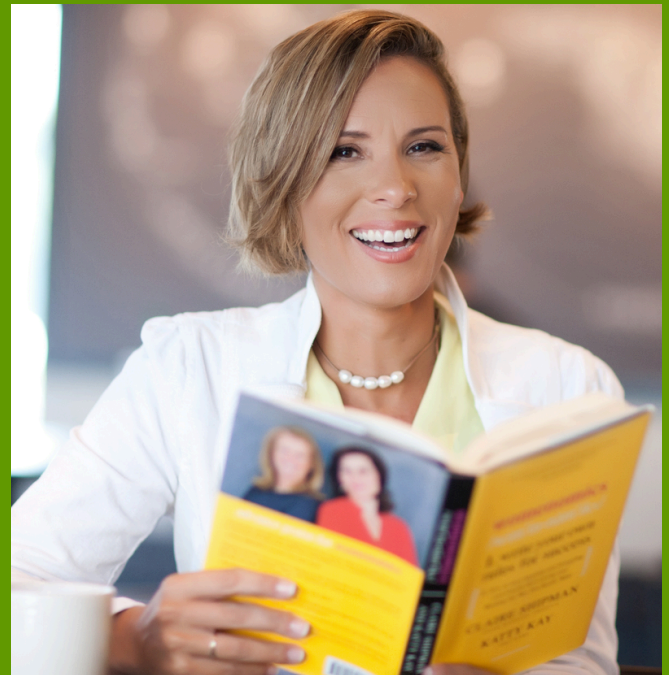


THE DRAINING QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY



I've fallen into so many traps in my life that I can't count them anymore. Some trends were easily transcended by my strong ego, but the quest for authenticity is a different beast. A quest for something elusive that we cannot find through the lenses of everyday life and its relentless demands.

I recently challenged myself to publish online to find my voice. It was probably the most draining experience I've had in recent years. Why? Because everyone is competing for authenticity and visibility, yet templates and platform guidelines push us to expose ourselves in ways that feed algorithms and force audience engagement. How does that support



**Schedule Your Complimentary
Call Now**

by Belinda MJ Brown
Executive Coach & Women Success Expert

authenticity and the associated freedom?

From the perspective of the Energy Leadership framework, this experience shifted me through various energy levels, revealing why it felt so exhausting. Initially, I found myself in the lower energy levels Level 1 and Level 2. At Level 1, I felt a sense of powerlessness, questioning how I would be perceived. This negative, catabolic energy drained my motivation and confidence. As I pushed forward, I moved to Level 2, where inner conflict and guilt took over. I resented the artificiality imposed by social media algorithms and felt frustrated by the need to conform to gain visibility.

Despite this, I persisted, driven by a desire to overcome these barriers. As I navigated the process, I gradually moved into higher energy levels. At Level 3, I began rationalizing my efforts, telling myself that playing the game was necessary to achieve, learn and grow. This provided some relief, but the energy was still predominantly catabolic. It wasn't until I reached Level 4 that I started feeling more anabolic energy. Here, I focused on the value I could provide to my audience and the potential positive impact of my authentic voice. Did I find my voice yet? I had it all along. This shift brought a sense of purpose and fulfillment. Ultimately, my aim is to reach the highest levels of energy Level 5 and

above where I can fully embrace my creativity and authenticity without being hindered by external expectations. These levels are characterized by reconciliation, synthesis, and a deep connection to my core values. By understanding these dynamics, I can better navigate the complexities of authenticity in the digital age.

So, What Does Authenticity Mean?

Philosophical Exploration of Authenticity

Authenticity, as a philosophical concept, transcends the superficial notion of being true to oneself. It delves into the intricate relationship between our internal world and external expressions, weaving through layers of societal norms, personal beliefs, and existential reflections. At its core, authenticity is about embracing and expressing our unique essence, which often requires peeling away the layers of conditioning imposed by society, culture, and even our own past experiences. Our brain is a fantastic super computer, computing terabytes of data and experiences. Each experience is coded and stored in unconscious programs. Those programs might not anymore serve our authenticity but are really useful in our daily lives.

Authenticity as Originality



Being authentic means being original, not just in appearance but in essence. It involves recognizing and embracing what makes us unique, and courageously expressing that uniqueness in our thoughts, actions, and interactions. This originality is not about standing out for the sake of being different; it is about aligning our outer expressions with our inner truths. In the words of existential philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, authenticity is about living in accordance with one's true self, rather than conforming to external expectations and societal roles. How often do we commit to this and yet unconsciously get caught into being the original of according to someone else?

The Deep and Meaningful Relationship

Authenticity is a deep and meaningful relationship between who we are and who we aspire to be. It requires self-awareness, introspection, and a willingness to confront our deepest fears and desires. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, authenticity involves being true to oneself, but this self is not a pre-existing entity. Rather, it is continuously shaped and reshaped through our interactions with the world and our reflections on those interactions. Authenticity, therefore, is an ongoing process of self-discovery and self-creation. Each step of growth leads to another set of introspection and self-

awareness.

Stripping Away Labels

To be authentic, we must strip away the labels and masks that society and others impose on us. These labels often serve to confine us within predefined roles and expectations, limiting our ability to express our true selves. Philosopher Martin Heidegger emphasized the importance of "being" rather than "seeming." He argued that authenticity involves acknowledging the "thrownness" of our existence—recognizing that we are born into a world with pre-existing structures and norms but also taking responsibility for our choices and actions within that context. The Energy Leadership Framework enables us to choose and take responsibility for our thoughts, emotions and actions for more authenticity.

The Interplay of Freedom and Responsibility

Authenticity is inherently tied to the concepts of freedom and responsibility. Existentialist thinkers like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir posited that authentic individuals embrace their freedom to choose and act, while also acknowledging the weight of responsibility that comes with such freedom. This duality can be challenging, as it requires us to make



conscious choices that reflect our true values and beliefs, even when those choices are difficult or unpopular. In leadership women have to recognize this interplay and find the balance that works for them.

Authenticity in Relation to Others

Authenticity is not only about our relationship with ourselves but also about how we relate to others. Philosopher Martin Buber's concept of "I-Thou" relationships highlights the importance of genuine, authentic interactions with others. In an "I-Thou" relationship, we encounter others as whole beings, not as objects to be used or manipulated. This form of authentic engagement fosters deep connections and mutual respect, enabling us to be truly present and open in our interactions. Level 5 and 6 of energy leadership reflect this clearly. At level 5 we accept unicity and diversity as an opportunity and seek to grow from this interaction with people different from us. Their differences spark curiosity and discovery. Level 6 supports the symbiosis and transcends the race, religion, language, borders to allow us to simply be HUMAN or even further to be a species on this planet respectful and integrated with other species.

Challenges and Paradoxes

The quest for authenticity is fraught with challenges and paradoxes. In a world that often values conformity and superficial success, being authentic can be a radical and subversive act. It requires courage to stand by our convictions and to express our true selves, especially when faced with societal pressures to conform. Yet, as Carl Rogers, a pioneer in humanistic psychology, noted, the path to authenticity is also deeply rewarding, as it leads to greater self-fulfillment and genuine connections with others.

Today, authentic leadership is considered a positive quality. But when being authentic means expressing our truth, and that truth isn't popular, it becomes difficult to handle. Take Elon Musk, for example. While I'm not his biggest fan, I respect his creative thinking and would say he leads with a certain degree of authenticity. Yet, when he doesn't align with mainstream thinking or methods, his authenticity is often questioned and even despised.

In corporations, women are encouraged to become visible and show up authentically. However, when they do, they often receive feedback that they are "too much" or "not enough." So, what does it really take to be authentic as a woman leader in the 21st century?



Sparkling Reflexivity

By embracing authenticity, we embark on a journey of continuous self-exploration and growth. This journey invites us to question our assumptions, reflect on our experiences, and seek deeper understanding of ourselves and the world around us. Authenticity is not a static state but a dynamic process of becoming. It challenges us to live with integrity, to align our actions with our values, and to cultivate a deep sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

In conclusion, authenticity is about recognizing and expressing our unique inner essence, free from the constraints of societal labels and expectations. It is a profound and ongoing journey of self-discovery, self-creation, and genuine engagement with others. By embracing authenticity, we can lead lives that are true to ourselves, fostering deeper connections and creating a lasting impact on the world around us.

Authenticity in Leadership: A Continuous Journey

Authenticity in leadership is not a destination but a continuous journey. The path to genuine leadership is filled with self-discovery, self-awareness, and the courage to be vulnerable. By leveraging frameworks like Energy Leadership and

understanding the blockers that hinder our authenticity, we can navigate this journey with greater clarity and purpose.

Reflecting on our energy levels helps us understand the dynamics of our interactions and the impact we have on others. It allows us to lead from a place of authenticity, where our actions align with our values and our true selves. This alignment creates a powerful connection with those we lead, fostering trust and respect.

As we embark on this journey, let us remember that authenticity is not about perfection. It's about embracing our imperfections, being honest about our struggles, and continuously striving to be the best version of ourselves. By doing so, we can inspire others to do the same and create a legacy of authentic leadership that transcends generations.

In our pursuit of authenticity, let us challenge the norms, break free from the constraints of societal expectations, and lead with courage and conviction. By doing so, we can create a world where authenticity is celebrated, and every individual is empowered to live and lead with their true self.

Questions to Ask Yourself to Be More of Who You Are, Wherever and Whenever You Are

1. **Observe Yourself:** How does your body respond in situations where you feel you are being yourself? What sensations do you feel? How is your tone of voice? Are you smiling or closed off?
2. **Welcome Observations Gently:** Treat any observation as information and data to create awareness. There's no need for positive or negative judgment of your reactions or behaviors.
3. **Peel Off Labels:** Identify the thoughts or behaviors you exhibited. Were they truly yours or the ones expected by your audience? The ones from your parents or teachers? If you were living in a different country, would you have the same thoughts? While interacting, were you seeking to be liked, confirmed, welcomed, or to belong?
4. **Visualize Freedom:** Imagine how you would handle the situation differently if approached with love and care for yourself. How will this manifest? What are the risks? What do you stand to gain? Who are you when you act this way? What feedback does your body provide?
5. **Hold This Posture:** Visualize yourself holding this posture and responding in this way for a few minutes. Imagine the positive response you offer yourself.

Through this process, you begin to peel off the labels, though not all of them are deeply ingrained in your identity. There's a chance authenticity will expand, allowing you to feel more comfortable being your unique self.

The Ongoing Process of Working on Your Identity to Be Authentic

Working on your identity involves revisiting your beliefs and challenging your environment. This process is best supported through coaching. Having a well-trained and experienced sparring partner allows for this work in a safe space to reflect and choose the identity you want to embody.

In our quest for authenticity, we must navigate a world that often demands conformity. But by staying true to ourselves and continuously reflecting on who we are and who we want to be, we can lead with authenticity and create a lasting impact.