

Living Authentic Lives

"Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life" – Steve Jobs

I've always interpreted the admonition "Think it, feel it, say it" to mean, be true to who you are – be authentic. On the other hand, I've often received the advice, "fake it until you make it", or to act confidently even when you don't feel confident.

Are these two pieces of seemingly good-sounding guidance at odds with each other? What's so great about authenticity anyway? Why do we value it in others? Do we really need more encouragement to be fake these days, in our social media-driven culture where others' reactions to our on-line escapades have demonstrated impacts on our self-esteem and moods? Do we even know what it means to be truly authentic?

Being genuine can be difficult. It takes courage to overcome fears of being judged and put your whole self out there, sharing thoughts and opinions that others may not agree with. I encountered this numerous times at NCOA where I wanted to share a thought, but was too nervous to speak up. I often kicked myself later for letting someone else express exactly what I was thinking!

Over time I've learned that being genuine helps others to do the same. It has helped me improve my communication, strengthen relationships, and find more joy in life. Not sure where to start? Give these suggestions a try:

- ✓ **Speak your mind...reasonably** – Take time to formulate respectful opinions, and then don't be shy about sharing them. Remember, not everyone will share your perspective, and that's okay.
- ✓ **Forge your own path** – Discover your own passion and purpose. Don't always allow external factors to dictate your life's course. Learn to trust your internal compass.
- ✓ **Embrace vulnerability** – This is one of the hardest things to do. While our culture admittedly values strength and stoicism, being vulnerable and open keys to learning and growth.
- ✓ **Be open-minded** – Don't take someone else's opinion as a personal attack, and don't waste your precious energy on elaborate revenge plots when you find yourself in a disagreement with someone. Living authentically means asking others to accept you as you are...and returning the favor.
- ✓ **Build strong identities** – A strong, authentic sense-of-self is a protective factor that can be developed by getting back to hobbies you enjoy, participating in activities that provide purpose and meaning, and spending time with supportive friends, family, and/or coworkers.

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