

# **PAMPHLET 15**

## **AUTHENTICITY**

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Dr. Seuss wrote of King Looie Katz, a proud king in the world of Katzenstein. King Looie was especially proud of his royal tail and did not want it to drag on the ground and get dirty. So he commanded Kooie Katz to walk behind him and carry his tail. All was well until Kooie realized that his fine tail was dragging in the dirt. His pride was hurt. So Kooie made a cat named Chooie follow him around, and Chooie Katz kept Kooie's tail from dragging on the ground.

On and on it went until all the cats in Katzenstein were hiking round and round all keeping one another's tails from dragging on the ground. They felt proud to be so special except Zooie Katzen-bein who was the last cat in line. No one was left to carry her tail. Zooie was awful mad, and she did a brave thing. She yelled, "I quit!" and slammed the tail of Prooie Katz on the ground. Then all the other cats did the same thing until each cat held its own tail. Since then the cats of Katzenstein have been more grown up and democratic than before. All movements to new realities begin with individual acts of courageous authenticity.

Authenticity is the expression of our beliefs into action--the intrapersonal congruency of ideas and behaviors. Herb Kelleher, president and CEO of Southwest Airlines (selected by Fortune magazine as the best company to work for in America in 1998) said, "I don't have a leadership style except being myself." Herb Kelleher is unusual. Most organizations, where conformity is the first rule, are filled with inauthentic people--top to bottom--colluded with by academics, consultants, and business writers who are equally contrived.

Social psychologist Solomon Asch conducted experiments to investigate what human beings will do when confronted with a group which insists that "wrong" is "right." When alone, 99 percent of the people chose the obviously correct response to a question. But in a group, 76 percent betrayed their own judgment and sided with the majority (who were

confederates with the scientist) at least once during 12 trials. And 37 percent of the subjects' responses were incorrect across all trials. Asch warned of a "tendency to conformity in our society so strong that. . . people are willing to call white black."

My colleague Bob Terry wrote in *Authentic Leadership*: **Authenticity is speaking, however dimly, to more and more of us, calling us to recognize the pervasiveness of the new inauthenticity. Something is not right and we sense that what is not right is expressing itself in many forms, from global issues to personal concerns. We have an intuitive sense of disconnection from the very institutions and people we believe we should be connected with.**

The inauthenticity we see in organizations is paradoxical because when we form teams, empower employees, begin quality programs, involve people in decisions, and try to become learning organizations, an essential requirement for the success of these approaches is the trust that comes from authentic relationships. The more many organizations mindlessly utilize these tactics, however, the more fearful and inauthentic their employees become. Too many managers jump to the new organizational approach looking for the quick-fix (mechanical) without laying the relational (organic) groundwork necessary for the program to succeed. The executives who make such incongruent changes are disconnected from what is real, and they do not understand that the success of the new organizational approaches is based on genuine relationships between people.

Our organizations downsize, reorganize constantly, behave defensively, and say one thing and do another. They demand political correctness, jump frenetically from change program to change program, and, at the same time, ask employees to trust, cooperate, and take risks. This "crazymaking" and "calling white black" calls into question the motivation of executives for using these new approaches in the first place. It is not unfair to accuse many in power of manipulating the movement to employee empowerment for selfish purposes. They are not the heroes they think they are for enhancing the enterprise's short-term bottom line. They are villains who destroy trust that may never be rebuilt. Their behavior threatens the sustainability of the organization. They are rewarded handsomely for the damage they do. Is it any wonder that so many in organizations are cynical, confused, and disillusioned?

Many executives are not up to the challenge before them. They do not

know how to lead change of the magnitude required, they are unwilling to ask for the help they need, and they are unable to acknowledge and apologize for their mistakes. They must work hard each day to appear competent. They try to lead from the safety of the rear--hiding in their office suites when things get difficult. These pseudo-leaders cannot hide, and they are not credible. Followers do not trust them, and their inauthenticity amplifies that of the employees. People realize they are part of a dishonest system, and they perpetuate it by their compliance. Our cynicism reflects an authenticity crisis that Bob Terry says is at the root of our problems with organizational change.

Authenticity can be dangerous unless you are the owner or CEO. An easy way out is to conform. We go along to get along. We smile and nod enthusiastically yet feel the opposite. As a former colleague said often, "I can feel strongly about either side of the issue." Perhaps we go through the motions. We "check out" mentally and emotionally, and we become just like those we are so critical of: clones, phonies, hypocrites, useless corporate suckups. The value of diversity is lost leaving only its surface appearance. For some, the inauthenticity becomes so insidious, the lies so exhausting morally that, to remain sane, they must flee the organization.

Others of us run from the awareness of our inauthenticity. We are in conflict with ourselves--conflict between what we know to be true and our fear. Deep down we know our falseness diminishes us. We are fearful that if we acknowledge our own inauthenticity, even to only ourselves, we will need to take action. This is correct for unfeigned behavior is essential for our wholeness and health. True mindfulness will require difficult choices. Do I want to work in an unhealthy organization? Can I change the enterprise? Can I stay in an unhealthy company and stay healthy myself? Am I willing to trade being "alive" for a paycheck and the illusion of security? How am I contributing to a destructive system? Am I going to risk being genuine and live an authentic life? These questions are the right ones to reflect upon and to squirm in our chairs over.

Authentic people examine themselves honestly. They ask others to help them do so. They possess a clear purpose for their lives, a vision for their future, and core values to guide them along the way. They translate this core identity into action and live congruent with their identity in all areas of their life. They do not confuse rude, insensitive, and selfish behavior with authenticity--such behavior is simply emotionally immature.

Real people are not perfect. They surface their shadow side and are

“perfect” in their humanity. Authentic people connect with others. They are the people who lead and are part of successful teams. We are inspired by unaffected people because they ring true. They are the people who change the world.

True leaders look in the mirror and see themselves and the organization honestly. They become continuous learners willing to gain insight from others. Authentic leaders see the variance between the organization’s behavior and the purpose, vision, and values the enterprise claims to live by. Often they sense that the organization feels crazy, that people feel crazy, and they ask kindly, “Do any of us know what we are doing?” Real leaders seek and tell the truth--all the time.

Authenticity is a personal choice and comes from the inside out--not the outside in. We are responsible for our own authenticity. We cannot wait for organizations to change. We must take the initiative and behave courageously. After all, it isn’t authentic to be yourself only when given permission by some higher authority. Then our organizations will change.

Aristotle said, “we become brave by doing brave acts.” I attended a dialogue about organizational change, and we discussed the pervasive lack of courage in organizations. Many of the people attending the dialogue shifted uncomfortably in their chairs when we talked about courage. Someone suggested we will see daring behavior in organizations when organizations are made “safe.” I am all for creating a “safe” atmosphere in organizations, but courage is not required when the situation is safe. Boldness must come before safety; courage creates safety. If we wait for safety before we act dauntlessly, we will never be brave. Courage is how we exhibit our character.

What will we do if we behave courageously? We will do the “inner work” a new era requires. We will look at ourselves honestly and ask if we are living by our values, if we are living our purpose, and if we create constantly evolving visions for ourselves. We will begin to live in heartfelt ways and will set out to become our deepest intent.

We will seek out a community for ourselves that supports and nurtures our growth and helps us become aware of ourselves, our organizations, and the natural world. We will cast aside fear and indifference and stand up to abuse, injustice, and incompetence in our organizations. We will understand that what we do to others we do to ourselves. We will ask ourselves if we want to work in an organization that is destructive to the

human spirit. We will see our role in systems and processes and how we affect and are affected by them. We will live the change we wish to bring about. We will see that our future success rests in creating conditions that allow others to be the best they can be--not in technology or reengineering.

The movement for the times in which we live is an inner journey that will transform the external world. The first stage in a movement happens when isolated people choose authenticity over living a divided life. This is a decision made courageously for the sake of personal integrity. Like all ventures into the unknown, the journey to authenticity begins with a few. Soon others will follow. Those who are first inspire those who come later. Each authentic life expresses nature's potential for the whole.

**RECOMMENDED READING:** "*Divided No More*" by Parker J. Palmer in *Change Magazine*, March/April 1992.