



the human connection

I am a qualified Professional Integral Coach who partners with people to build long-term excellent competence and become more fulfilled in their lives.

Since becoming a full time Integral Coach I have coached leaders of global companies at executive and senior management level in a cross section of functions. Organizations I am, or have done work with are Toyota, British American Tobacco (SA), Microsoft Internationally, Woolworths, @ Home, Standard Bank, and KWV. In addition to coaching individual clients, I also coach teams and facilitate workshops on coaching and leadership practices.

As well as my formal business qualifications, I have completed my training as a Yoga Teacher. I am married and have two young boys. My passions are my work, which I regard as a vocation, spending time with friends and family, reading, ongoing learning, yoga, cooking, and more recently writing.

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What is this thing we call authenticity?

Authenticity is one of those words that have become a catchphrase in the past 15 – 20 years. It is often used when talking about leadership, but it also extends to the personal experiences we have with other people and whether we find them to demonstrate genuineness in the way they relate and engage with us. Paradoxically authenticity is becoming more and more important because the world we live in is becoming increasingly superficial in many ways. Consider, for example, the plethora of reality shows and how so many of them are about the external trappings of living in Western society and you start to form a very visual picture!

We tend to view authenticity as a quality and therefore see it as static, rather than fluid. Until recently I always took this at face value until a few weeks ago when I was part of a learning group and someone spoke about authenticity being a process and not a permanent quality.

And that got me thinking about authenticity and what it is we have to learn, do and be in order to be seen as authentic.

Learning to be authentic? I think not you may say... But actually it's less about learning to be authentic, and more to do with learning about one's own true nature and who one really is. It is only in knowing yourself and with that the light you shine in the world as well as the shadow you cast, that you can be authentic in your unique way. How often do you meet someone who claims something like 'I stand for abundance and am generous in the way I work and live my life', and they think they truly are, and yet they act in a way that actually demonstrates a scarcity approach to life. Inevitably they are oblivious and ironically it is obvious to everyone around them, a bit like the Emperor who wore no clothes. I think what causes this disconnect is that when we say we only stand for one thing, we create duality and an internal belief that we can never ever act in a way that we have therefore abandoned as a possibility.

When we are able to accept that at times we may in fact stand for something that we would normally eschew, it allows for emotional and relational honesty with oneself and others, and there isn't a need to live up to an impossible ideal. Then there is no need for pretence and this means that what we do is congruent with what we say. In this way we don't create unrealistic expectations and put ourselves on a pedestal and then wonder why people keep trying to knock us off it!

Also, if you think about authenticity being a process, rather than a static quality, that one either possesses or doesn't, it allows for our humanity to shine through as we can admit to being fallible. It releases the grip we tend to place on ourselves that we need to be a particular way always. So instead of expecting ourselves to be little more than a cardboard cut-out with a script to be followed, we can actually be whole and multi-dimensional. We are then able to be more accepting and forgiving of ourselves, and this in turn allows us to be more understanding with others, as we are able to recognize that they share the same struggles as us.

Authenticity is then something we can access any time by virtue of who we are (being), rather than by what we are doing or saying, and that is incredible freeing and ripe with possibility.

Personally, when I am being authentic it means that I am being true to what I believe, feel or think and am able to voice that in a way that is clear, honest and without judgement of myself or other people. It is sometimes very hard to do because of fear of what people will think and how what I have to say may impact on them. And so a key part of authenticity is having the capacity to trust that what we do and say will be received in the way it was meant and to know that even if it isn't we and others have the resources to deal with the misunderstanding. That way we are able to let go of needing to be a certain way or of being seen in a particular light.

As mentioned earlier, since we tend to think in absolutes in that we see authenticity as a fixed quality we can create blind spots that impact on our intention to be authentic. One-way to assess whether you are being authentic or not, is to ask the question, 'Would I still do what I am doing if no-one else was watching

me?' It doesn't matter what the answer is, as either way you are working on growing your authenticity. Think about the energy that releases and what could happen as a result.

Over to you...

If you are interested in learning more about yourself and authenticity, here is a reflection for you.

For the next few weeks, at the end of each day, ask yourself the following questions:

When was I/wasn't I authentic? How did I know?

What excuses did I make when I was inauthentic?

What impact did my being authentic/inauthentic have on me, and my relationships?

What is the price I am willing to pay?

What am I learning about myself and what possibilities are now open to me?

“Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.”

- Chinese Proverb