



Keep It Real... Embracing Your Authentic Self

By: April Baker, TRA

It is so easy to get swept up in trivial things and drift away towards a person who is opposite of who we authentically are and what we are truly about. So many times, we dress or act the part to get the part, and we wake up one day realizing that this wasn't the part for us to begin with! When you are not true to your core, you run the risk of coming across as phony or false. For that reason, you are wise to embrace your uniqueness and be true to yourself and what you stand for and believe in. We were all created for a reason. If we aren't true to ourselves, we are doing the world a disservice not to mention, our families, our friends, and our customers!

The Authentic You

What is authenticity? It is acting in a manner consistent with your beliefs. It is the quality of being genuine and authenticity leads to trust. People who come across as phony and false are viewed with skepticism and often are not generally liked or trusted. Not surprisingly, we avoid such people. We seek friends, colleagues, and new business partners who are authentic.

Nothing is more exhausting than trying to match the environment you're in. Talking to the "right" people, having the "right" friends, acceptance in to the "right" social circles, working in the "right" profession and saying the "right" things. This happens to many of us as we are maturing. Have you ever climbed the ladder to success...only to realize that you are not at the right place? I fell in to this trap myself. I did all those things. I tried to match my surroundings and be the person that others wanted me to be. Ever hear "keeping up with the Joneses?" Yep, I did that. Did it bring me material gain? Yes. Was I happy? At first. Did those relationships last? No. What I learned is that relationships that are built on credibility and trust stand the test of time. Inauthentic relationships, on the other hand, are destined for failure. They crumble as soon as

the going gets tough. As I self-reflect, I had a bunch of fake relationships... no one "keepin' it real." Once that bigger, better deal or relationship came along, I was out. It was a tough lesson to learn, but in the end, I'm better for it. Discovering your authentic self is one of the greatest gifts in life. It will permit you to move through life with purpose, passion, and appreciate those around you who are genuine and authentic.

So, how do you stay real? Let's not underestimate the influence of great, inspiring people in our lives. These influential mentors remind us of what makes us tick, why we exist, and inspire us to keep climbing. They allow us to appreciate our unique abilities and guide us back to our core values when we stay the course. These precious friends do not want us to be molded or morphed in to somebody we are not as they have, at one point in their lives, experienced the loss of self-worth...the tragedy that comes when one is not true to oneself.

Characteristics of Authenticity

Authentic leaders possess a number of common characteristics and demonstrate special qualities. The authentic you grows by developing the following:

- Understanding purpose
- Having an attitude of gratitude
- Leading with heart
- Connected Relationships through emotional intelligence
- Demonstrating self-discipline

Understanding Purpose

Simon Sinek is an author, motivational speaker, and marketing consultant who has made the foundation of his work the examination of "WHY" -- the exploration of who we are and what inspires us to act. People will not always recall what you say, but they will remember how the authentic you made them feel. Purpose is the WHY beyond your existence. It influences that authentic you, guides behavior and creates meaning to your life. Your WHY is embedded in the authentic you.

In the wonderful book, *When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*, Harold Kushner teaches us, "Our souls are hungry for meaning, for the sense that we have figured out how to live so that our lives matter, so that the world will be at least a little bit different for our having passed through it."

Attitude of Gratitude

Having an attitude of gratitude means making it a habit to express thankfulness and appreciation in all parts of your life, on a regular basis, for both the big things and small things alike.

In the book *How Full is Your Bucket?* by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D., they convey the "theory of the dipper and the bucket." You have an invisible bucket constantly being emptied or

filled, depending on what others say or do to you. When your bucket is full, you feel great. When your bucket is empty, you feel small and unimportant. You also have an invisible dipper. When you use the dipper to fill other peoples' buckets – to express gratitude to stimulate positive emotions – you also fill your own bucket.

Leading with Heart

When you lead with heart, others are sure to be touched. This quality has so many positive outcomes in your personal and business lives as it shows how much you care. Despite whatever you have achieved, whatever power you have amassed, or whatever knowledge and wisdom you possess, people want and need you to be "real." The best way to accomplish this is to blur the lines between "professional" and "personal", and truly care. When leading with heart, you become a better leader, a servant leader.

In our businesses today, we are moving and reacting to our environments far more quickly than ever before. This increase in speed is allowing for tremendous gains and many new opportunities. Would you agree that this speed has also created a work force that is increasingly confused, disenfranchised, and out of touch with their own fundamental values of the organizations they work for? What is mission-critical in our businesses today is a new perspective, one that is focused on the most basic and important of human values--compassion, trust, empathy, forgiveness, understanding, and love—lead with the values that come from the heart, not from a place of logic.

Connected Relationships Through Emotional Intelligence (EI)

A connected relationship happens when you take a genuine interest in the other person and the connection grows even stronger when emotion is involved. An emotional connection is a bundle of subjective feelings that come together to create a bond between two people. It is the glue that holds relationships together. While you may have a gift for creating emotional charged relationships from the get-go, for many it takes time and energy to create and maintain a connected relationship. The longer the relationship lasts, the more important it becomes to put extra work in to staying connected. As the exhilaration and excitement of a new relationship wears off, and the regular routine sets in, extra effort is required. Think of it this way, the silver tea set is only shiny if you continue to polish it. If you don't, it becomes dull and loses that special shine.

The authentic you demands emotional intelligence (EI). It is a key building block in developing your self-awareness and self-confidence. It is your ability to recognize how others feel to enhance the level of trust and respect in the workplace.

Self-Discipline

Living out the authentic you requires discipline...your ability to practice your values despite temptations to abandon them. Today's world is filled with glamour, glitz, and a focus on material gain. For that reason, I suggest the following strategies:

1. **Self-Reflection.** The authentic you requires constant self-reflection. It is this ability that will put you in a state of perfect harmony, causing you to experience less anxiety as you are not worried about another person's view...only your own.
2. **Visioning.** When you are deeply connected to yourself, you are able to envision your future self. Visioning will permit you to feel excitement as your core values help you raise the bar.
3. **Transparency.** Open communication is woven into the fabric of authenticity. When you are secure with who you are and what you stand for, you move about life with self-confidence as you exude a sense of inner worth.
4. **Active Listening.** When you are authentic, you experience fewer emotional threats to your ego, which makes you a good listener. Because you are confident and comfortable in your own skin, your ability to focus on others is evident.
5. **Focus.** Success in business and at home requires you to resist impulses and focus on projects through completion. Your ability to embrace your authentic self enhances your ability to push aside distractions.

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About the Author

April Baker, Chief Learning Officer for Beyond Insurance, provides leadership, strategy and direction in the design, development and delivery of the Beyond Insurance coaching, training and e-learning programs.

Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their organization to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.

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