blatant attempt to normalize.

Trump's lies are putting not only his presidency at risk, it is, as Senator Lindsay Graham put it "shaking the core of democracy". An obvious question being asked is how can we trust the office if we can't trust the individual. By extension, how can we trust government when we cannot trust its leader.



What is most disturbing for me is the number of people who find Trump credible. Despite his opponents and the media challenging him with facts (not "alternative facts"), forty six percent of the voters believed him. Some may argue that his opponents and the media were dishonest as well. If this is the case, it proves that one can win by being dishonest. This

also reflects an attitude that trust and respect is less important than power and control and motivating through fear.

The book 'Why Nations Fail' by Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson validates the premise that at the core of a nation's failure is the trust and credibility factor. This is true of the many organizational failures. Wells Fargo is the most recent example of an organization that is being brought down because they are not believable, their employees and customers

no longer trust them. The major reason for the level of distrust is not because of the practice of up selling, forcing employees to cheat, it was because of how senior leadership handled the situation, falsely claiming that they were unaware and when they were aware they made scapegoats out of 5,200 employee. Volkswagen is another recent example where senior executives doubled down on their claims of not being aware of the emissions scandal, despite mounting evidence that they were

Compare this to how Mary Barra, the CEO of General Motors handled the emission switch crisis which she inherited. Barra took full responsibility, minced no words in her apologies and steps she was taking in very hostile congressional hearings. Internally she called in her executive team and asserted that obviously they had to fix the emission switch issue, but more importantly they had to fix their culture, challenging them on how could a situation like this be continued without senior people being aware, and if they were aware, what happened. She asserted that employees at all levels need to raise areas of concern without fear of retaliation, knowing that the issues will be taken seriously. For General Motors this act of leadership saved the organization, because customers and employees trust the leadership they by extension trust the products.

In the January 26th issue of *USA Today*, Pope Frances urged the media to “end the focus on bad news”, claiming the “scandal mongering media that only focused only on muckraking or spread fake news risked becoming like those who have a fascination with excrement.” The Pope claims he wants the media “to engage in constructive forms of communication that rejects prejudice and help create a world of realism and trust.” With the greatest respect, I can only hope that the Pope’s comments have been taken totally out of context, if they have not been, these utterances are naive and dangerous. Also if they are not, he should focus on cleaning up the

institution he heads of the deflections, denials, cover ups and predatory cultures that continue to prevail under his watch. The Pope, rather than slam the media, should encourage them to dig even further in exposing wrongdoing and falsehoods. Rather than admonishing the media, the Pope should be preaching that lying is a sin, and if people follow this lesson there would be less scandals to report on. Also in defense of the media, there are precious few positive stories to report on.

On January 4th the Editor in Chief of the *Wall Street Journal*, wrote a piece called "Trump, 'Lies' and Honest Journalism" on "Why editors should be careful about making selective moral judgements about false statements." What Gerard Baker in essence did is caution journalists to dilute the significance of lies by using less offensive words. Thankfully most journalists are not paying heed to this offensive advice in reporting on Trump and his cronies, and calling "alternative facts" what they are -lies.

The raw negative emotions that exist today is as a result of a lack of trust in the establishment, largely because of the scandals, abuse and wrongdoing that has been uncovered and reported on touching on every aspect of society, be it in government, politics, business, religion, the media, entertainment, sports, education and associations – none have been immune. Back to the Pope's admonition to the press, the almost every day exposures on this, is not "muckraking or fake news". As a critical writer, I follow the news and what I read and hear is honest journalism.

In the research conducted for my books on adult bullying, I found that one of the main reasons people are targeted is resisting authority, and in particular when they do not comply with directions to misrepresent and or report wrongdoing. What happened at Wells Fargo may be considered extreme, my findings is that this dynamic is more common than not. In "Obedience To Authority" Stanley Milgram writes "... ordinary people simply

doing their jobs, and without any particular hostility on their part, can become agents in a terrible destructive process. Moreover, even when the destructive effects of their work become patently clear, and they are asked to carry out actions incompatible with fundamental standards of morality, relatively few people have the resources needed to resist authority". In the case of Wells Fargo, employees were caught in a classic catch 22 situation, people were fired for engaging in wrongdoing, at the same time others were fired for resisting and others for not meeting the quotas.

For us to get out of the rut of negativity we are in, all of us need to become more honest, and challenge ourselves, individually about how truthful and believable we are, rather than rationalize our lies.

Simply rationalizing lies is a dangerous game, you compound the issue by not only being dishonest with others – you are not true to yourself. Also the risk is huge, your self-esteem takes a hit and if you get caught, it ruins your reputation, which is more important than your status, wealth, intellect and ability to write and speak well. Consider how far former role models like Lance Armstrong and Bill Cosby fell, not so much for their misdeeds but the fact they blatantly lied.

Considering all of the above – how believable are you?

About the Author: ANDREW FAAS is an author, activist, revolutionist, philanthropist and management advisor promoting psychologically healthy, safe and fair workplaces. Before becoming a philanthropist, he led some of Canada's largest corporations for over three decades as a senior executive. He founded the Faas Foundation, which supports non-profit organizations concerned with workplace well-being and other personal health and research endeavors. Currently he is partnering with the Yale Center for Emotional

Intelligence on a groundbreaking initiative, Emotion Revolution in the Workplace, which will revolutionize the way organizations operate, leveraging the power of emotional intelligence; and Mental Health America, to help reduce unnecessary stress factors at work and eliminate stigma around a condition that affects one in five adults. He is the author of a new book called, "From Bully to Bull's-Eye: Move Your Organization Out of the Line of Fire."

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