

# Congruence Matters

By David A. O'Brien, WorkChoice Solutions



Like so many people I know, I'll be glad when the political campaigns of 2016 are behind us. Despite the ongoing rancor and almost daily swing in polls, the leadership lessons that can be gleaned from both major candidates are numerous. Chief among them is the absence of congruence and its huge impact on the trust factor.

Steven Covey, one of the great leadership thinkers of the last century summed up congruence as, "the process of keeping your vision and values before you and aligning your life with them every day." Implicit in this wisdom is the critical importance of consistency, i.e. *every day*. Congruence is not about allowing your values to guide your words and actions sometimes or when it's convenient, but rather, always. Simply put, leadership congruence is about consistently being the positive role model for the behaviors you wish to see in others; be it your team, your family, friends and yes, strangers too.

The following story from my second book illustrates why congruence matters and serves as a reminder that sometimes, our actions *do* speak louder than words.

Maria was a mid-level manager who like most 40-something professionals, was feeling overworked and a bit stressed. Her busy schedule juggling the many demands of career and family seemed to be accelerating. One day on her way to work she realized that she had

forgotten about an important meeting that she was to attend for her boss. At about that point she also realized that the meeting was in fifteen minutes, and that she was at least twenty minutes away from the office.

Frustrated and more stressed, she approached the next intersection and found herself second in line at the traffic light, which had just turned red. Anxious, she began to tap on the steering wheel and repeatedly looked at her watch. As the light turned green, the car in front of her stalled. She grew even more frustrated and anxious. Just as the light turned yellow, the driver of the car in front of her restarted the car and darted through the yellow light, leaving Maria at the red light for a second time.

By now, Maria was quite agitated and ready to scream. She was surely going to be late for the meeting. Again she tapped the steering wheel and anxiously looked at her watch. She was going to make it through the intersection *this time* she thought. Just as the light turned green, a school bus pulled into the intersection from the other direction and proceeded to signal a pick-up or drop-off with its flashing red lights.

When no children appeared to be getting on or getting off of the bus, Maria became furious and began to blow the horn and shout at the bus driver. When this didn't seem to work, she

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rolled down her window and began to scream a few obscenities at the bus driver. Just as she thought that the bus was about to move, a loud pounding noise came from the back of her car. In a split second, a police officer appeared at her car window and proceeded to physically remove her from the car, placing her in handcuffs, and putting her in the back of his police cruiser.

Maria became hysterical. Not only was she going to miss the meeting; she was sitting handcuffed in the back of a police car!

The policeman called his supervisor to the scene in an effort to get her to calm down. After a few minutes, the police supervisor took Maria from the cruiser and removed her handcuffs. He explained that the first police officer had been right behind her at the light and had observed her irrational behavior. "More importantly" he said, the officer noticed the bumper stickers on her car proclaiming things like – *Serenity Now*, *Practice Random Acts of Kindness*, and *Patience is a Virtue* – and in light of her behavior was convinced that the car was stolen.

Great leaders don't put out mixed or contradictory messages about their values. They operate from a level of clarity and values-driven purpose that allow them to lead with congruence and to walk their talk every day. Every one of us possesses this level of power. Sure – it's easy to forget, get distracted, or even be afraid of our power. Nelson Mandela quoted Marianne Williamson in his 1994 inaugural speech, saying "Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us." In being open to this truth, we not only discover why congruence matters, but we also help our teams and all of those around us to do the same.

What do your work and life related bumper stickers say about you? Can people tell your values by your actions? If someone were following you, would they think your car was stolen?

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## About David A. O'Brien:

David is President of WorkChoice Solutions, a trusted provider of leadership and team effectiveness training, coaching and consulting services that was founded in 2000. He works with a wide range of corporate, non-profit and public sector clients to help bring about sustainable improvements in organizational effectiveness. His first book, *The Navigator's Handbook, 101 Leadership Lessons for Work & Life* is available on-line and in bookstores nationwide. His second book, *The Navigator's Compass, 101 Steps Toward Leadership Excellence* was released in 2015 and is also available nationwide. To learn more about the scope of David's work in helping leaders and teams to be more effective or to arrange for David to speak at your next conference or other special event, please visit WorkChoice Solutions on line at: [www.workchoicesolutions.com](http://www.workchoicesolutions.com) or call him directly at 860.242.1070.

