

Who Do You Think You Are?

Aligning your intentions with the impact you have on others



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Famed American philosopher and psychologist William James once said, “When two people meet there are really six people present. There is each person as they see themselves, each person as the other person sees them, and each person as they really are.”

As a leader, how do you see yourself? And more importantly, how do the people you lead see you? Now before you say, “I don’t care what other people think of me,” realize that you don’t need to care what they think. You do, however, have to care about the impact you have on others, on your organization and your industry. Why? Because in the end, what matters is not who you think you are, but the experience that other people have with you. Even with the best of intentions, if your impact doesn’t align, then you may not be as effective as you could be.

If you want to have a positive impact and be viewed as a leader that others actually want to follow, consider taking the following steps.

Detail the Impact You Want to Have

How do you want to be known in your company and industry? Most leaders have never detailed their personal creed. But doing so can be incredibly powerful. Get clear about who you think you are and what you stand for. Establish your stance in the roles that are most important to you. Then ask yourself who you want to be when things aren’t going well. Sure, it’s easy to stay true to yourself during the good times. But when you’re frustrated or things aren’t going well, who are you then? These are the times that most leaders lose credibility because they haven’t thought about the kind of impact they want to have. Figure out how you want people to experience you in the difficult times.

Identify How Others View Your Impact

There are two ways to get information about your impact. An indirect approach like an anonymous survey is less confrontational, but the results are

not always useful. A direct approach is to talk with someone you trust face-to-face and ask specific questions to gain key insights. The secret is to phrase the questions properly. If you ask someone to give you feedback on your leadership style, you won’t get what you need. It’s too vague. Instead, ask a more focused question like, “During today’s meeting, I think I may have sounded defensive when I told Chris that the idea would never work. How did it land for you? What was your experience in that meeting?” With this approach, you’re pointing out a specific incident or behavior and asking someone about their personal experience during that moment and the impact you had. Of course, this doesn’t guarantee that the person will tell you the truth, but it does create an atmosphere where they’re more likely to be open.

Change your Impact

If you discover that observations about you don’t align with your personal perceptions, it’s time to make some changes. Figure out why there is a mismatch. Ask yourself, “Under what conditions might a person experience me this way?” Even a motivating, empowering and uplifting leader can come across as harsh, cold and defensive in certain situations. Become mindful of the conditions that can hinder your success. Identify your blind spots so you can shed some light on them. With this new knowledge, you can consciously alter the impact you have on others. If one approach isn’t getting the results you want, try another. As long as your approach supports your values and what you deem important, then you’re acting in integrity and in alignment with your goals.

Decide for Yourself

All leaders leave a lasting impact. What do you want yours to be? And is it the legacy you want? When you can align who you think you are with how others perceive you, you’ll be the kind of leader people naturally gravitate toward, and your enduring mark on the world will be a positive one. ✪



Founder of Latson Leadership Group, Alesia has more than 20 years experience helping organizations and leaders produce results while enhancing employee engagement. Visit www.latsonleadershipgroup.com