
Authenticity is the Way

5 Habits for
Creating an
Authentic
Life

Michael S. Seaver

Authenticity is the Way

5 Habits for Creating an Authentic Life

By Michael S. Seaver

“Authenticity is a collection of choices that we have to make every day. It’s about the choice to show up and be real. The choice to be honest. The choice to let our true selves be seen.”

~Brené Brown

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Step 1: Reflect](#)

[Step 2: Pursue Self-Awareness](#)

[Step 3: Generate Value](#)

[Step 4: Learn](#)

[Step 5: Uphold Boundaries](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Resource Recommendations](#)

[About the Author](#)

Introduction

Society is becoming more accepting of and willing to celebrate human differences, yet it is still challenging to live authentically on a daily basis. Why? Confronting our fears isn't easy. People I serve often fear if they showed up as they truly are – expressing their feelings, saying what's on their minds, and taking action on things not everyone will like – those around them will shame, ostracize, or not engage with them again.

Our challenge is to acknowledge these fears, yet move past them. Why? Because if you choose to live authentically, you will be happier. You will feel fulfilled, satisfy your own needs faster, be guided more by your intuition, live life confidently on your terms, invest time into experiences that recharge you, enjoy a deep sense of purpose, prioritize time more effectively and more.

Every person has his or her own life's mission – the thing that we are supposed to learn, like a curriculum on Earth. Therefore, it's not my job to tell you what you should or shouldn't learn, or whether you should or shouldn't invest the time and effort to be more authentic. However, there is a reason to pursue this idea for yourself.

The K-12 education system in America was designed in the 1800s to create order-takers who could complete monotonous, repetitive and physical-labor-intensive tasks. It was created to batch produce people who could do mass production factory line work. As much as this was ideal once upon a time, what has happened with technology and globalization since then has changed how people work.

This form of education has led to 156 million people working in the United States¹ and only 33% of them being happy, according to recent Gallup statistics on workplace engagement. *Fully 67% of the American workforce is disengaged.*² If this statistic is hitting close to home for you or for your organization, you already understand why pursuing a more authentic way of life is not only worthwhile but non-negotiable.

¹ <http://www.dlt.ri.gov/lmi/laus/us/usadj.htm> Accessed on February 25, 2019.

² <https://news.gallup.com/poll/180404/gallup-daily-employee-engagement.aspx> Accessed on February 19, 2019.

These numbers reveal that something has to change—not just for you as an individual, but for society as well. Robert Anthony’s quote, “When it becomes more difficult to suffer than to change... you will change” will become your mantra.

[Change will accelerate.](#) Societal institutions you used to hold in high regard will fall. New leaders and systems will rise. Evolution is disrupting nearly every facet of your life. It’s going to be uncomfortable. The good news is you can find comfort in the uncomfortableness if you put your wellbeing first. Forget about what society says you should be or do. Instead, find deep levels of self-acceptance by being the most authentic version of you.

If we really want to be happy in life, we must design a very purposeful and meaningful existence—one that allows us to live a long time in good health, with high-quality close-knit relationships. To me, an authentic life is one in which a very large percentage of our day, if not all of our day, is spent living our life’s mission. The steps in this book outline how you’ll get to the place where you’ll understand what authenticity is for you. My goal as an executive coach is, ultimately, to help you spend the majority of your days doing the things that:

- Give you energy
- Make you happy
- Allow you to invest in relationships
- Help you to grow and develop personally
- Allow you to be emotionally resilient because life’s always going to throw you curveballs
- Help you contribute to society in a meaningful way

What’s the Problem?

Living in an authentic way should be as easy as breathing, right? Unfortunately, it’s not that simple. Society creates all of these structures that lead to a lot of fear and divisiveness. There are voices telling us it’s not safe to go down an authentic path. There’s always this push toward “How do we do the safe thing? How do we do the reliable thing? I need to get my kids into this school, I need this much in my savings by the time I retire!” Or, “I need to stay in this job because it has healthcare benefits!”

Change brings up fear—even a good change.

If a person goes through a life-altering shift and becomes the authentic version of themselves they were always meant to be, they don't want to give up the relationships or the things they had created or become accustomed to. Often, when they become a more authentic version of themselves, the life that they had been leading for 20, 30, 40 years is unfortunately no longer meaningful. They need to reimagine everything, and they don't want to do that. They fear they will be ostracized from their friend or family group. Our amygdala (the part of the human brain that controls the way we react to certain stimuli or an event that triggers emotion, that we see as potentially dangerous) kicks in, and we do everything we can to avoid fear and be accepted by those around us. For hundreds of thousands of years, before technology, it was a matter of life or death.

All of these concerns are valid, but what we also need to be cognizant of is that there might be, later in life, a significant and heavy level of regret if we let these fears and lines of thinking dominate our choices. I don't want you to feel regret when you're 75, 85, 95 years old. I don't want you to feel heavy in your heart that you didn't take risks or try to accomplish things that you really desired to, just because society said it wasn't safe or wasn't acceptable.

I watch so many people choose to live 21st-century lives based on 20th-century societal constructs as opposed to how they truly wish to live deep down in their souls. Society says that achieving the “dream” of financial prosperity will lead to satisfaction, but it doesn't, and the trappings of success are just that—trappings trapping people in lives devoid of what they actually desire.

My Own Reckoning

When I think about this topic, there have been many moments in my life in which I've come face to face with the imperative to honor my own authentic self. I had known from a very early age, for example, that I didn't want to work in my family's landscaping, lawn maintenance, and snow plowing business, but I did work in it from age 12 to 24. In each of those years, I felt an increasing pull in my heart to do something bigger. Unfortunately, I didn't know what it was or how to do it.

When I lived in West Michigan, even though I was a highly unique individual, and even though I knew I was meant to do something different, I became a robot in my father's business due to the

way small-town life was structured. I was not allowed to share my strengths, to communicate the way I wanted to. My values were not aligned with the values of the organization I worked for. The experiences I was having day-to-day were not interesting or fun for me. There's was no travel, no art. And even when I made a major life change by moving to Arizona, I still had a fair distance to go when it came to finding my life's mission. One cross-country move did not solve the central issue.

Fortunately, while I was a student at the Thunderbird School of Global Management, I began learning a process to become authentic. Then, a few years later, a turning point arrived in the form of a traffic jam.

Driving to my job at Banner Health in 2011—I was the Director of Talent Sourcing—I had everything society says is right. Society says that when you make six figures, you're winning. Society says that if you're driving the fancy car, you're winning. Society says that when you have an attractive partner, you're winning.

I had all of those things, but I remember sitting in brutal rush hour traffic one day on the Loop 202 and feeling like I was doing the opposite of winning. When the traffic came to a halt, I looked around and started bawling uncontrollably. The rest of the drive was just me sobbing. It was because I knew I was making the mistake again, of living per society's rules—the same way I had done when I was working for my family's business. I made up my mind later that week: I was going to leave my job and start my coaching practice. A little over nine months later, I did.

This breakdown was a ridiculously formative experience for me because I realized that in order to become my most authentic self, I needed to escape what society said was appropriate: *You need to work in your family's business, you need to make X number of dollars per year.* My most authentic self did not want to live by those rules. So, I wrote new ones.

If you're feeling as if your own rush hour traffic moment could be right around the corner, take the steps I eventually took—right now.

Step 1: Reflect

Setting aside time to think about your life as it is now—what is working and is not working—is the first step in your journey toward more authenticity.

There are multiple ways to do this step, but the first is to write in a journal. I suggest a pain journal to start. How this works is, for two weeks minimum, every time you feel pain, frustration, sadness or anger, you write in the journal about it. What was the scenario? What was the trigger? Who was around? The idea, of course, is to get at the root cause of the pain.

Then, as weeks pass, you can begin to identify patterns. You can often link current discomforts and friction to pain from a long time ago. All emotional reactivity today is due to a wound in your past. So, this process helps find the pattern and the problem's root. Using the historical event as a frame of reference, you can reshape today's negative emotions by considering:

- What are three things I learned from this event?
- Who have I helped as a result of what I experienced?

If you can associate a positive emotional value with the root negative event, it may stop bringing you pain today.

A lot of the work I've done with clients involves [identifying patterns](#) of recurring challenges the client endured in his/her teenage years, twenties, and early thirties. Forget about money, fame, recognition, fitting in, looking a certain way, going to a specific school, working at a certain company, etc. What matters more is your ability to reflect on your teenage years, twenties, and early thirties and find patterns of what challenged (made you upset, sad, angry, mad) you.

Once you can pinpoint the things that challenged you, you can choose to become the person who helps others (typically younger than you) overcome those very same challenges for themselves. If you do this, you'll be highly happy with, motivated by, and engaged in your life.

Track Your Wins

I also recommend a more traditional journal. It can be paper and pen, it can be a spreadsheet or document on your computer, it can be an app or a CRM system. Choose what's most appropriate for you. For some clients, I've recommended the [5-Minute Journal](#), which is both a book and in the form of an app. I've also suggested the [EVO Journal](#), which is based around one's natural communication preferences. You have to complete a survey, then you are mailed a customized-to-you journal.

A journaling habit is helpful because it ensures you are taking time for reflection—ideally on a daily basis. Track the wins you have over the course of a week. I want there to be a line item for each day that recognizes your own accomplishments. Ask yourself, *how am I generating value for another person? What have I done for another person?* Track it.

Write down any significant event you experience in the course of your day/week/month. It can be an unemotional event, such as *I gave the ___ presentation, or My best friend got promoted.* The reason for this is it will give you mental mile markers about the things that happened on a particular day. This will help you to answer questions such as, “*What am I grateful for? What did I learn today?*”

If you reflect each day then consider a 2-3-hour time block at the start of the month to look back at the previous 30 days, you'll see where you can make adjustments and improvements. If you don't make time for reflection, your life will be the same day after day after day. If you identify your emotional triggers, on the other hand, as well as the things you like doing, then you'll start to shift more and more time away from the activities that extract your energy toward those that gift you energy.

Here are some more questions you can answer during your reflection time:

- What challenges occurred today?
- How did you respond to them?
- For the things that went well, why did they go well?
- For the things that went poorly, why did they go poorly?
- What wins did you have? How can you create more of them?
- What did I learn about myself today?

- What are you grateful for?
- What steps do I need to take in order to improve?³

Again, your goal is to identify patterns and shift your behavior towards activities that benefit you and more closely align you with your life's mission. Journaling and time studies are valuable tools for reflection. Change can happen quickly once you take an honest look at how you are spending your time and where you're routinely putting your energy.

Authenticity starts to flourish when you figure out: What do I need to stop doing in my day—or what do I need to *start* doing—that will allow me to make meaningful progress toward the goals that matter the most to me?

The Authentic Leader

Leaders have even more perceived limitations than most people when it comes to exploring their own authenticity. Often, those in leadership roles are not in the habit of exploring their own authentic selves. They've not spoken about it before or even been asked the question. When I start to pull out the sequence of events – their life's narrative until today – they say, "I've never had anyone ask me these questions." Many leaders have gone through life doing what is societally acceptable without ever making the time for reflection. Sound familiar?

Part of it is they've never been exposed to the people or the resources to allow themselves to reflect in this way, or to address what their authentic mission is. Secondly, there's a fear of disconnection that exists in all human beings. I touched on this briefly in the introduction. We will stay in a group of people even if it doesn't really serve us, because doing so gives us a sense of safety and security. Most people have never been taught to be emotionally resilient—to drive on through difficult transitions to something bigger or better for themselves.

Another issue that comes up for leaders is their position can be so incredibly lonely. When a leader takes on a particular role, they often cannot share the things they're working on with their partner or

³ <https://www2.mmu.ac.uk/media/mmuacuk/content/documents/careers/Applying-the-Gibbs-Model.pdf>
Accessed February 27, 2019.

spouse, with their friends, or with their families. So, there's this feeling of independence this person may have, that they have to be able to solve all of their problems on their own. This is not a realistic approach, but it's what they believe in their minds to be true. So, they default back to thinking they can solve their own problems or deal with them down the road when they retire. Unfortunately, this can lead to even larger problems and even physical disease.

The good news is exploring your authenticity and leading from a more authentic attitude can create a whole cascade of positive effects. Think about Brené Brown's TED Talk, [The Power of Vulnerability](#), and how important it is for each of us to accept our own imperfections, admit that we make mistakes, and be vulnerable about the goals we're working to achieve. By sharing our vulnerability, our stakeholders feel safe to reveal *their* imperfections. As more people [take ownership](#), the collective whole builds momentum and begins to move forward positively by accepting differences and supporting one another in achieving our lives' unique missions. The instant a leader becomes his or her authentic self, the connectivity and the relationships within that firm blossom. Because now, everybody feels heard. Now everybody feels safe to be their most authentic selves. That's really the goal.

If I coach an executive and can convince him or her to display their authenticity in a meaningful way, then people in roles around that leader or reporting to that leader feel a level of safety—that they can do this, too. All of the sudden, these deeper relationships get fostered. People become curious—why is this person happier? Why is she more engaged? Why is he staying later? Why is she having these wins?

It all begins with reflection. Whether you're at the very beginning of your career or leading an entire organization, it's imperative to make reflection a regular habit. From there, we can move onto the next step: pursuing a deeper level of self-awareness.

Step 2: Pursue Self-Awareness

It is incredibly important to set a strong foundation when you're exploring your authenticity. You do that by understanding yourself: your unique behaviors, communication style, work priorities, values, and life's mission. The idea is to see your character traits as they are now, fostering growth so that you can begin the process of creating a more aligned life.

As you pursue self-awareness, keep in mind that nothing is set in stone. Your level of emotional intelligence, for example, can be increased with determined effort. In her book, [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](#), Angela Duckworth found that we have the ability to achieve our most important goals by taking small, focused and purposeful actions each day.

During this step, I'd like you to identify your:

- Communication preferences
- Motivators
- Emotional intelligence level
- Values
- [Languages of appreciation](#)
- Life's mission (be the person you needed when you were younger).

These serve as important guidelines to help you make difficult decisions that you won't regret later. For transparency's sake, my intention is to unlock human potential through the development of personal and professional wellbeing. My personal values are authenticity, growth, spirituality, wellness, power, and wealth.

Assessments to Guide You

There are so many tools available to help with this step. For example, I am certified in [TII Success Insights](#) assessments. The DISC profile is valuable, as it helps you understand your behavioral and communication preferences - whether you are introverted or extroverted, task-oriented or people-oriented, what your body chooses to do when you feel fear, what your fears are. It tells you, in a

hyper-specific way, if you view yourself as more powerful than the environment around you or if you view the environment as more powerful.

To learn more about your motivators, you can do a [12 Driving Forces](#) assessment. The 12 cover the “why?” behind human behavior and my clients find it very helpful to identify the top four for themselves. As an example, if someone is heavily motivated by wealth production and being very efficient to drive ROI, yet they’re working in a not-for-profit organization, there may be a disconnect. They’re motivated by making money but they’re in a system that’s paying them \$35,000 a year.

[Emotional intelligence](#), or EQ, is a measurement of your self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. Your EQ has an enormous impact on your career. Researchers Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, who published *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* in 2009, found that 90% of top performers have high EQ—and that EQ is twice as important as IQ for goal achievement. They also found there is zero correlation between EQ and IQ, and that EQ accounts for roughly 60% of job performance. To evaluate your EQ, [TTI offers a specific assessment](#).

To identify your values, there’s a [PEAK Values](#) exercise you may find helpful. It only takes 15-20 minutes. You’re given 50 cards, each of which names a value. From there, you place each card into one of three piles to determine that value’s importance to you and whittle down to six core values, then rank them from one to six.

Authentic Decisions Feed Your Life’s Mission

When you know your communication preferences and your motivators, you can identify why you’re doing what you’re doing and focus in on the values you are going to use to create what you want to create. This makes it a lot simpler to make better and more authentic decisions. Regardless of how you define success, i.e. financial, relationship, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, what is important is that you see yourself as an owner of achieving that success (and not a victim).

The minute you are vulnerable and own the problem, you become the solution. You’ve lost the risk of shame—what others may think about you or the desire to project your inadequacies on others. Instead of avoiding embarrassment or difficult situations, you focus even more on taking the right

action to achieve personal success because you have the self-awareness to do so. Responsibility is your ability to choose your response. As you take responsibility for goal achievement, you begin to see a much bigger picture...and your troubles become increasingly smaller.

I believe we should all be the person we needed when we were younger. Whatever challenges you were having, you likely overcame them. Now, the highest and best use of your life is to help other people overcome the same challenge for themselves. This is your mission. I encourage you to distill your mission down to one, easily repeatable sentence that you feel comfortable sharing anywhere and to anybody.

Self-awareness comes down to: did you do the assessments, did you sift through the values cards to find your own, do you know your life's mission? When you have answers to these questions, you have the guidelines to make decisions. This makes all the choices we are confronted with that much easier to make.

Create a Personal Advisory Board

We are greatly influenced by those closest to us. They can affect multiple aspects of our lives, but most importantly how we think. To gather life advice, most of us call family or friends. While there is incalculable value in reaching out to those you love for support, you also need advisors around you who have specific expertise to serve as a sounding board for your major life and work decisions.⁴ You must carefully select who is on your personal advisory board. The development and distribution of what you create and give to others depends on it.

When I work with my clients, I often challenge them to think about who they have in their inner circle and how frequently they tap into their collective wisdom. Corporations have advisory boards with regularly scheduled meetings. Why shouldn't individuals employ the same strategy to unlock their own potential? Creating your own personal advisory board is a powerful way to increase self-awareness, take smarter risks, and make more authentic decisions.

⁴ <https://newsroom.cnb.com/why-you-need-a-personal-advisory-board-for-your-life-transition> Accessed February 25, 2019.

As you grow to become the most authentic version of yourself, it is important that you select 3-5 individuals who can serve as a sounding board for you as you encounter hardships, challenging assignments, and strategic decisions. The people on your personal advisory board can be both personal and professional acquaintances. They should be individuals who have done at least some of what you'd like to do in the next five years. To best utilize their time and knowledge, I encourage you to meet with them once per month.

Step 3: Generate Value

There are several authentic ways we can give value to another person. I have little markers on my calendar to remind me to reach out to the people I'm working with to send an email, a small handwritten card.

We want to make the generation of value authentic to who we are. This step is easier if you already know your life's mission. As an example, my business is about unlocking human potential through the development of personal and professional wellbeing. So, because I'm a person who appreciates words of affirmation, it's meaningful for me to *be* a person who gives words of affirmation to others in a way that encourages them to take risks, challenges themselves, and accomplish more. I'm known for it.

Listen actively (with the intent to understand, not the intent to reply). Deliver a random act of kindness. Show appreciation to someone in the way she wants to receive it. Do this in such a way you make those around you feel heard, accepted, and empowered.

Another way to give someone value is at the end your experience together. What I mean by this is, for example, I deliver a rite of passage to my clients. I feel connected to Native American history, so I like to gift clients who have gone through a really significant change in their lives with a personalized kachina doll. This colorful, handmade doll is emblematic of what that person just went through, and it's become one of my signature offerings as a coach. It's meaningful because it's so specific to both myself and my history, as well as to the client and their journey. When I visit their office months and months later, the kachina doll is often the first thing I see.

Ask the people you are working with how *they* prefer to receive appreciation. The five main ways, identified by [Dr. Gary Chapman](#), are words of affirmation, acts of service, gifts, quality time, and physical touch. You can go up to a person and ask, "Do you like public recognition?" "Do you prefer to receive a gift? A pat on the back?" As soon as a person replies, it is now incumbent upon you to deliver appreciation regularly, weekly, in the way that person wants it. But it has to come from dialogue, and the trick is customization. The more we ask, listen, and deliver value—appreciation—in a meaningful way that evokes an emotion, the stronger the connection and the relationship becomes.

The 3 to 1 Ratio

The idea behind this ratio is very simple. All it means is I try to do three nice things for someone before asking them to do something for me. You might think to yourself, “I have this client Steve, and I’ve done three nice things for him, so it’s okay for me to ask him for a LinkedIn recommendation,” or sit in this meeting for me. The key is to make it a habit to consider the three things you’ll do first before asking for something in return.

The Karma of “Go-Givers”

You might not notice this if you’re a heavy news consumer, but most people routinely find great value in gifting resources including knowledge, network, advice, time and money to others simply for that person’s betterment. Some call this karma; others call it being a “go-giver.” I call it [generating thick value](#). We do these things purposefully without expectation of reciprocity. We take these actions because humans find emotional fulfillment in supporting others. There is a tremendous amount of goodwill all around us.

I see each person I interact with as unique. The societal problem I’m trying to solve is that almost no one I speak with *believes* that he or she is unique. This is particularly true when you’re going through a difficult life transition. All humans make mistakes and would benefit from you sharing your resources through good and bad. I’ve had the most success with clients when I’ve been side-by-side with them in the most difficult moments. Most coaches will meet with a client for 30-60 minutes every two weeks, assign the client homework and then respond to an email or two in between meetings.

I prefer to drive meaningful change, deep personal learning and increase confidence in the moment. I’m there providing the encouragement to help the person overcome a major fear when he or she needs to not feel alone. If you desire to meet people where they are, don’t simply be with them to celebrate a promotion, wedding, new baby, trip abroad or new home. Meet people where they are when the s**t hits the fan.

“Share your riches and reveal to him his own,” as Benjamin Disraeli once advised, during the difficult times is the most meaningful way to be of value to another person—so he or she sees the value in giving back, unlocking personal uniqueness and playing big in life.

The generation of value betters our karma and ultimately lifts all boats.

Step 4: Learn

Only 10 percent of your learning will occur by reading content online or in a book, or by attending a formal class or training. The next 20 percent comes from others in your circle of influence, mentors that you communicate with regularly, or your personal advisory board. The vast majority of your learning, 70 percent, will be derived from challenging experiences.⁵

Experiential learning can include making mistakes, failing, leading cross-functional projects, starting an entrepreneurial venture, taking a horizontal move internally, accepting a part-time job, nonprofit volunteering, vocational training, serving on a board of directors and other challenging experiences. This teaches you how to execute strategy and is extremely valuable in today's ever-changing business environment.

Whether it's via a YouTube video, podcast, book, talking to a subject matter expert or through experience, invest the time to integrate new-to-you knowledge. There are multitudes of ways to enhance your skills and personal insights.

Make learning a habit by seeking out:

- Structured training
- Off-the-job experiences
- Challenging assignments
- Book recommendations
- New friendships
- Ongoing certifications or an additional degree
- Coaching

When we learn something, the highest and best way to really ingrain it in us is to teach it to someone else. So, if that's in the form of a one-to-one dialogue within your organization, that's great. It could

⁵ <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/70-20-10-rule/> Accessed February 25, 2019.

also be in the form of serving a non-profit or serving on the board of a professional association. You could record your own content, do your own writing or make your own videos—whatever you're really passionate about.

Again, the best way to learn is to share new knowledge with someone who needs it, too.

You can share information through both formal and informal channels. What I mean by this is, of course you mentor or guide your direct reports, but it's equally important to simply spend 15-30 minutes per day walking around and finding out what's going on in people's lives. What's going on with their pets, families, kids, hobbies? When it comes to leaders, what I want them to do is create systems in their lives that allow them to not only mentor and give information but also get curious about what everyone around them can teach.

Share Knowledge in a Meaningful Way

Build relationships through sharing information one-to-one, but also in ways that are valuable to the community, too. Find places to share meaningfully. This is why I serve on the Board of Directors for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arizona. The robotic way of life I was living in Michigan didn't allow me to have mentors or coaches or people who guided me to a different way of life, so I promised myself when I got to Arizona in 2003 that as I developed myself and my career, I would constantly find ways to generate value for other people and help them in ways that were meaningful for me. It just so happened that the mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters is about giving people who need a hand up a more experienced mentor. I serve on the board because I desperately wanted a mentor when I was young. Now I can help make sure more kids today have the very thing I did not have.

I have a client who did something very similar. He knew his career was meant for more. It just so happened that his personal mission was almost identical to that of Goodwill. So now, he is on the board of directors of Goodwill. He's over the moon about it. He feels so connected to the organization and it is just amazing how things can align when you figure out what your personal mission is. Economic opportunity mattered to him when he was a kid because his parents didn't

have a lot of money. Now he feels called to help others create economic opportunities. These kinds of connections are really profound, but most people don't look for them.

The Value of Doubt (Unlearning)

If you haven't listened to Casey Gerald's TED Talk, [The Gospel of Doubt](#), I strongly encourage you to. Gerald is a Harvard MBA, entrepreneur and a brilliant orator. He tells multiple stories about his life's journey and the lessons he's learned along the way. From his recollection of being robbed at gunpoint to joining Lehman Brothers in 2008 (before it collapsed) to examples of how he helped entrepreneurs start their businesses, it is one of my favorite TED Talks.

Gerald reminded me about the power of doubt. Doubting the status quo. Doubting my own fears. Doubting my preconceived notions of "success". Doubting the stories I was told. Doubting that the answers I revered as being true were just as wrong as the questions I had been asking.

I encourage you to believe a new thing – that it is possible *not* to believe.

It is possible not to believe the many fears that fill your mind and tell you that you are incapable of significant achievement. Although miracles are hard to come by, taking focused, disciplined action will shorten the journey to accomplishment, fulfillment, and happiness.

Step 5: Uphold Boundaries

It's okay to say no to activities that extract your energy. It's okay to not spend time with people who don't support your mission. It's okay to (respectfully) speak your heart to those who have offended you. Feelings bottled up have incredible consequences on your physical body.

Once you've written a personal mission statement, you have the opportunity to ask, about any activity you are considering, "Does taking this action allow me to live my life's mission?" If the activity is not in alignment with your life's mission, don't do it. The things that are in alignment, we love to do. We care about these activities, we want to get other people involved. Participating gives us energy.

If the thing we are being asked to do does not align with our mission, we feel disengaged and unhappy. We're going to be less productive. I'm always asking people, "Tell me the connection between this activity and your life's mission." If they can't draw a direct link, I say, "It may be time to redistribute your energy."

Boundaries in Relationships

When it comes to people in your life, take a moment after you've left an interaction, dialogue or event with another person to ask yourself, "Did this person give me energy, or did this person extract my energy?" In other words, did you leave your time with another individual feeling whole and happy in your heart? Or did you leave feeling fearful, anxious, worried, concerned or tired? If so, it's probably in your best interest to *not* spend more time with that person.

Sometimes the equation is complicated. For example, if you have lunch with someone who is pushing you to build your business or try a new marketing technique you've never tried before, you may come away from the interaction feeling drained. Perhaps the advice was valid; your lunch advisor just conveyed it in a way that made you feel uncomfortable. It might be possible to say something like, "I agree with the things that you're suggesting, but I'm having a hard time understanding the next steps. If you can deliver the message in a way that matches up with my own

timeline, I'd really appreciate it." Then, if your advisor adjusts and next time you feel better, you'll get more value and energy out of future meetings with that person.

If you're choosing to do things that are aligned with your mission, and you take the time to ask about the people in your life, "Is this person adding value to me or are they not," then you have boundaries. The boundary is putting your mission and your energy first.

Honor Your Preferences

You can use what you learned in step two, particularly about your own communication preferences, to uphold personal boundaries. The folks who are more extroverted and people-oriented, for example, are very quick to jump on top of self-awareness exercises and assessments. They are very action-oriented; their brains are hard-wired to view themselves as more powerful than the environment, so they default to taking action. The other side of the spectrum includes people like me, a very big introvert who is heavily task-oriented. The process of self-discovery, particularly in a group setting, is more challenging for introverts. For those like myself, this process brings up a lot of fear. When there is considerable activity or conversation around, we avoid or limit our time engaging in it. We are not assertive; we default to what others want to do. We don't want to engage in too much group dialogue.

The best way to break through this fear and avoidance, for an introvert, is through one-to-one dialogue or via a solitary process such as reading a book or watching a video. Introverts may be better to do this self-awareness piece alone. They need time to digest and to process. The whole point is to figure out who you are and what you prefer, then set a boundary so you can make authentic progress on your terms.

If you remember that [direction is more important than speed](#), you're better able to evaluate your successes and the connectivity of your career to your mission. To ensure you're managing time and reflecting well, work with a mentor or coach to identify your fears and how you respond when confronted with an activity that evokes that fear. Instead of defaulting to old habits, you want to create more positive habits that help you build new rituals and confidently stick to a consistent routine. To stay focused, measure your results. This isn't easy, but remember the results are not a

judgment of who you are...they're simply feedback on *where* you are. Concentrate on completing the small steps of your new routine and you'll quickly fall in love with the new daily habit because of the wins you'll be recording and the confidence you'll feel.

The most effective effort is a continuing effort. You'll likely cross a tipping point where the pain of not doing what you love becomes greater than the pain of confronting your fears. You'll feel that it's easier to bear the inconvenience of an unwanted action than the pain of remaining the same.

FOMO and FOJI

FOMO and FOJI stand for Fear of Missing Out and Fear of Joining In. For someone with a FOMO mindset, it can be helpful to consider each and every opportunity from the standpoint of, "How is this event going to add value to my life?" For those in the FOJI mindset—the introverts who don't like to leave their comfort zone—it can be helpful to set up structures that allow them to have boundaries at the event in question.

For example, you can say something to yourself like, "All I need to do at this networking event is meet three people, talk to them for ten minutes each, receive three business cards, and go." You can create little boundaries that ensure you're not giving away too much energy.

Boundaries are also something to consider from a health standpoint. Take the time to be in nature, to go for walks, to be in the gym, to meditate. You need to care for your body and your soul more than you need to care for a specific job. Your own personal growth and development are one hundred million times more important than any job you could ever have.

Conclusion

Becoming your most authentic self requires that you consciously search for your higher mission and purpose, discover your unique strengths, find your true voice, and create a plan to best express who you are.

- Let go of who you think you are supposed to be.
- Develop the ability to be okay with making mistakes and learning from them.
- Be vulnerable and open to sharing your life's ups and downs.
- Find personal harmony by setting appropriate boundaries.
- Live your personal mission.
- Leave a unique legacy.

Yes, there will be challenges along the way. When negative events occur, remember that we humans have a tendency to focus on what we have to give up, not what we have to gain. If something has happened in your life recently that is making you question everything, your judgment may be clouded. Once you've mentally accepted the events that occurred, take time to think about the possibilities any change may offer you.

Make the 21st-Century Shift

Until now, you've likely used patterns, data, and big data to make fact-based decisions. Why? Because you've been trained by the K-12 and university education systems to believe this approach mitigates your personal risk, distributes responsibility to others, and is the basis of safe and societally-acceptable decisions. However, there's more to the story.

Brené Brown reminds us that the underlying reason why we do this is to avoid being shamed (excluded from a group). Humans desire to be trusted, respected, and accepted for who we are. But,

are you making “rational” decisions at the cost of living life as the most authentic version of yourself? I believe finding and living as the most authentic version of ourselves is the shift everyone must make to thrive in this century. It’s no longer wise to stay trapped in 20th-century paradigms or rely on outdated decision-making processes. We have to dig deeper.

When you practice the habits in this short guidebook, you purposefully tune into what authenticity is for you. Doing this in the midst of external influences that are often in the opposition to your intuition may be challenging. You may need to set calendar reminders, find an accountability partner or carry a journal. Happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, confidence, and purpose come to us in life’s most ordinary moments...not only when extraordinary goals are accomplished.

By reflecting, pursuing self-awareness, generating value, continuously learning and teaching, and upholding boundaries, you’ll become more authentically you, the most perfect thing you can be.

Resource Recommendations

[Center for Creative Leadership](#)

[TTI Success Insights](#)

Casey Gerald's TED Talk: [The Gospel of Doubt](#)

Brené Brown's TED Talk: [The Power of Vulnerability](#)

[Loyalty to Your Soul](#) by H. Ronald Hulnick Ph.D. and Mary R. Hulnick Ph.D.

[The Art of Authenticity: Tools to Become an Authentic Leader and Your Best Self](#) by Karissa Thacker

[The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are](#) by Brené Brown

[The Alchemist](#) by Paulo Coelho

[Feelings Buried Alive Never Die](#) by Karol K. Truman

[Energy Leadership](#) by Bruce Schneider

[Messages – The Communication Skills Book](#) by Matthew McKay

[Option B](#) by Sheryl Sandberg and Adam Grant

[Managing Transitions](#) by William Bridges

[Influence](#) by Robert Cialdini

[Fascinate](#) by Sally Hogshead

[Drive](#) by Daniel Pink

About the Author

I exist to unlock human potential through the development of personal and professional wellbeing.

I support driven individuals who want to succeed in the 21st century experience economy. These individuals know they have not reached their pinnacle and they have more to give to the triple bottom line. These business professionals are in search of their personal mission, a higher purpose. They want to discover and apply their strengths, find their true voice and create a strategic plan to best express who they are. I help these leaders learn by doing and move from managerial success to societal significance.

Through my For Purpose Leadership process, I help you apply business strategy concepts to your career, determine how to live in a place that you truly belong, and build meaningful and lasting relationships. I challenge you to use your talents to do something you believe in, and thrive in an environment that fits who you are. I will help you live life with the autonomy you deserve, the ability to master your chosen profession and find a higher purpose where you can contribute to a cause greater than your own. I help people disconnected from their purpose uncover and live their purpose.

I fear mediocrity more than failure.

BIOGRAPHY - Michael S. Seaver is an executive coach with expertise in executive leadership, personal branding, change management, organizational effectiveness and employee engagement. He is a Certified Professional 12 Driving Forces® Analyst, a Certified Professional Behavioral Analyst and a Thunderbird School of Global Management MBA. Michael is a contributor to Forbes, serves on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arizona board of directors, is a member of Valley Leadership Institute's Class 38 and was named to the Phoenix Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Class of 2016. Check out his podcast, Equal Chance To Be Unequal, on Apple iTunes and Google Play Music. For more, visit <https://michaelsseaver.com>.