BECOMING REAL
Journey To Authenticity
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Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.

Howard Thurman
THE ‘TRIPLE A’ APPROACH TO CULTURE

Great cultures aren’t built in a linear, tidy fashion. Like building a cohesive marriage or family, it’s a messy process that involves clarity, disciplined action, and perseverance. Building strong cultures, whether in families, community associations, public service organizations, entrepreneurial ventures, or multinational corporations, requires attending to three fundamental factors:

1. **Alignment:** If you work in an organization, you are going to have a culture. The question is, “Are you going to have a culture by default, or are you going to create a culture by design?” If you are committed to creating a culture by design, you have to get clear about the kind of environment that is necessary to achieve your strategy - and the kind of environment you want to work in. What are the attitudes and behaviors you expect from your people? What kind of leaders are necessary to build the culture you need and want? You must create clarity at every level about what is required and what is expected. It’s about achieving alignment.

2. **Accountability:** Collin Powell, the former US Secretary of State, once said, “Everyone on a team knows who is and who is not performing, and they are looking to you as the leader to see what you...”
are going to do about it.” Accountability is the ability to be counted on. No one takes pride for doing something easy or being let off the hook. Along with alignment, you need to have a process for holding people accountable for both operational and leadership results.

3. **Authenticity**: Within every person lies an aspect that, when connected to it, you feel deeply and intensely alive. At such moments there is a quiet voice inside that says, “This is the real me.” If you work to get alignment and accountability but don’t connect people to their authentic self, the best you’ll get is compliance. Alignment and accountability without authenticity is drudgery. If you want engagement, sustained commitment, and loyalty, you have to create a workplace that fosters authenticity. You have to make it real.
AUTHENTIC LEADING

From a leadership perspective, authenticity challenges contemporary theories and approaches that miss the deeper dimensions of development. Much has been studied about the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of leadership. But little is known about the ‘who’: who we are and the inner place or source from which we operate. Authenticity builds on a simple premise: good leadership cannot be reduced to technique or title. Good leadership comes from the identity and integrity of the leader – who you are as a person. Leadership is how you live your life. To be a good leader requires that you be a good person.

From more than a decade of research and observation, we have discovered that what people want from their leaders is essentially what they want from themselves: authenticity. Authenticity gets past the gimmicks, the fads, and the flavors of the month, and makes leadership – as well as life - real. Authenticity is where you get your power to lead – with or without a title. Authenticity connects you to yourself and to others. Authenticity makes leadership about presence rather than position. Authentic leadership development is about strengthening and deepening that presence. It’s about becoming a person worth following.
AUTHENTIC LIVING

Authenticity, of course, is more than a leadership philosophy. Authenticity is an approach to life. Abraham Maslow, American Psychologist, once said, “A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if they are to be ultimately at peace with themselves.”

Living authentically means living in accord with your values, your passion, your purpose, and your unique talents. Authenticity makes your life rich and full. It gives you the energy to live accountably, and a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Authenticity is what kindles a light in the darkness of mere being.

There is no blueprint or template for living authentically. Like building a strong culture, living an authentic life is not a linear, tidy, “ten step process.” What I do offer are a few strategies and guideposts for fostering authenticity within and around you.
1. Living authentically means following your own path.

We spend the first part of our lives responding to expectations from others (e.g. parents, teachers, peers, bosses, colleagues, and customers). I call this stage *engagement in the world*. However, if your life is solely based on reacting to the demands of others, you develop a slave mentality, a path of disintegration.

To live authentically, the second stage of life is when we turn inward – *disengagement*. You enter this part of your journey where there is no path because if there was a way or a path, it would be someone else’s. If you follow someone else’s way, you are not living authentically and cannot realize your potential. The third stage of life is *re-engagement*: engaging in the service of the world with your heart.
2. The authentic journey must eventually lead to contribution.

There is a difference between being driven and being fulfilled. I know a mountain climber whose passion to climb mountains took him to the top of the five highest peaks in the world. One could argue that he was living authentically by following his passion, but it wasn’t until he began to use technology on his climbs to inspire and teach students in classrooms back in Canada that he felt real fulfillment. To be authentic, you have to go beyond self-interest and close the loop by finding a way to use your passion and talents to make the world a better place. There is no meaning in life. Instead, you bring meaning to life by serving. It’s not what we have gained for ourselves but the contribution we have made to others that makes life meaningful. It’s not what we get from life that has the greatest, most lasting reward. It’s what we give. A good life, an authentic life, requires a generous spirit and a giving and caring heart. Living authentically means living a life of contribution.
3. You change the world by changing yourself.

Mahatma Gandhi said once, “As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world... as in being able to remake ourselves.” Our authentic work is not to straighten out the world, but to straighten out our own lives. Inscribed at the tomb of an Anglican Bishop in Westminster Abbey is this quote: “When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world; as I grew older and wiser I discovered the world would not change, so I shortened my sights somewhat and decided to change my country, but it too seemed immovable. As I grew into my twilight years, in one last desperate attempt, I settled for changing only my family, those closest to me. But alas, they would have none of it! And now I realize as I lie on my death bed, if I had only changed myself first, then, by example, I might have changed my family. From their aspirations and encouragement I would have then been able to better my country, and who knows, I might have even changed the world.” When you change, everything changes. If it is to be, let it begin with me.
4. Be receptive to doors that open to your authentic self.

There is a myriad of approaches that open to the door to your authentic self, to a deeper hidden aspect of who you are and who you are meant be in the world. Open doors can appear as a life-threatening illness, the death of a loved one, a family crisis, a quiet and profound despair in the middle of the night, or a simple knowing that you need to make a change in your life. Living authentically is about living more consciously, and each of these experiences, in their own unique way, can be an opening. For some, authenticity is sparked by a sudden event, a life-altering upheaval that causes a dramatic transformation. For others, authenticity is a gradual evolution into a new, slowly developing awareness. By shifting from conforming to society’s demands to listening and responding to this quiet call of the soul, a sustaining inner contentment emerges.
5. **S-l-o-w d-o-w-n.**

Authenticity will not find it’s roots in the dry and rocky soil of busyness. A daily practice of prayer or meditation helps connect you to your authentic self, the divine that lives inside you. The authentic life has two parts. One is the life *apart*: your unseen, spiritual nature. The other is the life *impart* – imparting to others what you have learned from your meditative experience. I have been living in a slower, more authentic world the past year as I have been walking with my brother through the cancer journey. Coming to grips with the inevitability of death and facing my own mortality has enlarged my awareness of what is important and what really matters. Facing death squarely and honestly helps you realize that the life you have today won’t last forever. Death awakens you to life. Knowing the precious and temporary nature of life enables you to appreciate and grasp it more deeply.

Slowing down means learning to find an internal centre, a place of contentment, independent of your successeses and your failures, a place of worth away from your work. You aren’t what you do. If you are what you do, then when you don’t, you aren’t.
Here are a few guideposts to help you s-l-o-w d-o-w-n and connect to your internal center, your authentic self:

- **Stillness**
  I define stillness as awareness *without thought*. While the surface of a lake may be tormented by a storm, stillness is that place below the surface that is immune from the tempest. Stillness can take the form of a formal meditation or prayer practice, but it can also be found during the course of a day when you slow down and are simply present to what is in you and what is around you.

- **Sanctuaries**
  A sanctuary is a place you can go to find refuge from the demands of the world. It can be a physical place (i.e. a park, seashore, church, special room, or even a jogging trail). It can be special person (i.e. a confidant, friend or mentor). It can be a mental place (i.e. a place inside where you go when you meditate or pray). All of these sanctuaries enable you to touch and listen to your inner wisdom, your authentic, spiritual self.
• **Inner guides**

We all have an inner guide or soul (the Romans called it your genius, the Greeks your *daimon*, or *entelechy*, the Christians your *guardian angel*; the Romantics, like many poets, call it your *heart*) that is your personal bearer, your support, your inner companion. While you may connect with, and find strength from this inner companion, you may also find support, guidance, and security from other ‘interior guides,’ such as relatives, teachers, or friends who have passed on.

• **Your Body As A Guide**

Your body knows. Here are some ways to connect with your body:

- Massages - that help you pay attention to what’s happening within
- Exercise that is supportive, energizing, and non-harmful
- Working with a health care practitioner that is skilled in body awareness
- Respecting, listening to, and learning from pain
- Being conscious of what you eat and drink and how food affects you
- Being conscious of how much rest and sleep you need
### Stay connected to your own sources of inspiration.
Stay plugged in to the source that supports and sustains you. What inspires you? Who uplifts you? What has been your experience of finding your authentic self in poetry, songs, novels, dance, stories, visual arts, film, theatre, nature? Expose yourself to those guides, writers, poets, artists, musicians, songwriters, environments, actors, teachers, friends, colleagues - anyone or anything that awakens you.

### Create transition rituals.
‘Ritual’ comes from the Sanskrit word rita, meaning that which *illumines*. Transitional rituals are practices that illuminate your nature, bring you back to yourself, to your center, especially when you are in the midst of a transition. They can include music, quiet time, exercise or bodywork, connection to nature, inspired reading or conversations.

### Practice gratitude and generosity
Gratitude is a vital practice for living an authentic life. The practice of gratitude enables you to participate in life and all it entails. Gratitude keeps you from being lost in the pain of an event and can center you in the midst of success and failure. It is also the antidote to entitlement. Generosity flows from gratitude.
6. Authenticity asks you to look at suffering with new eyes.

A good friend, Don Campbell, says, “If you want to make small changes in your life, change the way you do things. If you want to make big changes in your life, change the way you see things.” I used to try various tools and strategies to eradicate things in my life that caused me to suffer. While tools can be helpful, I now feel that my suffering arose from some unknown cause that sent me in search of healing. Rather than “pathologise” symptoms such as depression, anxiety, insecurity, self-doubt, and fear, even physical ailments, I can instead use these to teach me to be more authentic. It’s not so much what to do ‘about’ these symptoms as what do ‘with’ them. Pathology in one context can actually be healing in another. Sometimes we simply need to change the context.
I have gained both solace and strength in my own darkest hours from the 13th century Sufi poet Rumi in his poem, “The Guest House”.

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning, a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,

some momentary awareness comes as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they’re a crowd of sorrows, who violently sweep your house

and empty it of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,

meet them at the door laughing, and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,

because each has been sent as a guide from beyond.
7. Listen carefully to the call.

The Terma Collective offers some important questions for reflection: “What in your life is calling you? When all the noise is silenced, the meetings adjourned, the lists laid aside, the TV turned off, and you sit quietly with yourself at the end of the day, what calls to you? In the silence between your heartbeats hides a summons. Do you hear it? What is calling to you? What in you lies dissatisfied? What are you seeking at this time in your life? You know what the world wants from you, but what does your soul desire?” Take out a pen and paper. Start writing. Make time every day to listen, to reflect, to be still, to be silent.
8. Authentic people seek clarity about what matters in their life.

A rich industrialist from the North was horrified to find a Southern fisherman lying lazily beside his boat, smoking a pipe.

“Why aren’t you fishing?” asked the industrialist.

“Because I have already caught enough fish for the day,” replied the fisherman.

“Why don’t you catch some more?”

“What would I do then?”

“You could earn more money,” responded the industrialist. “With that you could have a motor added to your boat to go into deeper waters and catch more fish. Then you would make more money to buy more nylon nets. These would bring you more fish and more money. Soon you would have enough money to own two boats... maybe even a fleet of boats. Then you would be rich like me.”

“And what would I do then?” asked the fisherman.

“Then you could really enjoy life.”

“What do you think I am doing right now?”
You certainly don’t have to be poor to be authentic, but living authentically is about getting clear about what really matters and living in accord with these values. Living without clarity is like embarking on a wilderness journey without a compass. Any way will get you there if you don’t know where you are going. Creating a life that reflects your values and satisfies your soul is a rare and precious achievement. You’ll be told in a hundred ways what is expected of you and what is needed of you to be a success. The real discipline in life comes in saying no to the wrong opportunities.
9. **Authenticity requires courage.**

Being authentic isn’t the same as being comfortable. An authentic person is a person of strong character. That means finding a special attractiveness in difficulty, since it is only by coming to grips with difficulty you can realize your innate potential. Authenticity challenges the idealistic vision of leadership as an experience of harmony and light. Authenticity forces one to appreciate the dark, shadow side of human nature that, if left undetected, can wreak havoc in our lives and the lives of those we lead.

If you have ever walked through something that frightens you to the other side, you know that courage is inspiring. It inspires you and it inspires those around you. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is facing fear and walking through it. There have always been courageous men and women who have been prepared to die for what they believe in. What do you care enough about to give your life for? As you go through life, you will see a great chasm. Jump. It is not as wide as you think.
10. **Authenticity cannot be separated from a life of integrity.**

Living with integrity means you have nothing to hide. You live life honestly. You cannot do right in one aspect of your life while doing wrong in another. Life is one indivisible whole. That's what integrity means. An authentic life is an integrated life. Who you are at work is essentially the same person as who you are in your personal life. Integrity is the foundation of authenticity.
11. Seek the call of your authentic self.

The destiny of the mighty oak tree is inscribed in the tiny acorn and like that acorn, we are all born as a seed of possibilities to fulfill in our lifetime. We are all born with a destiny. The central purpose of life is to find, and live, that purpose. Finding that calling is an integration of three critical forces:

- **Ability:** What do you do well that you don’t remember learning?
- **Passion:** What do you do, that when you do it, you lose all track of time?
- **Contribution:** What do you do that makes a difference?
12. **Authenticity is a decision.**

You don’t need to have the ‘right’ job or the ‘right’ boss or the ‘right’ organization to be authentic. Like happiness, authenticity is not a destination; it’s a method of travel. You can decide to be authentic. It’s an attitude, a mind-set, a choice. As Abraham Lincoln said, “*Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.*” Living authentically, like happiness, comes from the inside; it is not a matter of externals. You can inspire people around you to be authentic when you make the choice to be authentic, independent of your outer environment. Regardless of your title or lack of title, your success or lack of success, your accumulations or lack of, you can positively influence others to become authentic with the right attitude.
13. Seek Community.

We live in a world where most of us expend a great deal of energy in *impression management* – trying to look good to those around us. With whom in your life can you let down the masks? With whom can you relax and simply be yourself? Who supports you and holds you accountable to find your own voice, discover and express your gifts, and be who you are? Authenticity is a lonely journey, but it can’t be done alone. An authentic community is a group of people who support and encourage you to stay authentic. Georgia O’Keefe, an American painter, once said, “*That which is most precious to us is often so close to us that we don’t know that it is there.*”

I view the world as a big pot. We all contribute and remove what we need from the ‘community pot.’ Every time you need something, you dip in and take it out of the pot. When you don’t need anything from the pot, you put a little something back in: a little attention, support, comfort, kindness, love, and so on. If we all throw a little in every day, then when we need it, the pot will have just what we need.
14. An authentic life is a persistent life.

Living authentically requires that you often must let go of the outcomes of your actions. Authenticity means at times you act independently from what the world gives you back. On Mother Teresa’s wall in Shishu Bhavan, the children’s home in Calcutta, was a poster entitled “Anyway.”

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ANYWAY
People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered,
LOVE THEM ANYWAY
If you do good, people will accuse you of
selfish, ulterior motives,
DO GOOD ANYWAY
If you are successful,
you win false friends and true enemies,
SUCCEED ANYWAY
The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow,
DO GOOD ANYWAY
Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable,
BE HONEST AND FRANK ANYWAY
What you spent years building may be
destroyed overnight,
BUILD ANYWAY
People really need help
but may attack you if you help them,
HELP PEOPLE ANYWAY
Give the world the best you have
And you’ll get kicked in the teeth,
GIVE THE WORLD THE BEST YOU’VE GOT ANYWAY.
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Authenticity is the realization that there are two kinds of success: outer success and inner success. Outer success comes from the world. Outer success is about winning, promotions, degrees, and acquisition. Inner, or authentic, success is about right living. Inner success is about the kind of person you are. It’s about what you contribute to the world and the quality of the relationships in your life. Outer success is about being the best in the world, while inner success is about becoming the best for the world. Outer success is about what you can get. Inner success is about what you can give.

In my workshops I often use an exercise where I have participants think of three people they admire. They could be real people, such as Nelson Mandela or your grandmother, or mythical characters such as Hercules or Athena. For me, they would be my mother, my father, and Viktor Frankl. I then ask them to think of the character traits that make each of their chosen characters admirable to them. For example, I admire my mother for her wisdom; my father for his compassion, and Viktor Frankl for his resiliency, perseverance, and dignity. Next, we compare these admirable traits with the typical success markers of our culture, the kind of traits featured in People magazine. After doing this exercise with thousands of people, I have yet to see any choose characters they admire with qualities such as fame, beauty, power, youth, or wealth. It is fascinating that culturally we gravitate unconsciously to things that ultimately mean so little to us.
I used to be drawn to people who had outer success. While achievement is still an admirable trait, as my own authentic self has been detected and expressed more fully and I have become more comfortable with myself, I am now inspired more by people who have inner success, success beyond success. It is not those who seek the next promotion or the next achievement or the next level of financial success, but rather the caring people, people with integrity, and people who are committed to making a difference in the world that I now admire.

The authentic life is not one that seeks ephemeral happiness. Happiness is a by-product of living the right kind of life, of doing the right thing. Sometimes authenticity means a simple march of duty during dull, dark days. The quality of your life is an expression of the qualities that you bring to your life. True joy is the by-product of a life well lived.
If you need any support on the journey, regardless of your title, we’d love to hear from you. Please visit: davidirvine.com

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