4 Ways to Grow Your Moral Authority

We've all been there—probably multiple times.

You don't have to roll up too many miles on the odometer of life until you experience:

- the regrettable reality of being required to follow someone who has the title of leader, yet is not qualified to lead…

- or the satisfying reality of choosing to follow someone who has no formal position of leadership, yet is eminently qualified to be followed.

Welcome to the world of **moral authority**.

What is moral authority? Moral authority is the recognition of a person's leadership influence based on who they are, not the position they hold. It is the authentication of the weight of a person's leadership that is simply the by-product of the credibility of their life and track record. Whether or not they occupy a predominant box on the corporate o-chart is not the issue. The issue ultimately is between position-based leadership and character-based leadership.

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Why is moral authority important? Moral authority is the foundation of leadership influence. **People desire to follow people, not positions.** Your business card may say you're large and in-charge, but if your bank account of moral authority is overdrawn, you will be forced to rely on extrinsic factors to rally your followers. No amount of skill, wealth, personality, education, or accomplishment can compensate for the absence of moral authority. **Perks and paychecks are the currency required to enlist people into a project, but moral authority is the currency required to enlist people into a movement.** Andy Stanley in his book, *Next Generation Leader*, observes: "Your position will prompt people in your organization to lend you their hands…But your moral authority will inspire them to lend you their hearts."

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How can you build moral authority?

1. You build moral authority by living a life where there is an observable and consistent alignment between what you believe and how you behave. As the saying goes, you

walk your talk. There is no gap between your platform rhetoric and your everyday actions.

2. You build moral authority by choosing to play by the same rules as those in your charge. You steer clear of entitlement at all costs. Your followers know that you neither seek nor accept preferential treatment that attends high-profile leadership.
3. Moral authority is established as it becomes increasingly clear that you are not motivated by financial gain or public recognition. **People see that the leader is called to make a difference, not driven to make a name.** There is something noticeably sacrificial about how they fill their leadership role.
4. And finally—and most importantly—moral authority is built as people recognize the presence of God at work in and through your life and leadership. **Spiritually-minded people want to follow a spiritually-rooted leader—someone who leads from the inside out.** They want to know that their leader is relentlessly seeking and discerning God's agenda for how they live and for how they lead.

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In short, moral authority is the sine qua non of long-term leadership effectiveness.

Be the leader you would choose to follow.

Chuck Olson
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