

part one



why it can
be hard to be
authentic

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don't step out
of line

“You were born an original, don't die a copy.”

—John Mason

Why is it hard to be authentic? More important, why is it hard for you to be authentic? This isn't an accusation or a judgment, it's an important question. If you can ask and answer this question honestly, without judging yourself (remember, it's hard for most of us), you're well on your way to becoming more of who you really are and ultimately more authentic.

Are we born inauthentic? No, I don't think so! So how did this difficulty in being authentic come to pass?

Understanding how we got to be inauthentic is not only more complicated to answer, it's essential for us to inquire into on our journey of authenticity. While I don't believe we're victims of our circumstances, nevertheless we're influenced by the culture in which we live; the people around us; and our own internal make-up.

This first section of the book focuses on why it can be difficult for us to be authentic and on some of the societal, familial, and personal influences—thoughts, feelings, attitude, beliefs, decisions, and choices—that can make authenticity so challenging for us. Each of us is unique and therefore has a separate set of influences and challenges, but many of these factors are also universal. Chapter One focuses on the cultural level, while the second chapter delves into things on a more personal and psychological level.

We Aren't Taught or Encouraged to Be Authentic

From the moment we come into the world, we immediately begin getting “trained.” The doctors, midwives, nurses, parents, family members, and others we meet on our very first day of life begin taking care of us and at the same time imposing on us their rules, procedures, opinions, beliefs, and ideas of how the world works and how things should be. As the father of two very young girls (our older daughter, Samantha, is three and our baby girl, Annarose, is not even one yet), I'm well aware of this

process and understand how necessary it is. If we don't take care of our babies for many years after they're born, they could not and would not survive. This human dilemma, however, highlights one of the core conflicts we all face—how do we know what it means to be who we truly are when how we learn about life is through the filtered perspectives of the people who raise us and the culture in which we live?

In addition, the survival training we get as young children and throughout our lives is often at odds with our desire and ability to be authentic. Directly and indirectly we're taught not to “step out of line,” literally and figuratively. There are many factors and social institutions within our culture that either initiate or perpetuate this. Some do both. Let's take a look at some of the most significant examples of these influences and how and why they get in the way of our knowing and being who we truly are.

Family

Whether we come from families we consider “healthy” or those we consider “dysfunctional,” most of us didn't learn to be authentic in our families. In fact, in most cases we learned the exact opposite. Why is this? Because most of the people in our families have a hard time being authentic, just like most of the people on the planet (you'll see that this is a theme throughout this chapter, section, and the book, by the way). In addition, most families—even “healthy” ones—have a lot of unresolved issues, conflicts, and unexpressed emotions that have an impact on each

person within the family individually and the family unit collectively. This causes us to create certain dynamics in our families in which each of us plays a specific role based on years of unconscious thoughts, feelings, and behavior. These roles often create a lot of pain and frustration for us and others in our families, and they're not at all conducive to us being who we really are.



CHECK THIS OUT

Statistics About American Families

- According to the 2000 U.S. Census, more than 60 percent of all American children are from divorced families.
 - According to the American Medical Association, 72 percent of American homes harbor someone with an addiction.
 - According to a 2006 Harris Poll, approximately 33 million, or 15 percent, of all U.S. adults admit that they were a victim of domestic violence. Furthermore, six in ten adults claim that they know someone personally who has experienced domestic violence.
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Many of the major life decisions we make—where we live; our career choices; what religion or spiritual path, if any, we choose to follow; whom to be in romantic relationships with and ultimately marry; if we have children

and how many; what we spend our money on; whom we vote for in elections; how we take care of ourselves; and much more—are significantly influenced by our family members, regardless of how old we are, whether we're in regular communication with them, how far away they might live from us, and even in some cases whether or not they're still alive.

Many people follow in lockstep with the values or beliefs of their families, while others, especially in the past fifty years in our Western culture, have rejected the beliefs of their families and make it a point to let everyone know they are “doing it their own way.”

Regardless of which end of this spectrum we find ourselves on, it's obvious that our families play a huge role in our ability or inability to be authentic. Most of us unconsciously run the decisions we make through this base-level filter and ask ourselves, “What will my family think? Given that we all needed the love, approval, and acceptance of our families for our survival when we were children and adolescents, many of us still operate as if that is the case today, when usually it's not. Others of us may have rejected this need years ago and operate in continuing opposition to our subjective recollection of our family's values and opinions.

Many of us, as we grow and evolve, learn to disentangle ourselves from our family of origin (parents, siblings, and so on) but then re-entangle with our spouses and our own children. It's the same phenomenon, just different players. In either case, when we do this (which most of us do, without even knowing it) we're not fully thinking and

feeling for ourselves and we're letting the real or perceived expectations of others dictate who we are, what we can do, and how we think we're "supposed" to be.

I still find myself doing this all the time. As I sit here and write this book, I notice that my automatic filter of what I think I can and can't say is heightened, especially as it relates to my family. Wondering about what my mom, my sisters, my wife, my aunts and uncles, my in-laws, my daughters (when they're old enough), and others will think of what I'm writing influences what I'm willing to say.

Being aware of this is the first step in taking back our power and being more of who we are. Our family is the first and often most powerful force in our lives that we allow to take away our authentic voice and our real power. In most cases we were and still are given direct and indirect messages from our family to not be who we really are, but to be who and what they want us to be or think we should be or, at the very least, to not be who or what they would be embarrassed for us to be.

School

I wore a maroon polyester leisure suit with tan desert boots and a grey clip-on tie to my first day of kindergarten. Yes, my mother did actually love and care about me. She swears to this day that I insisted on that outfit myself—although I'm sure she got a real kick out of it. It was the late 70s, my older sister Lori was into the Bee Gees, Shaun Cassidy, and disco, so I guess I just picked up this odd fashion idea from some of that influence. I'm not really sure if this was an

act of me being myself or not, but it definitely was unique, and the snapshots from that day are pretty funny. However, I learned something on that first day of kindergarten when the other kids laughed and I felt stupid that stuck with me for a long time and still lingers today: *Do everything you can to avoid being made fun of!*

I think most of us learn this lesson at some point early in our lives, especially at school. Education is so important, and most of us in this culture are fortunate to have access to it and for free. Sadly, however, we all have experiences in school with the other kids, as well as with many of the adults, that affect us in a negative way both mentally and emotionally. Our educational system often misses the boat big time when it comes our mental and emotional development, to say nothing of the quality of education itself.

I believe that most teachers, like most parents, have the best of intentions. But because most of the people involved in the school communities have a hard time being authentic themselves (like most people alive), just by watching the adults and the other kids around us on a daily basis, we often literally were “trained” to be inauthentic in school.

While things do seem to be getting better, and there is much greater awareness these days about important stuff like room setup, exercise, diet and nutrition, mental and emotional well-being, creativity, multiple learning styles, and more, most of us who are adults today grew up going to schools and sitting in classrooms where we were stuck in rows and forced to memorize lots of information

simply because that was the way it had always been done and because the standards, test scores, and funding for the schools often depended on the enforcement of these things. Sadly, this is still the case in many schools today.

While there is clearly an important place for discipline, training, rules, safety, and much more—both at home and at school—much of the fear-based, ego-driven way in which we were taught in school did not encourage us to think for ourselves, allow us to express our real emotions, or give us the necessary tools to figure out who we are, what we want, and what's important to us.

Some argue that school was not designed for this in the first place and that much of the social and emotional training we need should come from home. However, given the amount of time we all spent in school, the relative dysfunction of many of our families, and the increased financial pressure placed on modern families to work more hours and leave their kids with others, school has become even more influential over the years in terms of the mental and emotional development of children and teenagers.

On average most of us spend fifteen years in school from the time we go to preschool at the age of three until the time we graduate from high school at the age of eighteen. Assuming we go on average of 180 days per year, for six hours each day, that's over sixteen thousand hours of school, or just about two full years of our lives, by the time we graduate from high school—without even factoring in our time in college or graduate school. Suffice to say, we spend a good amount of time in our formative years in school.

Regardless of our current age or where we grew up, most of us learned a great deal in school—both good and bad, as well as in and outside of the classroom. And, since the educational system is often devoid of many effective tools for how to really think, feel, express ourselves, and deal with the reality of life, most of us were trained to simply follow rules and retain information, and were given a long list of social norms we either follow or rebuke as we move through life.

I'm not an expert on education, and I realize that the opportunities and challenges within different schools and communities vary a great deal, but from my own experience growing up, going to school as a child, and even as I got older and attended a well-respected university (Stanford), I feel that there's not a lot we learn in school that teaches us about how to be ourselves, to speak our truth with confidence, and to live life in an authentic way.

Organized Religion

Organized religion is another powerful force and institution in our culture that can have a negative impact on our ability to be ourselves. This one is a little tricky for me to talk and write about, because I don't want to offend anyone. We all have our own personal opinions about religion and our own personal beliefs about the role of God or religion in our lives, and for most of us these opinions and beliefs are held sacred. Even if you're someone who doesn't believe in God; doesn't belong to an organized religion; and has never even gone to a church, synagogue, mosque,

or spiritual gathering of any kind, you can still be mightily influenced by organized religion in our culture.

I have great appreciation and respect for everyone's spiritual path, and I even respect those who choose not to acknowledge one or don't think that God exists. I truly believe that "all paths lead to God." But, paradoxically, I think organized religion is an institution that can and does damage people deeply, especially as it relates to authenticity.

I heard Dr. Wayne Dyer a few years ago say, "That which is of God unifies us and that which is of the ego divides us. Therefore, in most cases organized religion, which divides much of the world and has for generations, is of the ego, not of God." When I heard him say this, I was shocked. I remember looking around to see if anyone else was as shocked as I was. There didn't seem to be that much reaction from the people around me. I then turned to my wife Michelle and said, "Wow, I can't believe he said that—he might get in trouble." Even though I actually agreed with what he said, my knee-jerk reaction was based on years of programming, and I immediately thought to myself, "That's blasphemy." Wayne Dyer, who is one of the most prominent spiritual teachers of our time and one of my personal favorites, spoke a deep truth that resonated within me. But on the basis of my own notions of what's "acceptable" to say about religion I was taken aback.

Religion can be a beautiful expression of spirituality, community, love, and service. So many good things are done by faith-based groups in our culture and throughout the world. But at the same time, I think religious doctrine,

structure, and dogma in many cases stifle our creativity, our expression, and ultimately our authenticity. There are so many sad and painful stories of people being abused in very harmful ways by members of their religious community—leaders and others. And I've heard literally thousands of less dramatic stories from family members, friends, and clients over the years about how much fear, shame, and guilt they felt growing up based on what they learned or heard at church or temple.

I grew up quite confused in relation to religion and spirituality. My dad was raised Jewish and my mom Catholic, although neither of them really practiced their religions and we did not go to church or synagogue on any regular basis for the first few years of my life. A couple of years after my folks split up, when I was about five, my mom took my older sister Lori and me to St. Paul's Lutheran Church in our neighborhood because they had free meals on Wednesday nights and programs for kids, and it gave my single mom an opportunity to connect with other adults. I got baptized at age seven (so we could become official members of the church) and then as a teenager went through confirmation class and ultimately got "confirmed" as a Lutheran.

I didn't feel any real personal connection to God, Jesus, or the whole church experience as a kid or teenager. I wanted to, but it all seemed stuffy, outdated, and weird to me. I couldn't understand how or why it had anything to do with me, my life, or life in general. A pivotal moment for me in my relationship to organized religion happened in one of our confirmation classes. I raised my hand and asked Pastor

Merkel, our minister and teacher, “How can I be sure that Lutheranism is the ‘right’ religion? I want to make sure if I’m going to pick one, I pick the ‘right’ one. And, since I know other people who are from other religions, like my dad who is Jewish, does this mean that they are ‘wrong’?”

Pastor Merkel was in his early thirties and in his first few years at our church. He was a bit stunned by this question from a somewhat self-righteous thirteen-year old who didn’t really want to be in his confirmation class to begin with. I don’t exactly remember what he said, and in hindsight I feel a little bad that I put the poor guy on the spot like that. I’m sure he did his best to answer my question and probably talked about the importance of faith, but whatever he said didn’t satisfy me. I came to the conclusion that if there really was a God, He, She, or It probably wasn’t looking down from above at all of us on earth and laughing at the vast majority of people who had picked the “wrong” version of organized religion.

The ideals and intentions of most organized religions—Divine teaching and practice—are beautiful, wonderful, and important in life. Sadly, however, the way that many of us, like me, experience organized religion and the influence that it has had on our society has not been all that supportive or empowering in our desire to be ourselves and live with authenticity.

Politics

The 1939 movie *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* depicts a young, naïve “do-gooder,” played by Jimmy Stewart, who gets appointed by the crooked political machine of his state to

become a United States senator for the final few months of the term of their recently deceased elected senator. The powers that be figure that this young kid is smart enough to do the job, but clueless enough to not ask any questions or get in the way of their agenda. The movie goes on to point out how corrupt and cynical the politicians and media in Washington are, and in the end the honest, high-minded Smith prevails in a perfect Hollywood/Jimmy Stewart/Frank Capra (the writer and director of this film, along with *It's a Wonderful Life* and many others with similar themes) kind of way.

This is one of my favorite movies, and every time I watch it I'm amazed by how much has remained the same in terms of the opinion we hold and the reality of how political leaders operate in Washington and in general.

Unfortunately, politics is another institution that reinforces and exemplifies inauthentic behavior. We're all very aware of the lying, cheating, and hypocrisy that take place in politics today, and with the twenty-four-hour cable news cycle we see it and hear it all day and all night. Even with this increased scrutiny and pressure, most politicians still look us in the eye and lie to us on a regular basis. Whether it was President Nixon saying, "I am not a crook," President Clinton saying, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky," or President Bush saying, "Iraq has stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction," we get lied to by politicians in big ways and small ways all the time.

While most people don't want or expect bald-faced lies from their political leaders, at least not the ones they respect and support, we assume that they'll pretty much do

and say whatever they need to in order to get elected and have high approval ratings. The post-debate gathering place for the media and the people who work for politicians running for president is called the “spin room.” I don’t know what’s worse; that it has that name or that we aren’t more upset or concerned about it.



CHECK THIS OUT

Our Opinions About Politicians

According to a bipartisan survey commission by the Project on Campaign Conduct:

- Fifty-nine percent believe that all or most candidates deliberately twist the truth.
 - Thirty-nine percent believe that all or most candidates deliberately lie to voters.
 - Forty-three percent believe that most or all candidates deliberately make unfair attacks on their opponents.
 - Sixty-seven percent say they can trust the government in Washington only some of the time or never.
 - Eighty-seven percent are concerned about the level of personal attacks in today’s political campaigns.
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The message we get and the interpretation we make from watching the way many of our political leaders operate is that you can’t really tell people what you honestly think; you have to tell people both what they want to hear

and what is in the best interests of the people who have the power to get you elected—certain voters, corporate lobbyists, political party insiders, media pundits, and more. I assume that most politicians get into public service to make a difference and to help their city, county, state, or nation. However, in most cases, it seems that the system is set up to force them to sell out on what's most important to them in service of grabbing more power, getting elected, or having “real” influence.

Another great political movie, which came out in 1998, is called *Bulworth*. Warren Beatty, who wrote, directed, and starred in this movie, plays depressed Senator Bulworth from California, who decides to hire a hit man to kill him so that his family will get a huge life insurance payout. Knowing he will die within a few days, he goes out on the road and starts speaking his truth—from his heart, honestly, and in a very funny and entertaining way. His realness is so refreshing, people actually love it, and what ensues in the movie is both hilarious and at the same time sad, as it underscores the lack of authenticity in politics and the deep yearning that we all have for honest communication from our politicians, which we rarely get.

Media

Given the enormous nature of the media today, this may be the biggest culprit in the lack of authenticity we face in our culture. Even with the rise of “reality” TV in the past ten years (which as we all know rarely seems to depict actual reality), it seems that most of what we get fed to

us through the many different forms of media these days is filled with superficial news, gossip, endless bickering, political opinions based on agenda and fear, and lots of negative messages about what's wrong with the world, other people, and us.

The advertising industry alone makes billions and billions of dollars telling us we're not good enough the way we are—we need to buy their products in order to look, feel, and be better. The entertainment news shows, gossip magazines, and celebrity blogs on the Internet—as well as the “mainstream” news's obsession with sensationalized stories about conflicts, addictions, and scandals—cause many people to pay more attention to what's happening with Britney Spears and her children, which politician or media personality made a politically incorrect statement, or whether Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie are staying together or not, than to what's going on in their own lives, in their relationships, and within themselves.

The media as a whole don't seem to be all that interested in real truth, complexity, ambiguity or paradox—it's all about sound bites, hype, right versus left, drama, and simplicity at all costs. Our attention spans are shorter; there are many more channels, including popular online sites. All of this has caused more competition for ratings and consequent ad revenues.

According to the A. C. Nielsen Co., the average American watches more than four hours of television each day (or twenty-eight hours per week, or two months of nonstop TV watching per year). In a sixty-five-year life, that person

will have spent nine years glued to the tube. Because the majority of what's on television these days lacks depth, truth, or authenticity, this has a major impact on us.

While I don't believe that most of the people involved in the media are motivated by bad intentions, we are each affected significantly by what we see, hear, and learn from them. As it relates to our ability (or in most cases inability) to be authentic, the overriding message we get from the media is that perception is reality, we should believe what we're told, and that to be happy and successful we need to fall into line with what's popular.

Unhealthy Messages

Through our institutions, the people in our lives, and our own interpretations, we grow up with and live in a culture that constantly reinforces many unhealthy messages that keep us trapped in our own inauthentic ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. Some of these messages are obvious and overt, while others are more subtle. Either way, they're insidious and can do real damage to us, our relationships, and our ability to be genuine. Let's take a look at what some of these messages are and how they have an impact on us.

Be a Good Boy or Girl

Whether we heard it from our parents, our teachers, or other adults, all of us were taught both directly and

indirectly while growing up to be a “good boy” or a “good girl.” This usually meant for us to do the things that the adults around us wanted us to do—go to bed, sit up straight, clean up after ourselves, play nice and share with the other kids, put smiles on our faces, and much more. However, many of us continue throughout our lives, long after we’ve left school and moved out of our parent’s homes, to hear and respond to this message. We have the “disease to please”—always trying to do or say things that we think will make others like us and think we’re “good.”

While it was important and essential that the people raising us gave us certain rules and boundaries—to keep us safe and so that we had some important structure in life, this good boy or girl message taught us at an early age that who we are is based on how we behave. Underneath that was a message that we weren’t good enough just as we were, we had to keep earning our love, approval, and appreciation from others, and in order to do so we had to live up to specific, subjective expectations of what it meant to be “good.”

Any of us who have or still suffer from the disease to please (as I sometimes do) know how stressful, painful, and ultimately unfulfilling it can be. Constantly trying to do or say the “right” thing so that others will approve of us, like us, and keep us in good favor does not empower us to be ourselves, speak our truth, or live our deepest passions.

Anita, a former coaching client of mine, was constantly on the go, struggled to keep her life in balance, and was always dealing with lots of “family drama,” as she

would put it. As a single, young professional in her late twenties, she was doing pretty well in the first few years in her career in sales. She said she liked her work, but seemed bored, anxious, and discontented when she talked about her life, career, and relationships in our coaching sessions. A lot of her stress and suffering centered around her relationship with her father. He had always pushed her to succeed, and as a very successful businessman himself, he had high expectations for Anita.

In one of our sessions, when Anita was expressing some specific frustrations with her job and life, I challenged her to think about some other options for what she could do. The mere suggestion of her doing something else made her stop in her tracks. She said, “Are you kidding, I can’t quit my job, my dad would kill me.”

Anita, like so many of us, was attached to the opinions, expectations, and ideas of her father and other important people in her life. The options she saw for herself fit only into the category of what would have her be a “good girl” in his eyes. Although she did make some great progress in our time working together, her ability to create the kind of success and fulfillment in her career, relationships, and life that she truly wanted was significantly diminished by her attachment to pleasing her father.

Shut Up

Many of us were and still are told to “shut up.” Sadly, this message was often communicated directly and with anger, shame, and resentment when we were young—particularly

if we grew up in a dysfunctional or overtly negative home. Even for those of us who didn't hear these specific words or didn't grow up in a hostile environment, this message was and is all over the place in our lives and in our culture.

We all have learned that there are certain times and places when and where it is "appropriate" for us to speak up, but in most cases and when it comes to us truly speaking our minds, we learn to keep quiet and mind our own business. Think of the various phrases we've heard many times:

- "Children should be seen and not heard."
- "You can't say that."
- "Speak only when spoken to."
- "No side conversations."
- "Wait your turn."
- "Don't talk back."
- "Who do you think you are?"
- "Don't interrupt."
- "Be quiet."

These and so many other things were said to us as children, and variations of them continue to be said to us in our relationships, at work, and throughout our lives. Some of these things were said with good intentions, and our parents, teachers, and family members were telling this stuff to us as a way to set us up for success in life. However, the way that most of us interpreted these messages as children and

then throughout life was and is that we're supposed to keep our mouths shut so as to not get in trouble.

I was recently delivering a seminar on conflict resolution skills to a group of leaders within one of my corporate clients, and as we were discussing the importance of honesty and straightforwardness as it related to being able to resolve issues, most everyone in the room was nodding their heads in agreement.

Charlie, one of the senior people in the room, raised his hand and said, "This all makes sense and is essential when dealing with my team, but it doesn't work with my own boss. You can't really be honest and speak your mind with upper management." As I looked around the room, I saw most of the heads nodding in agreement.

This was not so much a reflection of the dysfunction of this particular company, it was more a statement of how we continue to perpetuate the notion of "shutting up" throughout our lives, regardless of our level of experience, success, or responsibility.

Why Can't You Be More Like . . .

Another damaging message we get when we're young is that we should be more like someone else—our sibling, cousin, friend, classmate, famous kid on TV, or others. In moments of frustration our parents or teachers would see us doing something we weren't "supposed" to be doing, and in their infinite wisdom they thought that by pointing out how good someone else was at something, it would motivate us to be more how they wanted us to be. They would say things like,

“Why can’t you be more like your sister? She sits at the table, eats her vegetables, and doesn’t throw her food on the floor.”

Questions like this may have seemed benign to our parents or teachers, and in fact what they said had some merit and truth to it at the time, but most of us heard these messages and interpreted them to mean we were not okay as we were, we should be like other kids, and there must be something wrong with us. In other words, we began to feel ashamed and guilty for being who we were.

Even for the kids who were often used as the “models,” these messages were and still are damaging. If you were or are someone about whom other people say, “Why can’t you be more like him or her?” it puts an enormous amount of pressure on you to continue to be the “ideal” person and someone that people hold in high esteem in this regard. No one wins this comparison game, and it sets us all up to act in ways that aren’t genuine.

Susie and Jim, some friends of our friends whom we’ve spent time with on a couple of occasions, have three boys: Tyler, who is seven; Ryan, who is five; and Zackary, who is two and a half. The boys are full of passion and vigor, as many little boys their age are. They like to play, wrestle, and run around together. Susie and Jim, however, have the most trouble with Ryan. He constantly fights with his brothers and is very defiant, which causes a great deal of stress and frustration for everyone in the house.

As self-proclaimed “old school” parents, Susie and Jim are quite strict with their boys—they spank them occasionally, have very clearly defined rules, and run a “tight ship”

in their house. So they reprimand Ryan, spank him often, and take him away from his brothers regularly for “time outs.” In addition, they say to him many times a day, “Can’t you just follow the rules and do what you’re supposed to do like your brothers?”

While Jim and Susie clearly love Ryan and are doing what they think is best for him, it’s obvious that these messages and their treatment are perpetuating much of the behavior they want to see change and keeping this challenging dynamic in place.

Calm Down

This is one that has always triggered me a great deal. Being told to “calm down” is something that we hear not only as children but throughout our lives—especially if we happen to be emotional, passionate, outspoken, opinionated, or all of the above, like me. If you want to really push my buttons, all you have to do is say to me “calm down” or make some reference to me overreacting, getting too emotional, or being too intense. As you can probably tell, this has happened to me many times throughout my life, and I am still a little sensitive about it. Ah, to be human!

We all get messages from the time we come into this world about when, how, and what is appropriate for us to express in terms of our emotions. Watch how people react to babies crying, which is something I’ve had quite a bit of personal experience with in the past three years. Parents, friends, grandparents, and even strangers passing by usually see a crying baby as a “bad” thing. Everyone has to do

whatever they can to get the baby to stop crying as soon as possible. My feeling about a baby crying is different. Sure there are times when a baby is upset and needs help, food, changing, and so on. I'm not a huge fan of the sound of either of my girls crying, and I don't want them to suffer needlessly. However, I think oftentimes babies are just expressing themselves, and because they don't have much of a vocabulary at first, crying is one of the most passionate and appropriate ways for them to do that.

Our obsession with making sure a baby stops crying is usually more about us being uncomfortable with intense emotion, not liking the actual sound of the crying, not wanting other people to judge us for having an upset baby, and mostly some unconscious beliefs about which emotions are acceptable and appropriate and which ones are not, than it really is about taking care of the baby.

This same phenomenon goes on throughout our lives, long after we're babies. In our culture, most of the people around us do not encourage the passionate expression of many of our emotions, especially the ones that are considered "bad," such as anger, fear, sadness, hurt, shame, guilt, grief, sorrow, and others. Excitement, joy, love, happiness, and gratitude are okay, but they're often met with cynicism, and even these "good" ones are only encouraged to be expressed in "appropriate" ways and for "appropriate" reasons. In other words, whether we're upset or excited, we've been trained to "calm down" and not get too worked up one way or another.

Not being aware of, being comfortable with, or feeling as though we have "permission" to feel and express our

true emotions can create debilitating suppression within us. Not knowing how to honor or express our emotions in an effective and productive way is even worse. This dynamic creates a great deal of stress and pressure, and it causes us to live our lives in an inauthentic way.

A lot of the negative behavior, unhealthy habits, and ultimate pain in our lives stems from our inability to acknowledge and express our intense emotions. While there are many factors that lead to things such as alcoholism, overeating, infidelity, eating disorders, workaholism, depression, and even suicide or violent crimes, one of the main underlying reasons is that we don't feel as though we're allowed or able to express the real feelings we have, and therefore do damage to ourselves and others.

Most recovering addicts will tell you that the reason they started and continued to abuse drugs or alcohol was self-medication, due to some specific emotion or emotions that they were unable to tolerate or deal with effectively. They'll also tell you that letting go of the actual substance of their addiction was the first step in their healing and growth process, but not in any way the last or most important one. Until they deal with the underlying issues and emotions that led them to the addiction, the real problems remain.

It's Better to Look Good Than to Feel Good

The message that appearance is more important than substance is all over the place in our culture. From our obsession with physical beauty and youth to the preoccupation

we have with material possessions and outward success, many of us are striving to “make it” and to look good to others.

I’ve often found it interesting and somewhat annoying that at gatherings or when we run into people, the first question we often ask or are asked is, “What are you up to?” Not that I’m not interested in what other people are up to, I actually am. I just find it fascinating that we immediately talk about our careers, activities, vacations, families, plans, events, and so on, and often don’t ask or talk about stuff that is more real—our feelings, our dreams, our struggles, our passions, and more. We focus on what we are doing instead of how we are truly feeling.

The messages from the media and elsewhere telling us that happiness is about losing weight and having a nice body, driving a fancy car, taking a nice vacation, having an attractive spouse, retiring early, owning a big home, doing the things that famous people do all reinforce that looking good on the outside is more important than feeling good on the inside. Even many people who are aware of this, like me, still struggle with it all the time.

I catch myself more often than I’d like to admit obsessing about my physical appearance, focusing on my external success, worrying how other people perceive me and how I’m doing, and trying to portray a sense of confidence and fulfillment, instead of paying attention to actually feeling that way inside. As my work has expanded and I’ve become more public, this has actually become even more challenging for me. As I often say and will probably

reiterate a few times throughout this book, we teach best what we most need to learn.

Questions to Ponder

As we move to Chapter Two, and then ultimately into the five principles of authenticity, pay attention to all of the institutions, programming, and messages from the past still having an impact on you today that make it challenging for you to be yourself, speak your truth, and live in an authentic way. Ask yourself how all of this continues to affect you on a personal level.

The following questions are for you to think about or write answers to, as a way of making this more real and specific for you and your life:

1. What have you learned from family, school, religion, politics, media, or others about being yourself?
2. What specific messages did you receive growing up that made it difficult for you to be authentic?
3. What specific institutions, influences, or messages in your life today get in the way of your fully being yourself and living an authentic life?

As you consider your answers to these questions, you should be able to see clearly how much impact these institutions, influences, and messages have on you and your ability (or inability) to be authentic.

We are not victims of our culture, family, or any of the things we have been taught in the past or are currently reminded of in the present. It is, however, essential that you acknowledge these influences, so that you can admit them, own them, and ultimately take responsibility for how you have internalized these messages and why it can be difficult for you to be authentic.

Now that we've looked at some of the most pervasive external factors that make authenticity challenging for us, we're ready to take a look at the more insidious and damaging aspects of all of this—our own false personas, self-criticism, and fear.