



GOOD COMPANY
COACHING

Rick Gilmore

Authentic leadership: the real deal, or just snake oil?

*New insights and practical tools from our
Ancient Wisdom heritage to inform this
Western conundrum*

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About Rick Gilmore

Rick is the founder of **Good Company Coaching**. As one of the pioneers in the executive coaching arena in Australia (starting in the early nineties), he is a sought after executive coach, speaker and influencing strategist.

For over twenty years Rick has inspired and challenged many top executives, business owners, entrepreneurs and teams, delivering hundreds of workshops and over ten thousand hours of one-on-one coaching. Exploring what's possible to help people thrive and deliver consistent exceptional results in the areas of business strategy, leadership, culture transformation, sales, influencing and negotiation.

Clients have included: American Express, ANZ, Lease Plan, CSC, ING, Westpac, Newcrest Mining, The Department of Finance, Radiometer Pacific, The Church of The Latter Day Saints, Konica Minolta, WMC, Havencab, Orica, Stockland, Lion Nathan, Unisys and CSR to name a few.

After studying Western Philosophy, Rick spent years in India investigating Eastern practices and methodologies, including mindfulness and insight meditation techniques. Now, he is well regarded in the business community for his innovative and critical synthesis of Eastern and Western wisdom, supporting others to create inspired workplaces that support true human development, peak performance and significant business outcomes.

Rick is available for media and speaking engagements. Find out more about Rick's work here: www.goodcompanycoaching.com.au

Introduction

It's been said that we live in an age where truth and reality are simply perception, an age that extols shameless promotion where the pursuit of 'going viral' is the new Holy Grail. It can all be a bit confusing. What is real and what is illusion?

In this chapter authoritative East-West commentator Rick Gilmore looks closely at authenticity, primarily from the ancient wisdom of Eastern traditions where authenticity has been a cornerstone of society, human potential and spiritual practice for centuries.

Based on his study of Western philosophy, meeting Eastern and Western masters, practising Eastern methodologies and working with hundreds of business leaders over the past twenty years, Rick explores new ways to apply strategies and techniques used by the ancient wisdom masters to the contemporary business world.

Rick calls us all to liberate our heart and mind, ignite our own natural leadership style and enjoy being true to ourselves all along the way.

"Be Who You Are Meant To Become"TM



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Since before recorded history, our spiritual beliefs – and lack of them – have guided society's successes and failures.

For some, formal religion defines us, while for others it is the human spirit that separates our species from the rest of life on our planet. For others, concepts of spirit, higher self, universal consciousness and formalised religion are archaic, childish concepts from more primitive times and have no place in today's secular and scientific world.

Aside from mountain-top musings, rainforest reveries, or waxing lyrically amongst the conviviality of sufficiently primed dinner guests, it may be best to leave such discussions to philosophers, priests and poets.

However, for those of us immersed in human performance in organisations,

never before has the role of ‘spirituality’ (however you may define it), been as imperative to organisational success as it is today. Spirituality, together with a host of associated concepts and practices including wellness, resilience and mindfulness, is beginning to have a profound effect on how organisations are lead and managed.

At the forefront of these associated concepts is ‘authenticity’. The word *authentic* derives originally from Greek, meaning ‘one who accomplishes’. **To be authentic is to act, to embody and to participate in life.** Webster’s New International Unabridged Dictionary defines authenticity as “fidelity, actuality and fact, compatibility with a certain source or origin, accordance with usage or tradition, a complete sincerity without feigning or hypocrisy”.

Dictionary definitions, however, do not reveal the philosophical and existential complexity of humanity’s relationship with authenticity. From the early Greek philosophers, to Shakespeare, to psychology and existentialism, secular and religious notions of authenticity have been explored throughout history.¹

In this chapter we will look closely at authenticity, primarily from our Eastern ancient wisdom heritage where authenticity has been a cornerstone of society, human potential and spiritual practice for centuries.

In this context, the use of authenticity is interchangeable with specific formal Eastern wisdom terms like: self-realisation, true self, ultimate self-condition, inherent source condition, awakened state, natural state or fully conscious self. These terms and concepts are ultimately about a state of being that is not reducible to a psychological state, attitudinal mindset or socio - cultural driven behaviours.

We will examine how authenticity in organisations may have two futures: either something to be genuinely embraced and embedded into future practice; or, alternatively relegated to just another management fad. Something to evangelise about until another buzzword comes along to provide the novelty needed for business to purchase leadership development programs and consulting engagements.

¹ I acknowledge there are many divergent views around this confounding topic. Some readers may believe authenticity is nothing like the version outlined here. My use of the term authenticity in this chapter is not inclusive of all interpretations. I acknowledge for some purists, my approach may appear to be taking too much liberty with the topic. It’s certainly not my intention to offend, yet I recognise a topic like this necessarily polarises people and provokes a response. If nothing else, it puts authenticity into the spotlight!

If it works for Steve Jobs

The rise and rise Apple Corporation experienced during the first decade of the 21st century has been attributed in large part to its charismatic founder and CEO, Steve Jobs. Whether or not one would want to emulate all aspects of Jobs' approach to management and leadership, there is no denying his status as a business Colossus, and it would be prudent to look at what drove the man to achieve such personal and organisational success.

Jobs, openly a Zen Buddhist, unabashedly championed how his early life meditative experiences in India shaped his world view and approach to business and life. In his biography, released not long after his passing, Jobs is quoted as stating:²

"If you just sit and observe, you will see how restless your mind is. If you try to calm it, it only makes it worse, but over time it does calm, and when it does, there's room to hear more subtle things – that's when your intuition starts to blossom and you start to see things more clearly and be in the present more. Your mind just slows down, and you see a tremendous expanse in the moment. You see so much more than you could see before. It's a discipline; you have to practise it."

In this short quote, we gain an insight into much of what has changed for some business leaders and leadership over the past few decades. We also see a reflection of the changing social environment in which the world of business operates in this second decade of the 21st century.

It's not just Steve Jobs who has been championing a new, holistic, humanistic and spiritual approach to life and work. An emerging group of other CEOs and managers, consultants, academics, authors and commentators have also been advocating such an approach.³

Now let's take a broad look at some of the Western socio economic changes

2 Isaacson, W 2011, Steve Jobs, (Little Brown Book Group) Page 49

3 The articles which reflect the new way of thinking underscored by this chapter are too numerous to mention individually. One Australian example is the Total Success Inquirer series. Social commentator Ruth Ostrow showcased six of Australia's most influential and charismatic business leaders talking about deeply personal subjects such as death, love and God. In the *Path from Profit to Prophet* episode, she interviewed Gordon Cairns, who is the former Lion Nathan, Arnotts and Pepsi Co CEO, former David Jones chairman and current non-executive board member at Westpac and Origin Energy. Cairns sees this new frontier as 'business with a spiritual edge'. He says, "I don't use the word spiritual. It is about transformation. To get the most out of your business and people, you have to work on yourself first." "Buddhism has given me a profound sense of meaning and purpose." "Now", says Ostrow, "he wants to pass it on" She also mentions The Practical Wisdom group, which includes business luminaries like John Akehurst (founding managing director of Woodside Petroleum and current Reserve Bank board member), Michael Rennie (senior partner of McKinsey & Co) and Cairns. Their intention is to help leaders to be great human beings. *The Australian* March 12 2014, p 17

underpinning why authenticity has suddenly become part of management lexicon in the West.

The changing face of Western capitalism and society

Events of the new millennium suggest that we may be standing at a crossroads.

Modernisation, globalisation and the merging of historical “never the twain shall meet” boundaries, are generating many challenges, confusions and opportunities for humanity.

For the first time in human history multiple philosophies, ideologies and beliefs of all persuasions are sizing each other up in the global marketplace and jockeying for our attention.

Across the world, the spheres of science and the secular are battling against the domains of the religious and the spiritual, the traditional and the tribal.

Things that were once held in high regard as self-evident truths are now also being revised and commoditised. Time honoured texts, gospels, myths and traditions are being challenged as anachronistic. For some, this is leaving a void in personal beliefs and they are struggling to find new anchors to replace foundations which had served to give meaning and purpose. For others, it means hanging on firmly to entrenched black and white interpretations of old traditions, precipitating conflict within families and mistrust and animosity between nations.

For some, being freed from the shackles of belief structures established thousands of years ago is a breath of fresh air, allowing them to expand and open their minds to new ways of thinking, living and being.

It is a world of emerging fault lines, where paradoxes and double binds abound, transparent, yet muddled and hidden; outwardly connected, yet interiorised and narcissistic; globally cooperative, yet provincial and intolerant.

Capitalism, as developed in the West over the past 200 years, is under particular scrutiny. Many are asking whether the contemporary state of capitalism also needs a system reinterpretation, overhaul and redesign.

At a macroeconomic level, people are questioning the business zeitgeist and business leadership that delivered a Global Financial Crisis. The collapse of organisations like Lehmann Brothers and the propping up and preservation of ‘too big to fail’ corporations and nation states continues to have significant ramifications. From another perspective, critics are turning the spotlight on the type of education provided by the globe’s leading business schools, questioning if their approaches have served only to reinforce institutionalised greed and self-serving approaches to business.⁴

And at a personal level, individuals are questioning the intrinsic value of gaining transitory pleasure simply from acquiring more and more of the shiny objects and bucket list experiences we are persuaded to buy and consume.

A resulting question

In the business and organisational context, therefore, a central question arises:

How do our powerful, modern networked organisations respond to the changing face of capitalism and society?

Although an answer is not obvious, one thing is evident: given the complexity and accelerating pace of change, what worked for corporations and organisations in 1950, 1980, and even 2014, will almost certainly not work tomorrow.

Staying the same isn’t an option, and in response to all the flux, the concept of ‘authentic leadership’ has emerged as an attempt to deliver leadership in these changing times.⁵

Yet, given the nature of Western capitalism, some wonder whether a happy co-existence between authentic leadership and the profit motive is actually possible.

4 Examples of this can be found among the editors and contributors to the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR). Many would view the HBR as a mainstay of conservative, US centred business practice. However, over recent years – especially since the GFC of 2008 – the editors and contributors to the HBR have openly questioned some of the basic tenets of competitive capitalism, in tandem with putting the spotlight on how the business school industry is preparing students for corporate life.

5 Conceptually, Authentic Leadership first appeared in the 1960s. Over the past decade there has been a surge in publications about Authentic Leadership, with constantly evolving definitions, theories, models and slants on the concept. Leaders now come in many varieties – servant leaders, charismatic leaders, visionary leaders, transactional leaders, transformational leaders, situational leaders and connected leaders, to name a few!

Lessons from ancient Eastern wisdom for the changing face of Western society and capitalism.

Western business experience in consciously embracing ‘the authentic’ is very short compared with Eastern traditions, which by no means perfect, bequeath a long history of understanding and delivering on humanity’s search for authenticity.

Investigation of our true nature has resulted in some common principles and practices across many traditions, which can provide valuable insights on:

- the quest for the authentic;
- the desire for a natural leadership style which embraces this quest; and
- the demand for work roles that provide authentic individual contribution, purpose and meaning.

The fundamental tenets of the world’s great Eastern religions and philosophies have now touched every corner of the earth. The twentieth century was fertile ground in the West for experimentation and adoption of Eastern elements and practices, which have gained acceptance in business circles over a relatively short period of time.

The Eastern infiltration was initially fringe, advocated by spiritual seekers, then progressively legitimised by celebrity artists, psychologists and therapists, with parts of the medical profession, neuro-scientists, quantum physicists and business leaders joining in at the dawn of the new millennium.

We now see corporate executives and entrepreneurs (borrowing from cognitive psychology and Buddhism), hiring mindfulness and happiness coaches. They are being coached on matters like: how to develop “attention muscle”, experience enhanced composure and equanimity, generate “magnetic presence” and make wise snap decisions.

We now live in a time where truth and reality are apparently all perception, an age that extols shameless promotion; the pursuit of going viral is the new Holy Grail.

Yet, when it comes to realising our authentic true nature, to date, there

is no reliable instant gratification or super-size method. There is simply no immediate remedy, quick fix or short-cut formula. Commoditised snake oil authenticity doesn't work.

Whether you are ready to take a big leap, small leap or no authenticity leap at all, the remaining pages will discuss some core insights and tools from our ancient wisdom traditions. Namely:

1. **The pillars of authenticity.** First, we will investigate whether there are any atypical authenticity frameworks from our ancient wisdom heritage (primarily from the Indian sub-continent), that we can adapt to our modern work environments.
2. **Unfolding authenticity in daily life and work.** Next, we will examine how our authenticity quest might play out in our personal, social and work situations.
3. **Walking the authenticity talk.** Finally, in the third section we will consider what this means for us at the level of body, mind, emotion, energy and spirit. We will also explore some common traps to avoid when walking on the authenticity path.

Part I: The pillars of authenticity

The Eastern wisdom legacy for humankind offers a vast array of approaches and entry points. There is a plethora of classic *genuine* tried and tested paths and practices, developed down through the ages, devoted solely to helping individuals realise their authentic selves.⁶

Paths range from Buddha's noble eightfold path to Patanjali's yoga sutras, or the Upanishadic movement epitomised by Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta. Each one of these iconic landmarks contains comprehensive, step by step practical guides to being authentic, and together they have been producing authentic realisers for thousands of years.

Unsurprisingly, elements of these principles, processes and practices are increasingly being filtered and incorporated into current organisational best practice, especially relating to authentic leadership – albeit in a random fashion.

⁶ There have also been many individual iconoclasts throughout history who defy any categorisation. Many of these individuals are emphatically dismissive of formal paths and techniques to self-realisation. Also contemporaneously there are emerging "New School" models and methodologies.

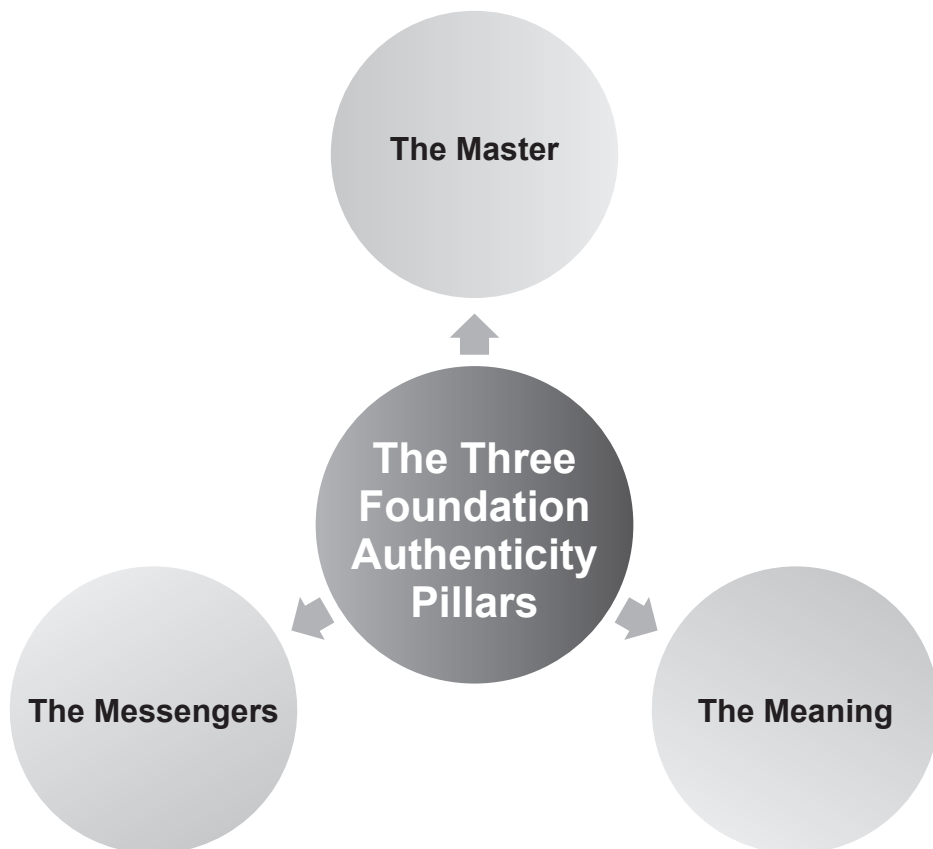
Whilst they acknowledge and have much gratitude for the influence of the classic traditions, they tend to purport to be the vanguard of the next 'spiritual' evolutionary moment, one that is tailored and relevant for our epoch.

So, given this long and diverse history, is there an ancient wisdom Authenticity Blueprint shared by all the traditions? For the purists ... probably not!

Yet, a case could be made that while they differ in definitions of the final outcome (The Realisation) and approaches (The Path), many of the major Indian traditions share a similar systemic framework for achieving self-realisation.⁷

Drawing primarily from Buddhism and Hinduism, the following framework depicts three fundamental authenticity pillars for transforming all facets of leadership, culture and performance in an organisation.

The Three Foundation Authenticity Pillars



⁷ The three declarations or foundation pillars that Buddhists of all denominations take refuge in is a good example of a systemic framework. They are:

- Right Guidance (The Buddha).
- Right Teaching and Knowledge (The Dharma).
- Right Culture (The Sangha)

Let's now take a closer look at The Three Foundation Authenticity Pillars.

Authenticity Foundation Pillar: The Master - Right Guidance and Leadership

In coaching, mentoring and training fields, it is commonly said that if there is something you want to do well, find someone who has already excelled at it and learn from them.

Traditionally the guide was much more than a coach- instructor-facilitator or technical and subject matter expert, and the pupil was after something much more than a competency certificate.⁸

When Buddhists take refuge in Buddha (the historical founder of Buddhism), they are acknowledging there are higher wisdom bearers, and it is the qualities of the higher wisdom bearer they take refuge in, not the individual person. The Guru⁹ Tradition largely associated with Hinduism also has its roots in this recognition. Why not learn from someone who has already walked on the path, fully realised the final goal and can offer you practical guidance, methods and inspiration?

This notion of the need for a Master or Guide is based on awareness that for most when it comes to being authentic and who we really are, we need great guidance and help.

Paradoxically, this is not something you can actually do *independently*. Admitting you need help is a major milestone on your authenticity journey.

In the contemporary networked organisation, collaborative leadership models have particularly gained ascendancy.

The democratisation of leadership is being championed, authentic leadership now is not only the monopoly of people with manager titles, it can and must be demonstrated by everyone.

⁸ "What the master communicates and reveals is much deeper and subtler than formal instruction in techniques". Pg. 83 *Spiritual Choices. The Problem of Recognising Authentic Paths to Inner Transformation*. Edited by Dick Anthony, Bruce Ecker, and Ken Wilber. Paragon House Publishers. New York 1987

For any capability development, it helps if you can admit you need help and are open to skilful guidance. When it comes to unlocking your authentic potential, it is even better if you can get guidance from someone who can speak with authority from direct perception, especially someone who literally understands the terrain and errors that can be made at both the beginner level and when experiencing 'higher' stages of growth.

⁹ Gurus generally get bad press these days and in India, there are many types of gurus. What exactly is a "guru?" The word consists of two syllables: *gu* and *ru*: *gu* meaning *shadow* or *darkness* and *ru* signifying *a remover*. So the guru principle in action is that which removes darkness from our understanding and our hearts with spiritual illumination or light.

To be an inspirational sign, leaders are exhorted to focus on giving everyone the opportunity “to be the best they can be” and to ask themselves, “Why would anyone want to be led by me?”, “ Would I follow me? ” is a question we all must ask and answer.

Bubbling under the surface is another question, which cuts to the root of leader- follower dynamics, “Why would you want to be led by anyone?”

*“When a finger points to the moon,
the imbecile looks at the finger”.*

Ancient Chinese Proverb

Many of us would agree that we are all at uniquely different developmental levels and there are guides and teachers to suit everyone’s capabilities at every stage.

No doubt every moment, every person and every situation you encounter can be your teacher.

Yet it is always critical to be able to discriminate between genuine leadership and authority and spurious charlatans. The ancient Eastern traditions admonish us to be extremely discerning in choosing a guide and rigorously test their qualities, attributes, skills and knowledge.

The following queries must be resolved before you agree to be led, guided or coached by anyone.-

1. “Is my leader or coach The Real Deal or a Snake Oil merchant?”
2. “How will I know if they are the right person to help me?”
3. “Will this person help me become a better leader of my own life? Will I be able to generate self-mastery and lead and coach myself to do what it takes as well as others?”

Throughout history, prevailing cultural attitudes and values have always influenced whatever guide or spiritual framework we gravitate towards.

Western culture puts a high premium on individual independence and is extremely suspicious of master- disciple dynamics (fuelled by an incendiary media).

We all know the dangers of diminishing ourselves by projecting onto others our highest values and subordinating ourselves to them. This leaves us open to exploitation and a healthy dose of scepticism is extremely beneficial.

But we also need to be wary of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In our cynicism we may miss seeing higher qualities in others, especially those in whose company our lives begin to transform and flower.

Certainly charlatans and prestige wannabes are out there. Yet, as former GE CEO and leadership guru Jack Welsh once commented, “Just as we know phonies, the flip side is we do know the real deal when we encounter it”

The Real Deal

‘I don’t know what authentic leadership is, but I know it when I see it’

In September 1983 I had just completed a 20 day silent personal meditation retreat in a forest retreat centre in Dharamsala, India, in the Himalayan foothills.

Dharamsala is where the Dalai Lama set up the Tibetan government in exile after fleeing Tibet in 1960. It’s an old British Hill Station, where the British used to escape the simmering heat of the plains.

*As I was leaving the retreat, I heard that one day every week a respected **high** lama gave ‘audience’ to English speaking people in his private residence, which the Indian government had graciously provided for him.*

His name was H.H. Ling Rinpoche and he was actually the senior teacher-tutor to the Dalai Lama, and was highly revered as a being of ‘Great Attainment’. I decided to seek him out.

About a hundred metres away from his residence it felt like I had crossed a threshold and entered a new energy field as I noticed my body seemed to be tingling and vibrating in a subtler way.

I arrived at a lovely old British Raj house, and sat on a wooden bench outside waiting to be ushered in. Three other Westerners were waiting there, and one by one they entered the house, and soon after re-emerged. When they each came out I sensed there seemed to be something different about them.

Finally it was my turn. I assumed a ‘more spiritual than thou’ demeanour, and as I was virtuously putting my foot in the door, I was bowled over by this booming deep

bellied “hhhhhhhoooooo”. On the other side of the room sat Ling Rinpoche, beckoning and welcoming me like I was his long lost best friend.

The room seemed to be pulsating with aliveness and bathed in bright light. As a gesture of mutual exchange and respect I had bought a prayer scarf from the bazaar down the road. Instead of feeling awkward and self-conscious, I spontaneously bowed, like it was the most simple and natural thing to do.

As I looked up to offer my gift to him, I was astounded by what I saw and found myself literally thinking, “This is no ordinary person.” It dawned on me that the palpable immense energy permeating the room was the same energy I had sensed when approaching the house, and it was tacitly obvious it was all radiating from this magnetic presence in front of me.

On his right side was a Western interpreter. “Is there anything you want to ask him?” he enquired. By now, in the peace and silence of his company, all my own personal questions had dissolved.

I turned to the interpreter and said, “I’ve nothing I want to ask about myself, but I’ve just found out that my father is very ill in hospital in Australia. He’s in a coma and isn’t expected to pull through. I’ve been told not to rush home.”

The interpreter communicated this to Ling Rinpoche. By the time I turned back to look at him, huge tears of compassion were welling in his luminous orb-like eyes. It felt like he was fully investing himself in my father’s pain and suffering, yet utterly free and merely present at the same time.

He urged and admonished me not to forget to practise compassion.

Soon it was over and time to say farewell. As I backed out of the door, he unwaveringly regarded me with penetrating heart wrenching vulnerability.

Later, back in my hotel room, raw emotion and energy erupted suddenly inside me and in an instant I found myself spontaneously wailing, “I’ve just seen an enlightened being”. I’d read about this authentic state for many years and I didn’t know what it was, and I still don’t. But I knew I had just seen it. It was self-authenticating and more profound than I could ever have imagined!

There is a footnote to this story.

My father had a miraculous recovery and awoke from his coma. But, to the shock and despair of everyone, during the following week Ling Rinpoche had a serious stroke.

He died a few months later, on Christmas Day at the end of his eighty-first year. With his last breath, he smiled.

As a sign of great 'yogic' prowess, his body stayed in perfect condition with no signs of decay until 7 January, two weeks later!

Special human beings like Ling Rinpoche aren't to be found on every street corner. Even though I was only in his company fifteen minutes, since that day at a core level the vision he showed me has never left me. It's been etched into my consciousness for life.

We hear a lot these days about Turning Points that change everything. This was one Turning Point in my life. And isn't that the gift and impact of an authentic leader or guide? They change lives.

In the ancient traditions, the end game is that you become The Master.

Whether inner guide, outer guide, or guide as nature or life itself, whatever form it takes, right guidance is the greatest catalyst for creating a culture and community of Masters and enduring personal, team, and organisational success. It gives us a vision of our true potential, the inspiration to act on it, and the skilful means to do it.

Authenticity Foundation Pillar: The Meaning – Right Knowledge, Insight and Learning

"All I ask is the opportunity to prove money can't make me happy."

Spike Milligan.

Philosophically and psychologically throughout human evolution, there has been tension between what is truly authentic (or sacred) and what works best in getting through all the vicissitudes of our daily (secular) life. In the West in particular there has been ambiguity about the *spiritual* – *secular* dynamic and humanity's place in the order of things. It may be an understatement to say that Westerners generally have been conflicted around having both a rich outer life and a rich inner life.

The perceived ambiguity in Western societies between working authentically and making money with meaning hasn't been as problematic in Indian philosophy and society. That is because it is reconciled in the unifying concept of Dharma.

What does Dharma mean?

- On a macro or quantum scale – Dharma means a universal law of nature or Big Picture purpose in the widest sense, including the knowledge, insight and practices of the greatest spiritual teachings.
- On a micro or smaller scale, your personal Dharma or life journey is lived optimally in harmony with the universal Dharma. Your personal Dharma encompasses an unfolding sense of your specific life's purpose, duty, work or path to the truth. Like a hard wired individual GPS system, where every momentary experience has meaning in the grand order of things, continually revealing serendipitous threads and patterns about the truth of ourselves and reality.

As social creatures, we are currently the pre-eminent herd of mammals colonising the planet. When Dharma is rightly understood, lived and practised, it is always good for you, your tribe (or organisation) and the environments in which you roam (your business markets).

From a Dharma perspective we are always in a potential *“one small step for ourselves, one giant leap for humanity”* moment.

What is a virtuous business life?

We live and work in an age of instant gratification and short termism. In the modern workplace, all aspects of organisational life are being redefined and are under pressure to mutate.

Individual, social, global and universal coherence may philosophically sound like a good idea, but how do we engage markets from an intrinsic perspective and will it really help outperform the competition?

How can we ensure our corporate *wisdom and purpose* is protected from the inevitable revision and muddying of legacies as CEOs, people, processes, technology, systems and organisational structures change?

Traditionally, it was the job of the wise sage to inspire visionary leaders and monarchs to have faith in Dharma, expand their thinking and chart grander strategic horizon lines. Historical figures like Emperor Ashoka, or contemporary visionaries like Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela, leave behind, not just generational, but profound universal legacies that impact and

benefit everyone down through the ages.¹⁰

Meaningful and Virtuous Business Action

Two epics at the heart of Indian culture are the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Both reveal the inherent symbiosis and feedback loop between our inner and outer lives and each story is a guide to ideal behaviour and the duties and standards to which we must live. At the heart of both epics lies the question of what is virtuous 'right action' or Dharma. They highlight the perennial clash between what society exhorts you to do, what you as an individual want to do and what you are purposed towards in alignment with universal laws. We need to be aware of what it means for us individually, what it means to be a member of society and what is a 'life well lived'. Given the confusing times in which we live, particularly in the wake of the GFC it is encouraging that many executives, business leaders and organisational development professionals are looking at business through multiple lenses and are beginning to seriously ask and inspect what is a virtuous business life.

Authenticity Foundation Pillar: The Messengers – Right Culture and Community

"No road is long with good company"

(Turkish proverb).

We now live and work in a hyper connected age that opens up new possibilities for organisation-wide cross pollination and mutual exchange. Enabled by technology more than ever before, we can consciously bestow and inherit the right socio-cultural imprints and organisational DNA.

We are all greatly affected by the company we keep (even the company we keep with ourselves). In Buddhism, spiritual friends, with a common goal, vision or purpose was called The Sangha. Sangha can be translated roughly as "association" or "assembly," "company of truth" or the "community of practitioners".¹¹

10 Emperor Ashoka has come to be regarded as one of the most exemplary rulers in world history. H.G. Wells wrote in his book *The Outline of History*: "Amidst the tens of thousands of names of monarchs that crowd the columns of history, their majesties and graciousness's and serenities and royal highnesses and the like, the name of Ashoka shines, and shines, almost alone, a star." Ashoka the Great, the third monarch of the Indian Mauryan dynasty, ruled almost the entire Indian subcontinent from ca. 269 BCE to 232 BCE. His reign as emperor began with a series of wars and bloodshed, culminating in the Kalinga War of 260 BC, which reportedly resulted in more than 100,000 deaths and 150,000 deportations. Remorseful after his bloody campaign and conquest of Kalinga, he had a sudden change of heart, embraced Buddhism and adopted the Dharma. Ashoka is now remembered as a philanthropic administrator. Under him the earliest known bans on slavery and capital punishment as well as environmental regulations came into place. Reverence for life, tolerance, compassion and peaceful co-existence were the cornerstones of his administration.

11 In Indian philosophy the Sanskrit word *Satsang* means true or right relationship or the company of the "highest truth". It may involve spending time in the company of a master, a sacred place, or an assembly of persons who listen to, talk about, and assimilate the truth into one's daily life.

In response to being asked about the importance of good company or admirable friendships, The Buddha replied, "...admirable friendship is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk (or anyone else) has admirable people as friends, (they) can be expected to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path".

So even in the secluded monastic and meditative forest monk traditions:

- being and keeping good company;
- being visible in right relationship; and
- serving others, being served and holding each other to a higher standard;

were senior principles to any specific 'authenticity' methods or techniques the renunciates were practising.

The real secret method of The Masters was the gift of right relationship itself. A message that resounds throughout the ancient traditions is that change happens in relationship and we need the mirror of relationship to go to the next level.¹²

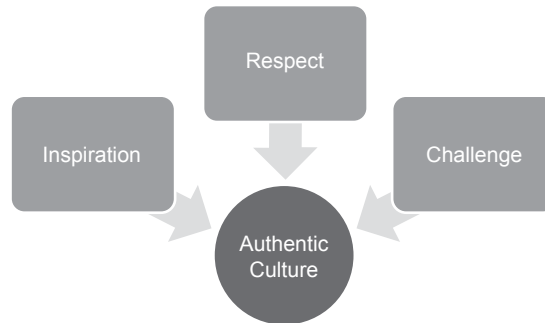
An authentic social and cultural context is critical for sustaining peak performance and achieving outcomes. So what sort of principles and practices would the 'fly on the wall' see?

A living cultural process based on Respect, Inspiration and Challenge is essential for sustainable success. A mature, functional culture needs to demonstrate a different level of reflection, connection and conversation with *yourself* and *others*. Embracing the principle of being and keeping good company isn't about maintaining superficial social niceties or casually hanging out together. It is all about finding ways to artfully help one another go through the process and grow.

12 Jiddu Krishnamurti (12 May 1895 – 17 February 1986) was a highly influential speaker and writer on philosophical and spiritual subjects. After World War II, many prominent personalities came to meet with Krishnamurti, including Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In one instance he said to Nehru, "Understanding of the self only arises in relationship, in watching yourself in relationship to people, ideas, and things; to trees, the earth, and the world around you and within you. Relationship is the mirror in which the self is revealed. Without self-knowledge there is no basis for right thought and action." Nehru asked, "How does one start?" to which Krishnamurti replied, "Begin where you are. Read every word, every phrase, every paragraph of the mind, as it operates through thought."

Quoted from Wikipedia

The Three Principles for Creating a Sustainable Authentic Culture: Respect, Inspiration and Challenge



Many spiritual, tribal and successful sporting and business cultures put a laser focus on everyone:

- Being *respected* and having an *inspired* purpose and strong intention;
- Being *challenged* and held to account;
- and showing up and *embodying* it all in daily actions and behaviours;

They understand all three are integral elements for creating an authentic cultural identity and a sustainable cultural process.

From Survive to Thrive

In an authentic culture, it doesn't matter if your organisation is characterised by dependent plodder followers, independent prima donnas or gruff bully bosses. None are pandered to or persecuted. Sociopathic fault lines, default positions and resistances, however, do need to be weeded out.

Ongoing assessment is a necessary part of the process, and unlike some organisational assessment centres, failure is not built into the performance review system. Individual and collective tests are meant to be passed, not just for the good of the culture and brand, but so you can really enter into the eventual higher stages of learning and growth and perform at the highest level.

Of course there will be lapses and deviations from the path, and that's why select cultural guides and peers are necessary to expose blind spots and explode anything that might get in the way of you realising your future

potential. With mature seriousness, humour and compassion, their job was to provide intimate, insightful feedback to help you maintain momentum. You can't do it without them!¹³

Badges of Honour

Back in the late 70's I was based in Darwin, working as an itinerant labourer. Before the wet season we used to cavort across the Top End carrying provisions to Aboriginal communities. On the return journey we carted hay for the big cattle stations. It was a wild and adventurous time of my life, one of my personal rites of passage.

Later on during a visit to Grafton, my home town, I met my Uncle John at Woolli beach. He was a very successful commercial and residential bricklayer who up until then probably thought that I'd never done a day's hard yakka in my life.

He looked at the newly toned, pecked and buffed me, and his first words to me were, "Strewth, you've been workin'."

This meant a lot to me then and still does now. It was validation from one my most respected family elders.

It took me back to a few months earlier when I was sitting around a fire with a group of Aboriginal people near a billabong on the Daly River Reserve.

It was a classic romantic adventure scene, a starry, starry night, a blazing fire, drinking billy tea, eating damper, big grins all round. The man beside me pointed to the nearby billabong and told me a story about his own uncle. It's a story I have always remembered.

He said, "My uncle fought a crocodile in that billabong. He fought only with his spear. Eventually he killed it."

He paused. Then he added, "My uncle died a few days later from his wounds."

To this day I can still feel the respect, and pride he had for the courage and bravery his uncle had showed and ultimate sacrifice he had made.

At that time, "secret women's business" and "secret men's business", initiation

¹³ Malcolm Gladwell is the international bestselling author of the *Tipping Point* and *Blink*. In *Outliers*, he argues no one does it on their own, and how we interpret elite performance and success is fundamentally flawed. Mastery and being the best of the best comes from a confluence of years of dedicated practice, providential opportunities... and socio - cultural legacies. In line with the principle of Good Company, he shows that grand attainment depends on social help, not self-help, in other words he argues, we need others to be successful.

ceremonies were still a very important part of tribal life. Away from the eyes of the community, elders took young men into seclusion. After a few days of ceremonial practices together, at sunrise the initiates would walk quietly to a secluded spot and be circumcised. A Big Badge of Honour.

However, this was a time of flux. The introduction of Western culture, ideologies, and values was starting to have an impact on this ritual. Pressure to stop performing these rites continues to this day.

That night my friend told me some of the young blokes would show disrespect to the elders and tribal system and head for the hills hoping to hide and wait it out.

I asked "What happens when they come back?"

With a twinkle in his eye he said "Oh they still get done."

Then he chuckled. "But we do them with a blunt knife!"

Even to this day I'm not sure if he was pulling my leg. But it gave me a powerful lesson. It taught me the power and integrity of a culture that not only valued respect and inspiration, but also challenge and testing, and didn't indulge weakness, or weak leadership.

The test isn't going to go away. Sometimes in life it's better to unplug, commit and pass the test now. It's a lot better than facing the Blunt Knife later.

Three Practices for Creating Generative Authentic Culture

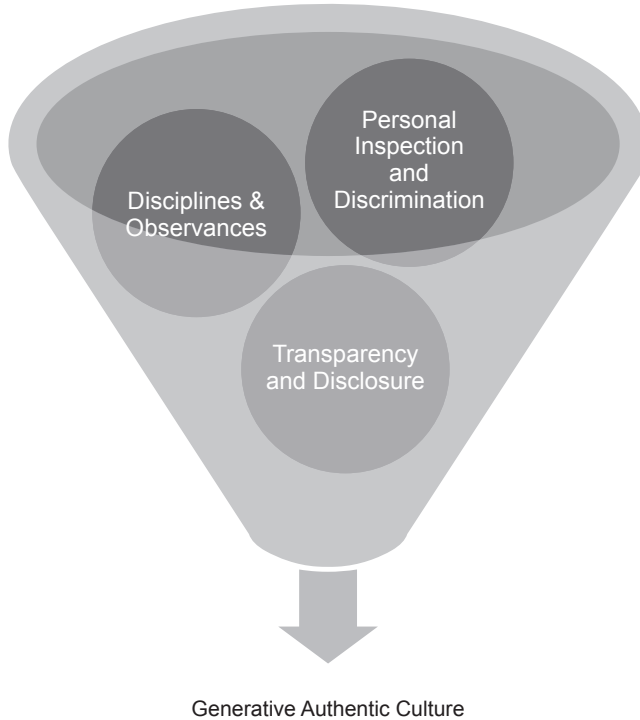
1. Personal Inspection (Sumyama) and Discriminative Intelligence (Viveka)

Sumyama is a Sanskrit term analogous to the ancient Greek aphorism Know Thyself, or Socrates' admonition that, "the unexamined life is not worth living"¹⁴. It involves bringing a curious, courageous and compassionate spotlight to the consideration of 'everything' about you, so nothing about you remains hidden or uninspected. Our *shadows and light* are revealed through Sumyama, and our authenticity journey becomes progressively self-authenticating.

¹⁴ Legend tells that seven sages of ancient Greece, (philosophers, statesmen and law-givers), assembled in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi to inscribe 'know thyself' at the entry to its sacred oracle. It subsequently became a popular adage for western philosophers, extending its reach as the influence of Greek philosophy expanded. Know Thyself is arguably a touchstone or meme of western culture.

In tandem with personal inspection and raised awareness, skilful and wilful choices have to be made. Discriminative intelligence (Viveka¹⁵) needs to be exercised around what serves you best. Discriminative intelligence plays a significant role when the going gets tough, particularly when it can seem a lot easier to throw in the towel and give in to the inevitable challenges and obstacles.

Three Practices for Creating Generative Authentic Culture



2. Disciplines and Observances (Yamas and Niyamas)

In training programs around the globe we hear leaders, managers and coaches exhorted to ask their people, “What did you do well?” and, “If you had your time over again what would you do differently?”

In the Indian yogic traditions, after personal inspection and developing insight, the individual sadhaka (or ardent spiritual aspirant) was expected to commit to *things to do* relating to others and the world around them (yamas), and *things not to do* relating to themselves (niyamas) and concrete individualised plans would be developed.¹⁶

¹⁵ Viveka or Discriminative Intelligence is analogous to the ancient Greek Gnosis.

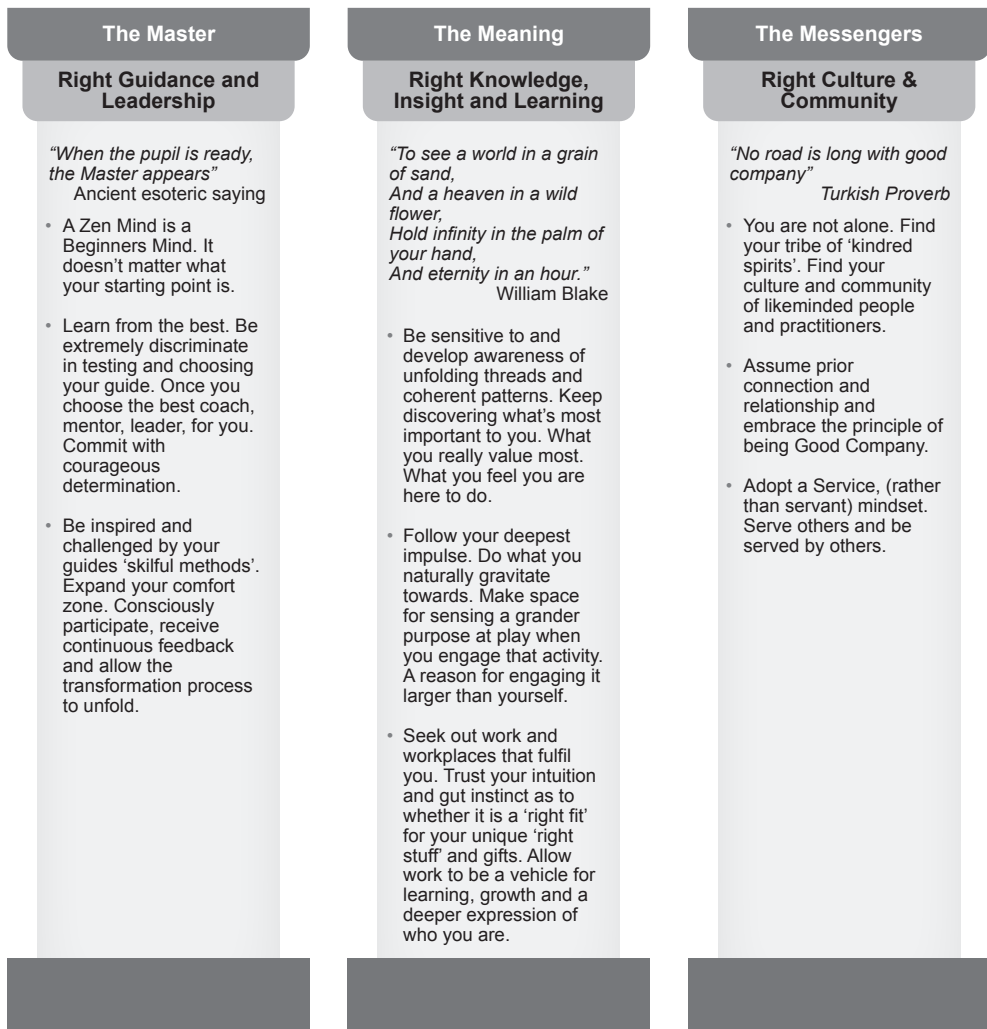
¹⁶ In Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh and Muslim traditions, a *sādhaka*, or practitioner, is one who skillfully applies a variety of disciplines and practices (mental, emotional, physical, energetic) in the pursuit of a spiritual goal. The practices performed

3. Transparency and Disclosure

In traditional spiritual cultures limitations are expected to be openly disclosed and maturely considered. Openness and vulnerability are valued and visible public declarations and commitments to your intimates and cultural guides were crucial for growth. Especially during the beginner stage, when issues around fear, commitment, and taking consistent action are likely to be most challenging.

Applying the Three Pillars of Authentic Leadership

This representation snapshots what we can contemplate and do, congruent with our desire for meaningful work, workplaces and authentic leaders.



were called **Sādhana** (literally "a means of accomplishing something") and involved study, investigation, observation, reflection, insight, committing to new appropriate disciplines and action.

Invest in your Messengers

In summary from an ancient wisdom perspective what matters most is the installation of a dynamic cultural platform that fulfils a sense of belonging and equips everyone with the opportunity to grow, realise their potential and succeed.

For organisations of the 21st century, sustainable authentic cultural success will rest on the ability of leaders to:

- embrace the ancient wisdom principle of Good Company;
- build and leverage small scale intimate functional and cross functional teams and communities, and
- create a generative cultural process, based on the principles of respect, inspiration and challenge.

Part II: Authenticity unfolding in daily life and work

This section explores elements of the evolution of leadership and involvement in organisations and what sustainable authentic leadership looks like filtered through an Eastern wisdom prism.

To Be or Not To Be

*"Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work
a day in your life."*

Confucius

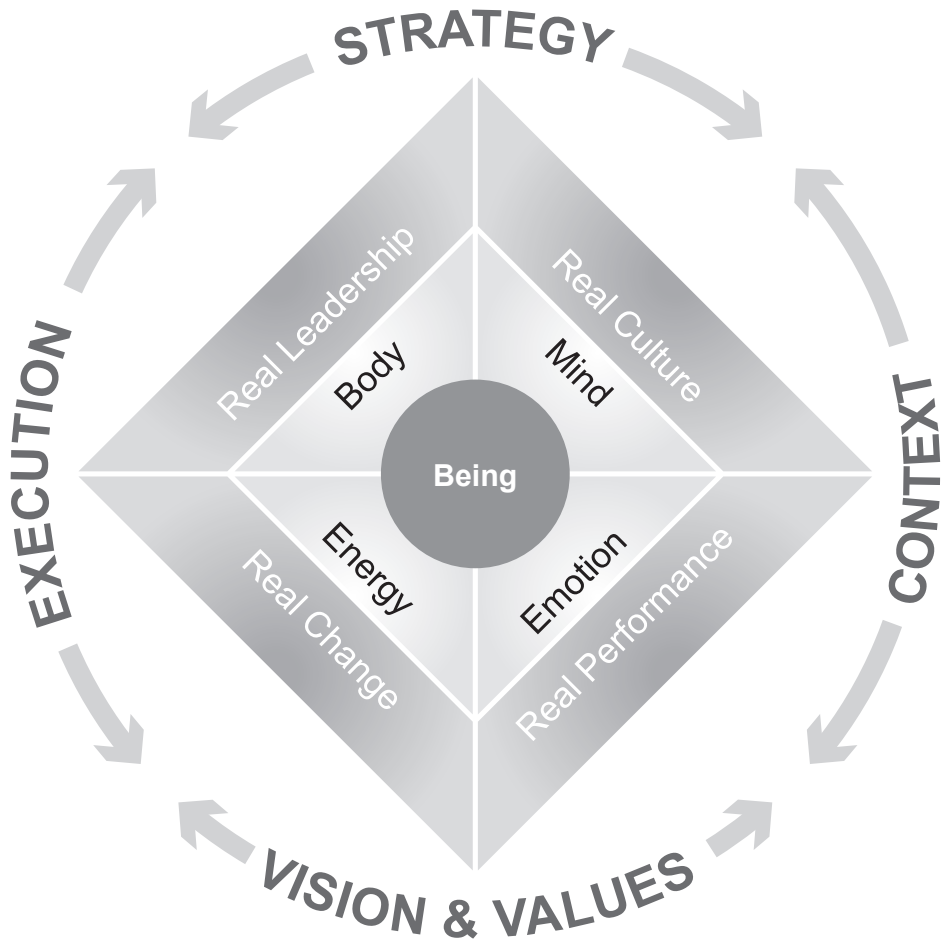
In the ancient traditions success is an inside-out job.

The Practical Wisdom graphic shows that an organisation is a synergistic eco-system. It depicts the dynamic interdependencies and operating rhythm between the context, strategy, vision and values and execution of the business, and individuals embedded in the organisation.

Real culture, real leadership, real performance and real change, are enabled by the conscious participation, networking and collaboration of everyone in the organisation.

The key ancient wisdom message, highlighted by the Practical Wisdom model, is to recognise that Being or our authentic true nature is always an inherent resort, at the core of all individual-collective interdependencies, creativity and actions.

*Practical Wisdom.
The Human-Being & Business*



For the ancient seers the real reason we are called human-beings is because there is a Being dimension to us.

Being is not reducible to a specific context - whether a peak performance motivation strategy, a value, belief system, an ethical code, cultural process or brain state. Rather the opposite is true. Being is the prior context of everything and everything emerges and arises out of it. This means the voice of authenticity is always present, locatable and can never really be lost.

An accessible gnosis or intelligence, and an inspirational leadership capability instantaneously emerges when we are present, manifesting our inherent nature.

Ignore or disconnect from that portal at your peril!

In the ultimate expression of self-realisation, we are rightly aligned with 'everything' (the universal and the particular); we act singularly, without any self-doubt or confusion, under all life's circumstances.

Not only that, in any given moment when you genuinely connect to your authentic self, you likely will also be the most magnetic, creative and influential person in the room.

Others will be attracted to being around you, even if they can't quite calibrate what it is they are attracted to.

Akin to a mysterious latent natural law, it maybe is best encapsulated in the oft repeated saying attributed to 19th Century Indian saint Ramakrishna, that, "When the flower blooms the bees come – uninvited."

Mindfulness – A daily bridge to Authentic Connection, Happiness and Productivity

There has been an explosion in the last decade of organisations endeavouring to build engaged workforces to increase capacity, reduce costs, promote personal productivity, enhance customer centricity and develop better leaders. Creative, unconventional and deeply personal professional development programs are increasingly gaining popularity and credibility, and a wellness industry has mushroomed to support this trend. Individuals are being encouraged to look after their physical health and emotional and mental wellbeing. Organisations encourage and sponsor participation in individual and corporate sporting events, gym memberships, yoga and meditation classes, lunch-time massages, formal mental resilience and positive psychology programs.

This can be out of step with some traditional spiritual paths which warn that self-absorbed effort, fixated on remedial self-perfection, can never give access to your essential nature.

The good news is, traditional spiritual methods, rightly practised, not only lead to abiding authenticity, but can also deliver a secondary benefit

of a healthier and happier life including experiencing a more participatory, energised and fulfilling work life.

One of the great signs of authenticity 'progress' is an ever-increasing compulsion to connect and associate freely, joyously and compassionately with all living beings. The caveat remains that these are all positive bi-products of the process, rather than qualities to be sought after as ends in themselves.

*"Before enlightenment: chop wood, carry water.
After enlightenment: chop wood, carry water."*

Zen proverb

It is bewildering, but it seems that real transformation is a spontaneous process that occurs only when we stop being so busy seeking to change and perfect ourselves. One description of enlightenment from the Zen tradition is "doing one thing at a time". When we become fully immersed in the doing, we are restored to a centred equanimity, abandoning our worries and stresses, with no problem, no need for a remedy or personal development.

We are all working longer hours; highly stressful environments are on the increase. At work we are constantly reacting to the external distractions bombarding us, whether emails, conversations, news, events, or general organisational and market noise. Mirroring the world we live and work in, our mind tends to be noisy and restless.¹⁷

Internally, we experience thoughts, feelings and emotions that are continually being recycled throughout the body-mind. Rarely is the subtle and constant inner chatter suspended. This can leave us emotionally and intellectually drained, or in a state of always coping. Typically, we don't even question the habitual incessant chatter, and scattered attention. We think that it is normal and just the way it is. It seems always easier to escape from the present moment and desire what is somewhere else, than to be fully aware of what is happening now.

To realise our real self, meditation is a core practice for many traditions. Meditation is something we can formally practise and there are numerous meditation and contemplative techniques. Engaging an inner practice and living life are not two contradictory things.¹⁸

¹⁷ Traditionally this was referred to as *monkey mind*. **Monkey mind**, is a Buddhist term meaning "unsettled; restless; capricious; whimsical; fanciful; inconstant; confused; indecisive; uncontrollable". Rather than existing in the present moment, the monkey mind fixates on one thought after another, like a monkey jumps from tree to tree distracting us from being simply in the present. We rarely stay present for more than a few seconds before *monkey mind* draws us back to dwelling in the past, or projecting into the future, fixated in constant craving and aversion.

¹⁸ In the previously cited Ruth Ostrow article, she mentions, "A renowned neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin

To engage both at the same time, we need to be interested in what's real in our experience, what is arising in our experience, whether mundane or sublime. It seems when we are simply aware of the present moment- through all our sense doors- feeling, seeing, tasting, hearing, smelling, touching, emoting – in line with our Steve Jobs' quotation at the start of the chapter, a deeper unfolding of who we are and what we can manifest becomes possible.

Paradoxically, the more we can effortlessly allow the state of choiceless awareness to arise, the more we can make conscious choices and act rightly without any internal conflict or insecurity.

Yet, during our busy days, sometimes all we have is a few minutes to grab some respite and equanimity and insight.

The mindfulness circuit breaker outlined below can be practised at intervals throughout the day, particularly when feeling overwhelmed and stretched for time.

Two minute Mindfulness Circuit Breaker

1. Keep your eyes open or closed. Sit upright, relax your whole body, let go of all the *busyness and bustle* and simply allow everything to be as it is, accepting where you are now, not where you'd like to be. Release all resistance and attachment to what you're currently doing, thinking or feeling. Remain in a state of non-judgmental, choiceless awareness.
2. At the level of the body: Become aware of your natural breath. Inhale and exhale fully, feeling the breath flow at the tip of the nostrils, or feel the rise and fall of the breath at the navel area.
3. Maintain awareness of your body and focus on what you are actually feeling, not what you would like to be feeling, or what you feel you should be feeling, while maintaining awareness of your natural respiration- the incoming breath, the outgoing breath.
4. At the level of mind and emotion, relax and be open to new possibilities - not expecting anything. Allow the mind to be like an open window, open to receiving new insights and awareness.

Madison, Prof Richard Davidson wired up the brains of meditating monks and proved for the first time that activity in the left prefrontal cortex (the seat of positive emotions) swamped negative emotions, anxiety, anger and stress. He ascertained the degree to which meditation can improve performance, sharpen focus and concentration and stimulate happiness in the individual, and hence all of those people he or she leads."

5. Whenever the mind wanders, keep gently, effortlessly returning your attention to the present moment, one moment, one breath at a time.
6. Breathe deeply, but normally and now feel as if your breath is coming in and going out through your heart area. Continue breathing until you fall into an inner rhythm that feels natural and easeful to you.
7. As you maintain your heart focus and heart breathing, activate and generate a positive heart based feeling and contemplate something in your life right now you are grateful for. Continue to radiate this positive feeling out from the heart centre.
8. After a few moments, resume action and focus on doing one thing, right now. Just choose one thing, clear away all other distractions and return to the doing - whether writing an email, leading a team meeting or reporting to analysts. Thoughts will continue to rise to the surface of the mind, gently be aware of them, let them arise and pass away.
9. Become totally alive and present in the doing, while continuing to keep doing.

Daily circuit breakers help us to *remember to remember what* we are doing *while* we are doing it. Whether carrying out mundane activities, work related activities or spiritual practices, by balancing our head, heart and energy, we are able to come into Now and be more authentically present. This simple introductory insight practice will not only give back sanity, fluidity and positively impact performance in the midst of a hectic work schedule, but, if consistently practiced over time, it has the potential to not only help access the flow zone but utterly transform our lives.

Part III: Walking the Authenticity talk

This section considers what it means to walk the authenticity talk - body, mind, emotion, energy and spirit. It also highlights some common traps and pitfalls to avoid.

Finding out what we are not, allows us to be who we are.¹⁹

¹⁹ Developing awareness and insight into the total reality of the body- mind and cutting through false self illusions is a necessary part of the human evolutionary process and transformation of the whole person. *Neti neti* is a Sanskrit expression which means “not this, not this”, or “neither this, nor that”. It is a method of self-enquiry practised typically by the vedantic traditions as a contemplative tool to help break our identification with parts of ourselves and perceiving only partial reality. By practising self-enquiry, through a process of negation, it opens the window to the possibility of experiencing a non-conceptual awareness of ourselves and reality.

From many ancient wisdom perspectives we are defined by our experience, our social personality, and *what* we believe, rather than by *who* we really are.

For many ancient masters the root cause of *all* our travail and dissatisfaction is ignorance of who we really are.

For the Eastern seers, the human-being is the bridge or fusion between the manifest and the un-manifest, the spiritual and the material. Our body- mind is a map of reality: not merely a material roadmap, but a map containing a subtler, esoteric anatomy layered into the physical blueprint.

This may sound far too philosophical and flaky. Yet, many neuroscientists, quantum physicists and sport psychologists, are finally catching up and corroborating what seers and yogis have always proclaimed: We inhere in an energy and information field with infinite potentiality for finite manifestation, actualised by opening new neural networks and pathways latent in the body-mind structure.²⁰

The latest Neuroscience findings extol, that when the three main neural networks – the Head, Heart and the navel (or Hara²¹) are integrated, an individual can make snap decisions, experience *flow*, access higher brain dimensions and much more.

For the sages though, not only does coherence of these three core centres produce peak performance, original ideas, and improvisation, but when they are stably aligned and balanced, they provide the agency that allows the possibility for a deeper unfolding of our authentic self into existence.

The Human-Being: Magical Mystery Tour

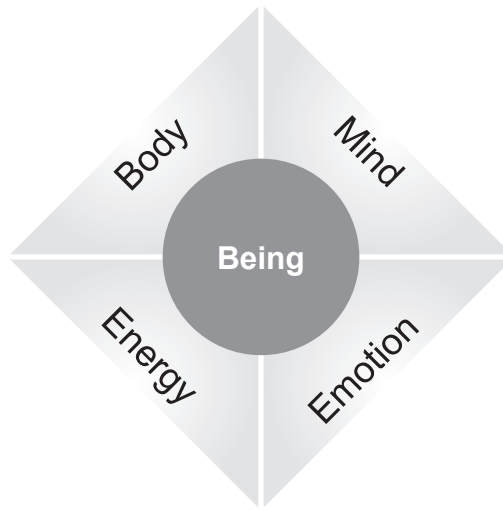
“We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

(Teilhard de Chardin, French Geologist, Priest, Philosopher and Mystic. 1881-1955)

For the seers, the real “magical mystery tour” is our own body-mind. That’s why yogic practices involving physical, mental, emotional, energetic and spiritual disciplines were developed to purify, rebalance and integrate the nervous system and the entire body-mind.

²⁰ NeuroLeadership (a term first coined by David Rock), is an emerging field of study rapidly gaining currency. It focuses on applying neuroscience discoveries to leadership development, change management, consulting and coaching fields.

²¹ The Hara is located at the navel, about two inches inwards from the skin. This portal is called the Hara by Taoists and is very often referred to in martial arts and Traditional Chinese medicine as the “centre of being”.

The Human-Being

What does this practically mean for our daily thoughts, words, feelings and deeds?

It means, to the degree you experience this unfolding, you will:

- breath easily and economically;
- move gracefully and effortlessly with free energy and attention;
- think and see things clearly; and
- be the Real Deal, truly intelligent, sane and wise...and likely be a genius or master of your field in that moment.

And who wouldn't want a taste of that!

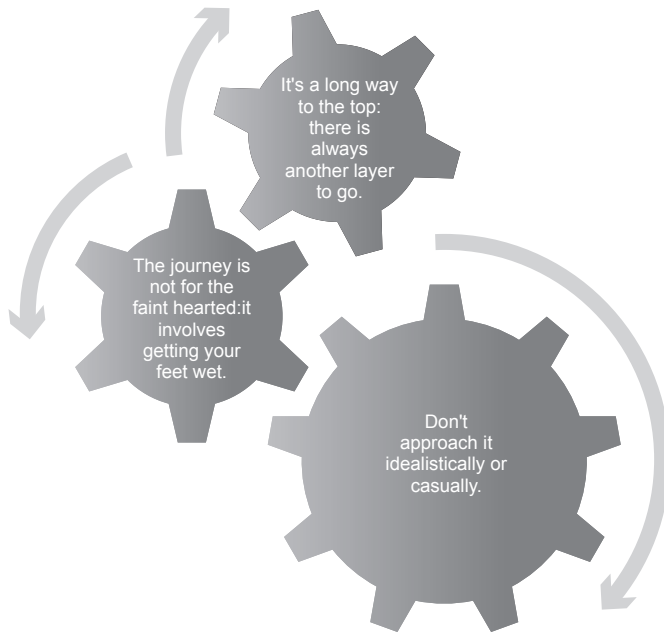
Admonitions to enable walking the Authenticity Walk

The spiritual path has been described as being like walking on The Razor's Edge. Like any life odyssey involving radical transformation, we need to be alert to the perils, pitfalls and blind alleys we are likely to encounter along the way. The same roadblocks that have stopped many a good yogi in their tracks will likely stop many a good business person as well.

Fortunately, there are numerous warnings, or suggestions, for travellers like us. The three admonitions tabled here, whilst by no means comprehensive, are

valuable pointers for those with a genuine desire to further their authenticity journey.

Three Admonitions to enable walking the authenticity walk



1. It's a long way to the top: there is always another layer to go

For most of us our authenticity journey will be a long path, likely a life long journey.

The non-linear nature of change means there is always evolutionary tension between the clouds opening and enjoying visionary, temporary glimpses of our authentic self. Then in the next moment back to believing the voices in our head, bound in dilemma, psychological time and memory desiring to have the authentic 'experience' again and wondering where did it go?

The spiritual search can be just as confusing as any other area and there can be just as much delusion and temporary fulfilment in chasing spiritual rainbows as material ones. We can be enslaved by our higher nature as much as our lower nature.

In the higher stages of growth, attachment to 'bliss' and a 'shinier' false self, can be just as deluding as being obsessed with feeling pious, pure and peaceful at the start. Seeking Jedi Knight super powers, or basking in sublime interiorised absorption states, is just the same entrapment as any other

addictive indulgence or instinctive compulsion.

Whether on the yoga mat or in the board room, with any genuine increase in personal power or influence comes new levels of responsibility. There is no doubt that taking responsibility for our (conscious and unconscious) urges and compulsions is a very complex process. Just how much responsibility you can assume is directly proportionate to your unfolding authenticity journey. Eventually your circle of influence will infinitely expand and you will naturally assume total responsibility for everything you see and experience, internal and external!

Now you may be thinking that all sounds good, but right now, will it help me get through the daily grind, pay the bills and have a happy life?

The short answer is yes it will, yet there will be confusion and ups and downs.

At times, you will feel you are caught in Groundhog Day²². If there is any solace, it is that without the experience of feeling stuck in endless cycles of highs and lows, there would be no impulse to grow and experience a deeper unfolding of who you are - your core authentic self.

Getting *stuck* on the spiritual treadmill is a natural part of the process. It's a long road with many twists, turns and deceptive bends. It requires truckloads of intention, deliberate practice and guidance. It is a multi-layered journey and from the position of the seeker, there is always another layer to go.

2. The journey is not for the faint hearted: it involves getting your feet wet and demands that you want to be real at any cost

The authenticity journey is a meritorious quest of Herculean proportions. No bigger challenge in the universe exists as it means facing the biggest opponent of all: yourself!

It is literally a quantum or evolutionary leap and is not for the faint hearted,

²² **Groundhog Day** is a 1993 American comedy film. Initially underestimated, over time it has grown in stature (through repeated viewings!). In 2006, the film was added to the United States National Film Registry as being deemed "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant". It has even been heralded by some religious leaders as the "most spiritual film of our time". The phrase "Groundhog Day" has entered common use at one level as a reference to an unpleasant situation that continually repeats itself. Yet, *Groundhog Day* is much more than another lost and found self-improvement story. At heart, it is all about spiritual transcendence. It reveals that all life's problems evaporate, when we can fully accept our situation. Our challenge is to let go of the resentment and denial over things not always working out the way we want them to, accepting life's vagaries and even our eventual death. Only then, are we truly capable of authenticity, immense love, compassion and masterful action.

it requires getting your feet wet and you have to want to be real at any cost.

Encountering the unfiltered you involves a fiery process of growth and purification. In the classic traditions this process was called Tapasya or Tapas (from the Sanskrit root ‘tap’, which means to ‘burn’ and ‘passion’).

Through tapas, you are meant to willingly “burn off” layers of deeply ingrained unconscious habits, judgments and inertia, purifying and opening up internal body-mind channels toward spiritual evolution and preventing accumulation of new negative impressions.²³

Tapasya is usually defined in religious and spiritual terms, but it can be applied to any field or context where there is great challenge and where limiting tendencies, habits and attitudes are overcome by making new decisions, disciplines and consciously generating and conducting your ‘inner fire’ and turning life’s circumstances to your advantage.

*“From the point of view of the caterpillar,
the metamorphosis to a butterfly is a catastrophe”.*

Anon

Why undergo the transformational fire?

The bad news is you must become comfortable with being uncomfortable. For most of us, there is no escaping this purifying heat. The good news is, there is always purpose in the pain and payoff for undergoing all the perturbation. We emerge, lighter, happier and capable of more meaningful connection, contribution and fulfilment.

3. Don't approach it idealistically or casually

If authenticity is our heart’s deepest desire and core to our being, then, we could surmise, it should be relatively easy to access it.

Yet, it seems the odds are against it. Historically there have been only a handful of overnight authenticity successes.²⁴

23 Iconoclastic 20th century UN - Guru UG Krishnamurti calls the ‘natural state’ ordeal he underwent ‘the calamity’. He says, “All kinds of things happened to me - I went through that, you see. The physical pain was unbearable - that is why I say you really don’t want this flushing out of everything good and bad, holy and unholy, sacred and profane that has got to happen. Once it (your consciousness), has become pure, *of and by itself*, then nothing can touch it, nothing can contaminate that any more. All the past up to a point is there, but it cannot influence your actions any more.” *The Mystique of Enlightenment*, 1982, page 30 Published by Dinesh Vaghela Cemtile Corporation, edited by Rodney Arms.

24 There have been notable exceptions. Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was probably the most famous Indian sage of the twentieth century. In the middle of 1896, at age sixteen, he experienced paroxysms of fear. Overcome by the feeling he was

Even though the connection is never cut, and the inevitability of realising our authentic nature is for everybody, not everybody is up to it. So far, relatively few people of any generation have attained the final goal of self-realisation.

An institutionalised, sanitised version of authenticity was an anathema and to equip you for a likely long haul, there were warnings about making casual or superficial approaches to your authenticity journey.

Why?

1. So you wouldn't give up due to *self*-doubt, and acquiesce to thoughts and feelings of not being good enough.
2. And also prevent you bailing out prematurely because of illusions of grandeur and superiority and thinking you don't need help because you already know it all.

It was entirely appropriate to be a householder or beginner. Yet, like any capability development path, you were encouraged to move on and not remain a beginner forever.

For ardent practitioners daily life was less about public institutionalised observances and spiritual entertainment and more about extremely individualised inner and outer practices.

For most of us, learning to be real is likely a lifelong job, one without any vacation. A daily, moment by moment (literally breath by breath) application.

For most of us, the discovery of our authentic true nature is an ever deepening process. Profound peace and happiness can be achieved while living ordinary lives. We don't have to live in an ashram or go on perpetual pilgrimages and retreats. There is no need to escape from life. The only renunciation needed is that of surrendering everything less than who you really are, and that doesn't depend on living in solitude or living an active life.

In a nutshell: Walking the Authenticity Talk

How to do it?

- The *path of return* to our authentic selves involves a comprehensive Tour

going to die, he lay down on the floor and relaxed into the feeling of imminent death and *spontaneously* fully realised his authentic self and true nature.

of The Body-Mind. A layered *conscious* tour of ‘everything’ about us - body, emotion, mind, attention, energy, breath, life force, spirit force and Being itself.

- There will be many pains, pleasures, opportunities and graceful milestones along the way.
- Yet, our opponent is a formidable and slippery foe, and we mustn’t forget to stay alert to the subtle false self fetters that can stall our progress to being true to ourselves.

We’ve come a long way baby, or, “Danger, Will Robinson”²⁵

As we sit at the cusp of the Asian Century, in the new globally networked economy, this chapter has attempted to explore the question of authenticity through the critical wisdom lens of our traditional Eastern heritage. It poses a number of questions:

- Are we at a transition point in our evolution? Is it possible, for a new paradigm in business to flower, for capitalism to play a leading part and be a positive game-changing instrument? Is it possible for the 21st Century to be remembered for the development of a more conscious and human face of capitalism?
- Can work become an opportunity to transform, contribute and grow like never before, impacting the planet, society and ourselves in major ways?
- Will our yearning for authenticity be the primal motivating force and enabler of this shift becoming a reality?
- Or is the authenticity trend just more snake-oil, or at best a vain hope?

Encouragingly, we are seeing rapidly expanding generations of business leaders and new entrepreneurs challenging us to discard old ways of thinking and apply wealth and entrepreneurial spirit to bigger and more meaningful challenges to make a difference in the world. For them, a reinterpretation of capitalism is paramount, so capitalism can be the vehicle for unleashing

²⁵ “**Danger, Will Robinson!**” is a catchphrase that has come into our lexicon from the 1960s’ American television series *Lost in Space*. The show ran for three seasons, with 83 episodes airing between September 15, 1965, and March 6, 1968. The Robot, acting as a surrogate guardian, with wildly oscillating arms exhorts this to young Will Robinson, when he is unaware of an impending threat. In everyday use, the phrase warns someone that they are about to make a mistake or that they are overlooking something.

our creative potential and solving social and economic problems on a global scale.²⁶

Great teachers all through human history have vehemently proclaimed: There is an authenticity journey that is about becoming more and more conscious and every human being at heart is a vehicle for that awakening.

Yet, soberly, 21st century humanity is also potentially the vehicle for self-destructive apocalyptic scenarios, precipitating the extinction of not only esoteric wisdom cultures, traditional and tribal ways, but all life on earth.

If history is a guide, evidence suggests this transition will continue to be difficult. If so, how alert do we need to be to the nature of the West in these Westernising times? Even though we are in the Asian Century?

Perhaps leopards can change their spots and old dogs can learn new tricks. You can also try to teach a duck to sing, but remember, it's a waste of time and it annoys the duck.

There is merit in heeding the 'nature' lesson of the scorpion and the frog. In the story, a scorpion and a frog meet on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asks the frog to carry him across on its back. The frog asks, "How do I know you won't sting me?" The scorpion says, "Because if I do, I will die too." The frog is satisfied, and they swim out. But midstream, the scorpion stings the frog. The frog feels the onset of paralysis and starts to sink, knowing they both will drown. It has just enough time to gasp, "Why?"

The scorpion replies: "It's my nature."

Likewise, many social commentators caution that we must maintain a vigilant eye on Western 'nature', citing our controlling outer directed focus, material lust for objects and 'forever young' entitled celebrity status as vicarious substitutes for spiritual nourishment. In a business context, building a 21st century Tower of Business Babel²⁷ is precisely what a cameo version of the authentic self would do.

However, my intention is not to righteously glorify or idealise the Eastern

²⁶ A key accelerator of the new entrepreneurial spirit has been the education revolution where now individuals across the globe have access to information about a host of issues which were previously the domain of specialists. We see this in the ascension of Western women, who are well down the track of becoming one of the most autonomous, educated, and powerful generations ever.

²⁷ Tower of Babel- in the Old Testament story, the Babylonians built the Tower of Babel so they could ascend and meet God. God saw this as hubris and intentionally scattered mankind to retard their technological advancement by confusing their speech and reducing them to innocuous global babblers.

traditions. They are legitimately on notice to renew and adapt with the times. Much of the time they also have missed the mark, also belching out dogmatic babble and erecting politicised, cultic institutional edifices.

Even in countries like India where numerous esoteric traditions have abounded for centuries, most people refrain from being serious practitioners. The prized authenticity trophy is incredibly rare and elusive even in the Eastern spiritual traditions and societies.

Undoubtedly, there are positive signs of radical shifts happening. I remember seeing His Holiness the Dalai Lama at Sydney Town Hall on his first Australian tour in 1982. The Dalai Lama was largely unknown on the world stage and it was a very low key and eclectic affair, attended largely by earnest spiritual seekers of the time. If anything, from a mainstream perspective, he was viewed as a curio piece. There was little interest politically in his tour, and it was largely ignored by the media.

Little did we know an awakening global giant had just graced our Town Hall. Now, he is a Nobel laureate and one of the most famous and genuinely revered leaders in the world, feted by people from every walk of life including business leaders.²⁸

Whether you agree with his stance on matters or not, few doubt his consistent message, conviction, composure and character under all conditions. Many genuinely look up to him as an inspirational sign that no matter what comes your way you can participate in a challenging and changing world and business marketplace, leave a great universal legacy, and be authentic and happy all along the way.

Authenticity is not the exclusive domain of the East. West or East, the search for truth is inevitably the great primordial event of human existence. Because we intuit something is missing, we are always, to some degree, in a state of not having found what we are looking for (our authentic selves). And so we all remain, paradoxically, seekers of ourselves, until our authentic nature unfolds

28 In February 2014, the Dalai Lama attended a two-day summit at the American Enterprise Institute. Vanity Fair headlined "Why Was the Dalai Lama Hanging Out with the Right-Wing American Enterprise Institute?"

Arthur C. Brooks contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times*, comments "There was no dissonance, though, because the Dalai Lama's teaching defies freighted ideological labels. During our discussions, he returned over and over to two practical yet transcendent points. First, his secret to human flourishing is the development of every individual. In his own words: "Where does a happy world start? From government? No. From United Nations? No, from the individual."

But his second message made it abundantly clear that he did not advocate an every-man-for-himself economy. He insisted that while free enterprise could be a blessing, it was not guaranteed to be so. Markets are instrumental, not intrinsic, for human flourishing. As with any tool, wielding capitalism for good requires deep moral awareness. Only activities motivated by a concern for others' well-being, he declared, could be truly 'constructive'." *The New York Times*, *The Opinion Pages*, April 17th, 2014

and is fully revealed.

The ultimate good news is that there is never any escape from who and what we really are. We don't have to search somewhere to find our authentic self, it is immediately accessible and obvious in this very moment, if we just stop doing activity that gets in the way of its revelation. It is always already right here, right now.

Eventually, no one needs to be sold on the value of being authentic. As humans, we are inherently attracted to discovering our real condition and to realise this is our deepest yearning. A description that reverberates down through the ages is that, whenever in any moment we genuinely connect with who we are, there is a feeling of being home at last.

The true self never has been and never will be an object of experience or knowledge. The revelation of our true nature is a process. Traditionally this genuine process and realisation has always been seen as the only game worth playing, and ultimately the only real game ever being played. Yes, in this time and age, the stakes are especially high. Time is precious and life is short. But, tipping point or not, the authenticity bell is always tolling for us to play our part today, in this moment, not tomorrow.

Whilst the choice in how you respond to the authenticity wave is yours and yours alone, you can take heart in the knowledge that, for as long as history records, others have successfully travelled their unique authenticity path, and doubtless many will travel it in the future. If you are not already an authenticity fan, now is always the time to dive in. Once the first step is taken for real – there is no looking back for you or your organisation.

Let me leave you with a time honoured and widely popular chant of the Theravadin Buddhists: *sabbe sattā sukhi hontu*

Translated it means, “May all beings be happy.”

Enjoy the journey you choose to take.



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