

The Struggle to Achieve Authenticity



The cover of the January 2015 issue of the Harvard Business Review contained this lead caption: "The Problem with Authenticity: When it's Ok to fake it till you make it."

When I read the headline, it caused me to wonder what happened to the characteristic social responsibility ethic of this Arespected business journal.

Could it be that Harvard's School of Business was actually promoting and encouraging dishonesty, fakery, and less than noble business behavior in the market place?

When I read the article, I discovered that the headline was a tease and not an accurate lead into the true contents of the piece.

The article itself explored the difficulties of defining authenticity and the challenges of leading an organization in an authentic manner.

Most of us probably think of ourselves as being an authentic person with occasional moments of straying from our true selves.

But, do we truly know the meaning and essence of authenticity?

Can you, for example, define for yourself and others the essence of authenticity and what it requires of us as leaders?

The original concept of authenticity has at its core these three meanings: (i) originality, (ii) genuineness-not being an imitation, copy, fake, or imposter; and (iii) being that which one purports to be.

Authenticity has also come to be known in other ways, such as: (i) being true to self, (ii) being transparent, (iii) maintaining alignment with what you feel and what you say or do, and (iv) making decisions based on values---the principles which you hold in high esteem, treasure and deem to be important to you.

The challenges of living authentically, in your personal, professional, or business lives are numerous.

They include the following:

- Truly knowing who you are at your core, not your idealized self (self-image), not your projected self (how you present yourself to others), and not how you are your perceived by others (public persona)-but the person on the inside with feelings, dreams, hopes, aspirations, fears, anxieties, strengths, and weaknesses.
- Knowing when (if at all) and how to express your authentic self without losing credibility and jeopardizing your reputation and effectiveness as a leader.
- Actually having a set of values, ethics, and leadership principles that define who you are and what you believe.

- Balancing real world pressures, self-interest, conflicting values, emotions, intellect/reason, and will to make daily choices that reflect authentic living.
- Taking the time to actually connect, know, contemplate, understand, and perhaps, define for self and for your organization what you truly stand for.

As the New Year begins, does it make sense to consider the practical aspects of the meaning of authenticity for you and/or your organization?

Why not make authenticity one of your topics for your upcoming annual board or management retreat?