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Acting Authentically

Are you at ease with yourself? Does your life mirror your values? Do you feel true to yourself? Do you put on a false front at work? Do you live by your priorities?

These questions all bear on authenticity, a vital developmental goal in terms of both personal life and leadership roles. Authenticity is not like an MBA, something that you can achieve and keep; it takes constant maintenance and development.

Someone who is authentic has a good understanding of her priorities and emotions. She can sense what is important to her versus what is important to other people, society, or the organization, and can maintain a healthy alignment between inner values and beliefs and outer behaviors. Authenticity is thus a state or condition rather than a personality characteristic.

Why Authenticity Matters

Authenticity matters to both individuals and organizations. For individuals, feeling authentic—that is, feeling that daily actions are in concert with deeply held values and beliefs—builds energy and promotes learning, while the reverse creates inner conflict and turmoil. Adults learn best at work when they feel they can be authentic in that setting. It is hard to develop if you must deny or

hide your true values, styles, and desires. Besides fostering learning, authenticity also promotes psychological well-being: how happy you are with your life, how confident you feel, and how accepting you are of yourself. Even if times are difficult, the knowledge that you are behaving in an authentic way can be comforting.

For organizations, having people who feel authentic means having employees who participate fully and honestly and who work in an engaged and enthusiastic manner. Particularly for managers, working in a way that feels untrue saps energy. In addition, inauthenticity can often be recognized by others, becoming a disruptive, negative force in the organization. Organizations that discourage authenticity for the sake of conformity can be creating hidden costs by demoralizing their staff.

Organizations also need to pay attention to authenticity because it correlates with the retention of talent. Indeed, inauthenticity often drives women to leave large organizations. In a survey of senior women executives, the Conference Board of Canada and Catalyst found that 33 percent of women regard the desire to be in an organization with compatible values as a top factor motivating women to leave their current jobs (Griffith, MacBride-King, & Townsend, 1998). In explaining her career moves a manager told us, "I realized the direction I was taking didn't fit within that firm's. I was kind of bucking uphill because of the gender issues. . . . I know that what I wanted required more independence than was possible in that situation." In a study of women entrepreneurs, Moore and Buttner (1997) also found that lack of congruence between personal and organizational values motivated women managers to leave large corporations and start their own businesses.

When Is Authenticity an Issue?

Women managers focused on authenticity most strongly when attending to long-ignored goals and passions, addressing a changing environment, attempting to fit into a male-oriented organization, and responding to a major life event. They worked on being au-

thentic to varying degrees. For some the struggle was strong and persistent. For others it was more a matter of fine-tuning and maintaining an already authentic lifestyle.

The Unlived Dream

Many women want to be novelists, travelers, entrepreneurs, lawyers, artists, and athletes; they have well-developed dreams that they have put aside or restrained in the face of doing something more conventional or coping with financial or familial pressures. As time passes, the unlived dream takes on more prominence and the cost of ignoring it increases. Often it is impractical or difficult to stop everything, switch gears, and pursue a dream—but it is possible to maintain a sense of authenticity without trying to change your life in one fell swoop by introducing small changes.

One woman, for example, dreams of a law practice defending women who cannot defend themselves. Although she enjoys her job, the law remains closer to her heart. She will be disappointed with herself if she doesn't make the move—but as her family's breadwinner she can't stop working and get a law degree. She compensates by volunteering in a women's crisis center. Further, she works toward her dream by building a financial cushion that will eventually let her go to school full time. She is grappling seriously with her long-term goal as she tries to clarify its importance to her life.

Another woman dreams of writing a novel. Working at "just a job" frustrated and drained her, and between work and home life she felt cut off from herself. After much soul-searching, she decided to address the problem by working on the book in her free time. She realized that the book wouldn't get written if it remained a dream—she had to find a way to make it happen. Little by little, she worked on it—jotting down notes, developing an outline, and starting a draft, and also sharing her dream with a close friend. Writing the book is a source of pleasure as well as a way of reaching her inner self.

Both women see the steps they are taking to realize their aspirations as enhancing the authenticity of their lives. Once they realized the importance of their dreams, they took steps to turn them from fantasy to reality.

A Changing Environment

A second type of authenticity struggle occurs when values and behaviors become inconsistent as the environment changes around you. Easy as it is to recognize that you feel uncomfortable, it is often hard to see why. Addressing authenticity requires figuring out what is wrong so the situation can be remedied.

> Sophie worked for Atlas Foods for over fifteen years, moving from place to place and advancing in the organization, all within the same functional specialty. She truly enjoyed her job until a new boss arrived, and the work environment changed. Sophie found it difficult to work with him. At first, she felt he simply had a distinctive style, but then she realized it was much more—the new boss was stepping into territory and tactics Sophie felt touched on the immoral and unethical. He had no qualms about misleading others in the organization and pursuing hidden agendas. She realized he lacked integrity. She tried to change the situation and get her boss to revise his approach. It didn't work. She felt betrayed by the environment and she could not reconcile the direction the business was moving with her own values.
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> To regain a feeling of authenticity, Sophie decided to transfer. It was worth it to her to move to a new city in a different state to be comfortable with the business practices reinforced in the office. "I didn't feel that it was the best personal situation for me to be in," she said. "I wasn't comfortable with it, and it wasn't something I could change or control. So I needed to make the decision that would change it for me, and I couldn't change him."

Sophie might have had other options. Others in a similar situation dealt with it by gaining support for their views and then

going to senior management. This can be a difficult move, but senior managers appreciate the honesty—and in some cases improve the climate of the workplace by transferring the boss. The women in the study dealt with inconsistencies in values differently, but they acted when they were driven to do so—and they felt they were living more authentically after the change and that they had grown by taking action.

The boss isn't the only potential problem—employees at any level can violate key values. And the organizational climate itself can simply deteriorate over time. Environmental drift can show up in family and volunteer settings as well, as when spouses grow apart, children grow up and leave home, and volunteer organizations change their mission or clientele. In each case, authenticity requires alertness and willingness to take action rather than go along.

Hiding a Feminine Style

The predominantly male culture of most organizations can impose a third type of struggle: restraining behaviors that seem too feminine so as to fit the mold without appearing more masculine than the men. Women often do what they can to fake being appropriately male for a while, but eventually the feeling of dishonesty catches up.

As noted earlier, based on the lives and expectations of white male executives, most organizations have long-standing norms for autocratic styles of leadership, prioritizing work over family, and aggressive self-promotion (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Acker, 1998; Williams, 2000). But women tend to find these norms that nourished generations of men handicapping. Parts of themselves can't be brought into the organization. Women in this situation strive to be true to themselves within the dictates of the organization, and adaptation isn't always the answer.

> Betsy's boss told her that she was "too emotional." She said she wasn't sure what that meant, and he replied that she was too easily upset and

too easily provoked into conflict. She responded by pushing back. She acknowledged her emotionality but pointed out that it also led to conflict resolution, innovation, and to a well-functioning team where people felt safe to be themselves. Her team was high-performing and committed. Why was it okay for him to pound his fist to make a point—wasn't that an emotional display, too?

Ultimately, Betsy's boss accepted her argument and gave her more latitude. However, not all women decide to question the boss's values. Instead, they elect to leave.

Lynn worked in a company with a hard-driving workaholic culture and no formal maternity leave policy for managers. Her male peers all had stay-at-home wives. They valued work above all else. Men had been running this group for a long time and young women managers were a rarity. Until she got pregnant, Lynn focused on minimizing the differences between herself and the men, but during the pregnancy it became glaringly obvious that she couldn't be one of the guys. Her boss and colleagues were hostile, grumbling about the time she would be taking off from work. She felt she was treated as damaged goods then—and after her maternity leave it was worse. They made her feel uncomfortable for having taken time off, and her boss transferred her to another satellite location—a move that seemed punitive as it entailed a much longer commute. This led to a reduction of her trust in her boss.

Lynn struggled to present herself in a way that felt real but was also conducive to success. She wanted to bring her whole self—including the fact that she was now a mother—to work, but instead she felt she had to put on a corporate face every day. Continually setting aside signs of being female was difficult and depleting. Covering up her real life cost her energy that she would much rather have put into her work. Ultimately, she opted for a lateral move to a division with a more supportive environment. When she left, her boss viewed her departure as a real loss and did not understand why she transferred. Lynn was disappointed that she felt she had to leave, but the move was essential for maintaining her authenticity.

Of course, this account takes Lynn's views at face value. It would be interesting to know what her boss really thought about the situation and how he would have responded if she had pressed him further on the way she was treated.

As told, Lynn's story borders on bona fide sexual discrimination. Sometimes the situation is subtler. In some places it's practically written on the organization chart that you must be white, male, and married to move up. People who don't pass all those tests are treated skeptically and have to prove themselves. Women often feel left out of social situations and networking opportunities with men; they describe a kind of insidious, invisible force excluding them. It seems essential to join the club—but there's no authentic way to do so.

Women often come to associate maleness with squashing and trampling others on the way to success. They see men taking credit for the work of women and focusing on self-promotion instead of achievement. The prevalence of overtly political behavior leads these women to believe that style and connections trump substance in their organizations, resulting in needless competition.

Further exacerbating the problem, many women are on their own as they figure out how to be themselves and smash through the glass ceiling at the same time. It is hard to develop an authentic business persona if there is no role model demonstrating the skills you need to develop.

A Major Life Event

Authenticity becomes a priority when life changes. A diagnosis of life-threatening illness can shake someone up, prompting review and reassessment of values and behaviors, and women often describe the experience as one of profound learning. With advancing age, good health once taken for granted is called into question—as with one woman whose liver problems led her to reassess her priorities and realign her life accordingly. She realized she was making too many compromises about what mattered to her.

For others, the health crisis of a loved one made them reflect on what was really important. One fifty-year-old said her father's death helped her clarify her priorities and realize she really wants to continue growing in her career rather than prepare for retirement. She said, "I don't feel like I'm finished at work, yet. This is where I want to be . . . there's lots to be done and it's going to be fun." Her father's death motivated her to make a mark at work in a way that was enjoyable. She wanted to leave a lasting impression.

Although we have no hard data, we speculate that the events of September 11, 2001, acted as a catalyst for many adults to reevaluate their priorities. What people thought were major priorities before the event may seem trivial afterward, and the reaction may accelerate the desire to live an authentic life. Stories and anecdotal accounts in newspapers and magazines suggest that in response, many people have refocused their lives to be more in line with their true priorities.

What Does Authenticity Look Like?

One of the defining characteristics of authenticity is a good grasp of priorities and preferences. In our study, the women who expressed the best alignment between their values and behaviors—the ones highest in authenticity—were in touch with what was most important to them. They reviewed their priorities regularly and were open to altering them as needed.

Related to this precision about values was awareness of choices and trade-offs. Women high in authenticity knew the trade-offs they had made and could articulate them: leaving jobs and taking new ones, having children, leaving a bad situation, switching careers, meeting financial goals, moving, divorcing, managing dual careers, balancing work and family, maintaining the relationship between their work group and organization. For example, on the work and family dimension, one woman said she had traded off the speed she moved up in the company for the time she spent

with her young children. She believed she would still reach a very high level but that it would take longer with two kids than it would with none, and this was a trade-off she was willing to make. Meanwhile, another woman said she was trading off being on top of every detail with her children for putting in the time necessary for rapid advancement in her organization. Others made trade-offs on financial goals and decided that they would work very hard for a number of years and then retire early. In fact, one woman who retired at the end of the study had explicitly made this trade-off twenty years earlier. Conscious of the implications of her choice, she worked hard for many years to achieve a stable early retirement. The point is that highly authentic women design their lives to suit their greatest priorities.

This awareness of trade-offs was also related to a strong sense of self-determination. These women knew what it would take to be successful in life as they understood success, and they worked toward those goals. They were willing to steer their own course, even when it went against the current. At the same time, they managed to go by their own rules and standards without living outside society; they still fit in. They simply pursued personal definitions of success based on the achievements and values that mattered most to them—as in the anonymous poem that introduces this part of the book, which one of the participants gave us to explain her view of life. The resulting trade-offs can apply both on the job and at home.

> Christine made a career change at the age of forty. She was making a lot of money helping a big company manufacture more widgets, but it wasn't satisfying. She wanted to do something with greater meaning and more opportunity to help people, so she resigned and moved out of her urban home to take a lower-paid IT job at a major university.
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> She had always dreamed of working in an educational setting, and even though she wasn't teaching she felt she was contributing to the university, which had a mission in line with her personal values. In addition, she liked working in a college town, preferring this environment to

> the city. Christine described the choice not in terms of giving up money but of pursuing a lifelong dream. "It was really important for me to work where I felt like I was doing something meaningful," she said, adding, "I'm sure widgets are very meaningful to the industry, but they don't directly affect human life."

It is also possible to act authentically at work and at home but not be authentic toward yourself. Some women said they wanted to nurture themselves because they valued themselves—but repeatedly ignored their own needs and desires. They made time for everyone and everything but left themselves out of the equation, creating issues of authenticity. For example, they valued exercise but made no time for it. They valued art or music, but were rarely able to indulge themselves.

A final characteristic shared by women of high authenticity was their comfort with decisions made earlier in life. By and large, they had no regrets. They were clear about their values and preferences and had made their decisions accordingly as well as they could at the time, so they did not ruminate about the past. They wasted no energy worrying about what might have been.

How to Develop Authenticity

Authenticity is a fundamental need throughout life, but different ages may call for different techniques for enhancing it. This section outlines some methods women in our study used to develop and maintain their authenticity. Many of these strategies were introduced in The Women's Leadership Program; others were developed by the women themselves. Each was mentioned by several women as helping them sort through issues of authenticity. Exhibit 1.1 provides an overview of the process described in this chapter.

Know Yourself

Work on developing self-awareness of your values and priorities, your likes and dislikes. A key component of acting authentically is understanding what you care about most. On the surface, this

EXHIBIT 1.1. A Developmental Thumbnail for Understanding and Achieving Authenticity.

1. Work on developing self-awareness.
   - Prioritize values and understand personal likes and dislikes.
   - Foster self-awareness of values and priorities.
   - Visualize yourself five years from now.
   - Create an actual image of the future.
2. Assess your behaviors, choices, and trade-offs.
3. Take action to align your values with your life.
4. Believe in yourself.
5. Get support.

sounds easy to do. In reality, it is not. Life offers many possible priorities and choosing among them means choosing among highly attractive forces.

The list in Exhibit 1.2 provides the basis for a "value sort" exercise that often proves useful. The idea is to rank the values in terms of their importance to you, so as to identify which ones seem most essential. Take a moment to think over these values and add any others that matter to you. Now take a sheet of paper and sort the resulting list into five categories—always valued, often valued, sometimes valued, seldom valued, and never valued—with no more than five in the always-valued category. This may be hard to do, but the always-valued group should reflect your essential self. Focusing on these values, think about how you spend your time. Does your daily life represent what you always value? Are you doing what you sometimes or seldom value at the expense of what is more important to you? How much time and energy do you spend acting in accordance with these values? Do you wish it were more?

In addition to understanding how you prioritize your values, you should also understand your personal likes and dislikes. Many women spend so much time responding to others' agendas at work and at home that they lose sight of their own interests and passions.

EXHIBIT 1.2. How Often Do You Value These Things?

Rate each value on this list according to its importance to you. Add any other values you prize.

Achievement—a sense of accomplishment, mastery, goal achievement
Activity—fast-paced, highly active work
Advancement—growth, seniority, and promotion resulting from work well done
Adventure—new and challenging opportunities, excitement, risk
Aesthetics—appreciation of beauty in things, ideas, surroundings, personal space
Affiliation—interaction with other people, recognition as a member of a particular group, involvement, belonging
Affluence—high income, financial success, prosperity
Authority—position and power to control events and other people's activities
Autonomy—ability to act independently with few constraints, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, ability to make most decisions and choices
Balance—lifestyle that allows for a balance of time for self, family, work, and community
Challenge—continually facing complex and demanding tasks and problems
Change and variation—absence of routine; work responsibilities, daily activities, or settings that change frequently; unpredictability
Collaboration—close, cooperative working relationships with groups
Community—serving and supporting a purpose that supersedes personal desires, "making a difference"
Competency—demonstrating high proficiency and knowledge, showing above-average effectiveness and efficiency at tasks
Competition—rivalry with winning as the goal
Courage—willingness to stand up for one's beliefs
Creativity—discovering, developing, or designing new ideas, formats, programs, or things; demonstrating innovation and imagination
Diverse perspectives—unusual ideas and opinions, points of view that

may not seem right or be popular at first but bear fruit in the long run
Duty—respect for authority, rules, and regulations
Economic security—steady and secure employment, adequate financial reward, low risk
Enjoyment—fun, joy, and laughter
Fame—prominence, being well known
Family—spending time with partner, children, parents, or extended family
Friendship—close personal relationships with others
Health—physical and mental well-being, vitality
Helping others—helping people attain their goals, providing care and support
Humor—the ability to laugh at oneself and at life
Influence—having an impact or effect on the attitudes or opinions of other people, persuasiveness
Inner harmony—happiness, contentment, being at peace with oneself
Integrity—acting in accordance with moral and ethical standards; honesty, sincerity, truth; trustworthiness
Justice—fairness, equality, "doing the right thing"
Knowledge—the pursuit of understanding, skill, and expertise; continuous learning
Location—choice of a place to live that is conducive to one's lifestyle
Love—involvement in close, affectionate relationships; intimacy
Loyalty—faithfulness; dedication to individuals, traditions, or organizations
Order—stability, routine, predictability, clear lines of authority, standardized procedures
Personal development—dedication to maximizing one's potential
Physical fitness—staying in shape through exercise and physical activity
Recognition—positive feedback and public credit for work well done; respect and admiration
Responsibility—dependability, reliability, accountability for results
Self-respect—pride, self-esteem, sense of personal identity

EXHIBIT 1.2. (*continued*)

Spirituality—strong spiritual or religious beliefs, moral fulfillment
Status—being respected for one's job or one's association with a prestigious group or organization
Wisdom—sound judgment based on knowledge, experience, and understanding

Source: Adapted from R. J. Lee and S. N. King, *Discovering the Leader in You*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001, pp. 60–61. Reprinted with permission.

They forget what brings them joy and contentment. Take another page and list twenty activities or things that bring you pleasure. These can be very simple—walking, gardening, practicing an art or craft, watching television, reading a book, talking to friends, getting a massage, playing golf, cooking, shopping. Repeat this exercise every two months. Doing this can highlight values that get lost in the shuffle. You may find you can't list twenty things right away. For most women, it is easy to get the first ten. The second ten are more difficult, but it's worth the effort to get in touch with yourself. If you have trouble, think back—what did you really enjoy when you were younger? Music? Art? Sports? Theater? Do you have this in your life now?

A third way to foster awareness of your values and priorities is by keeping a "gratitude journal." Sarah Ban Breathnach introduced this idea in *Simple Abundance* (1995), and Oprah Winfrey popularized it on her television show. When keeping a gratitude journal you take a few minutes every day to record the things for which you are grateful. Entries might include a wonderful job, a loving husband, good health, loving parents, time to exercise, close friends. At first it may feel forced to do this. But after a few weeks it will be much easier, becoming a powerful way to recognize your priorities and identify which of your many interests, roles, and activities are most central in your life. Going back and reviewing a few weeks'

worth of entries can help you see patterns that define your life values, helping you sort out what is most important. It will help you see that although you may not be able to have every single thing you want in life, you can and probably do have an abundance.

Visualization is a fourth technique for ferreting out what is most important in your life. Picture yourself five years from now and think about what you will be doing, what you will look like, and who will be with you. Make it a vivid image. Take some time with it. Imagine talking to your future self. What are you like? What are you doing? What advice does your future self give you? This visualized future self can give very strong guidance by showing where you want to go—and sometimes where you dread going. Looking at possible future selves helps in making decisions about the present. Visualization is not always easy but it is worth trying. It can help to do it with one or two friends who are also interested in visualizing their own futures and figuring out what they most value.

A final and related technique involves creating a physical image of the future. At CCL, we have had women make collages using magazines, natural materials, fabrics, and decorations to depict what they want for themselves. Not everyone finds this approach useful, but when it works, it works well. For example, one woman in our study put together a collage of things that gave her joy and used this as a signal that she needed to take more time to nurture herself. She hung it in her dressing room so she would see it morning and evening as a reminder to do something for herself each day and to review what she did each day that gave her joy. Sarah Ban Breathnach describes a means of using collages and imagery as a way of understanding values and priorities in *Something More: Excavating Your Authentic Self* (1998).

Use several of these techniques to understand your essential self better—multiple methods can give you a cross-check and help you identify your most important values and goals. Consciously assess your behaviors, choices, and trade-offs against your values, priorities, and likes and dislikes. Understand what you have already

given up and what you are willing to give up in life to get what you want. The women who were highly authentic saw trade-offs not as bad things but as bringing them *closer* to what they wanted most.

Assess Your Behaviors and Values

Look at your values and at what gives you pleasure. Reflect on your hopes and dreams for the future. Look at what you actually do—how you really spend your time and energy. Examine the patterns and trends in your behavior. Are there gaps between what you say you value and what gets your time and energy? Ask yourself what you need to let go of to work toward the things you care about most. Is there something you can trade off? As with the five themes, there are no universal trade-offs. The right choices differ for everyone and even for the same woman at different times. As long as you know what you want in the various realms of your life and what you will and will not do to get it, you can act authentically.

Take Action

We found that women were better at seeing potential trade-offs than they were at taking action to align their lives with their values. Taking action, however, is central to living a more authentic life. It doesn't have to be grand. Some women, like Sophie (see page 20), take dramatic action such as relocating to a new city to get away from an untenable situation. Others pursue a strategy of small wins, taking action on a small scale and gradually improving the alignment between their values and behaviors.

> Maribeth took many small steps to improve the relationships in her life: she stopped going to work on weekends, started spending more time with her children, and curtailed weekend business travel, all in an effort to devote more energy to her relationships. She also helped herself stay focused on her aspirations by reading books on authenticity and surrounding herself with reminders of her goals—putting symbols of her authentic self on display in places where she would see them every day,

to remind herself to act on her goals. Over the course of the year, she grew more comfortable and began to feel she was living an authentic life.

Believe in Yourself

Sometimes acting authentically means going against what everyone else tells you. Do the work to clarify what you care about, then trust your own instincts and support yourself in pursuing those goals. If you know others are likely to try to dissuade you from a course of action, spend time thinking about how to respond—or simply decide to listen and not respond. Authorize yourself to determine what is right by your own standards. At the same time, don't compel yourself to maintain a course of action if it no longer feels right for you. It's okay to change your mind. It's okay to decide that an opportunity, even though it may be very prestigious and represent "the ultimate job" by your profession's standards, is not right for you. Often choices related to authenticity require taking a risk—trust your judgment as to what is right for you.

Get Support

As with many areas of personal development, social support can play a key role in promoting authenticity. If you are making a change in your day-to-day lifestyle, whether it is large or small, it may be helpful to share your goals with others. Other people can help keep you true to your goals by asking how well you are doing, providing feedback and encouragement, and avoiding things that make it harder for you. Asking people to help keep you on track can be especially important when pursuing authenticity, because much of your environment may be rewarding you for the opposite behavior.

Obstacles to Authenticity

Many of the women were quite successful at developing in authenticity during the year of the study. However, family expectations,

societal norms, and organizational cultures all acted as forces hampering this process. Every woman lives with a list of shoulds, oughts, and musts in her head. These internal voices represent what we think we must do. Often they serve as guides to good destinations, but not always. In *The Nibble Theory and the Kernel of Power,* Kaleel Jamison (1984) argues that these voices eat away at us, blocking genuine growth and subtly preventing us from growing into our true selves by making us lose sight of what matters most.

Sometimes the internal voices contradict themselves. Many women found that societal norms suggested one course of behavior, organizational norms suggested a second, and familial norms a third. Authenticity can become a struggle when deeply held messages conflict with one another, as they often did for the baby boomers in our study. Baby boomers were born during a time when women were expected to primarily serve their families—to take care of children, maintain the home, take care of elders. But while that norm was in place, feminism and the civil rights movement entered the picture. In 1963, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* identified "the problem that has no name" as the problem of women's suppressing their own goals to take care of the needs of others. Feminists encouraged women to attend to their own achievement goals and needs.

As the sixties and seventies progressed, more and more women entered the workforce with the goal of achieving in their own right. Young women were told they could have careers like their fathers—but they still got the message that they should be like their mothers, raise their children, and make their family their number one priority. These types of contradictory messages still exist and make it very difficult for the adult baby boomer to discern her own needs. Acting in an adult manner—in fact, acting in any manner at all—means that someone will be disappointed or some standard will be breached.

In the face of contradictory messages, it can be difficult to search your own soul and figure out what you truly want. Several women told us that even though their parents encouraged them to excel in school, they still tried to mold them into housewives. The conflicting messages clouded their own wishes and needs. As they ma-

tured, they still felt they should have careers like their dads and also be good mothers like their moms.

Even if society's norms don't feel contradictory, it can be difficult to live authentically if your dreams run counter to convention. As the women reviewed their pasts, many told us that earlier in their lives they had made significant choices to satisfy others or adhere to convention. Some, for example, selected a particular career because that was what women did at that time. Would-be engineers went to secretarial school in one era; confirmed helpers and relationship managers took up investment banking in another. With the benefit of hindsight one woman told us, "I ended up doing what I viewed was more important and acceptable for the organization rather than what I was really interested in. I made a choice, not necessarily doing what I would have honestly wanted to do, but using other people's values to make my decision." Such choices can affect home life, too.

> Connie's marriage was rocky for several years, but she didn't think of divorce until her husband was offered a job that would require relocation. She felt it was imperative to go with her husband, that wives were supposed to do this, and her family and friends all agreed. However, after reflecting on it, she knew it wouldn't work. Although she felt she was swimming upstream to say no, she realized she could not make the move. For many women, this might not sound like a trying choice, but it was extremely painful for someone who was raised to believe that divorce was wrong unless abuse or adultery was involved. Connie felt that to be true to herself she had to go against social convention because continuing this marriage would thwart her own development.
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> Later in her life, Connie realized she really wanted to be a parent and that she could provide a good home for a child. Though she felt the pull of society's stricture that single motherhood should be avoided at all costs, she intentionally got pregnant. To be true to herself, she felt she had to ignore some of the dictates of society. Connie said that it was extremely difficult to do this, but she felt she could not ignore her deepest desires for the sake of complying with social conventions. Yet she didn't deny all social dictates. She made sure she could support a

child financially and emotionally before proceeding and also made sure there would be a father figure in the child's life. Connie conscientiously evaluated the necessary elements of good parenting for her child and concluded that she could provide these as a single parent.

Obviously, internalized norms serve many important purposes. We are not advocating ignoring them and what they represent. Rather, we are advocating understanding these norms as they shape your own behavior and using this understanding in an informed way. And we are advocating that you look at what *you* want to stand for, accomplish, and achieve.

Sometimes going counter to convention is less obvious than it was in the situations we've described here. It can be simply a matter of standing up for yourself in an environment that is subtly nonsupportive or inconsistent. Many of the women worked in settings with norms and values different from their own. Several felt blocked from growing authentically in such work environments. Some told us that they worked in organizations that were very hierarchical and had command-and-control styles of leadership. They had more participative styles and felt out of place, questioning their feelings and instincts. There was pressure on them to play the game the way the others did, yet they felt awkward doing so. They felt at a loss trying to fit in with the predominant male culture because their own values—emphasizing participation, empathy, work-life balance, and collaboration—were different.

One well-regarded upper-level manager said her style was different from that of her male peers. The team she led had cooperative norms despite the organization's generally autocratic approach; her people held open discussions, shared power, and made key decisions as a team. Her norms fit her values, style, and view of the workplace. At times she was reluctant to describe her group's decision-making process to others, but she felt that being true to her own leadership standards was critical. She liked the company so much that it seemed worthwhile to stay even though she sometimes wondered if she fit in there. Fortunately, her company val-

ued her good results even if she did use different approaches than the men did. She managed to reconcile her own values with the corporate value structure by demonstrating that she could achieve quality results with a different approach.

In light of the growing numbers of women entering managerial positions, organizations need to consider the ways in which climates and styles block or promote authenticity. Upper-level positions require bringing the whole self to work; blocking top managers from their natural leadership style can be costly. Organizations that require one particular style can unknowingly pose obstacles to authenticity and therefore to productivity.

The organizational emphasis on masculine norms poses obstacles to authenticity for many women managers. As noted in the Introduction, organizations are implicitly gendered. In *Unbending Gender* (2000), Joan Williams discusses the fact that organizations really only reward the "ideal worker," someone who can fully devote everything to work in elite managerial positions. Such managers must be able to work excessively—fifty to seventy hours a week—and be willing to relocate frequently in order to advance. This way of defining the ideal worker has different effects on women than on men; it implicitly puts a burden on managerial women who are also mothers and are likely to prioritize putting time into their caregiving role. As a result, trying to be the highly rewarded "ideal manager" strains women's authenticity by putting them at the center of these conflicting forces. It creates a dilemma in terms of figuring out how to respond.

If you work in an organization that you believe is threatening your authenticity, what can you do? In an interesting book on change in organizations, Debra Meyerson (2001) offers some suggestions for dealing with an environment that has issues with femininity. She suggests a strategy of "tempered radicalism" as a means of improving the fit between a woman manager and her organizational situation. Meyerson describes tempered radicalism as using a strategy of small wins to change the organization from an insider's position: keeping your sense of authenticity in the

face of an organization with a nonsupportive culture and creating social change from within. Tempered radicalism provides a middle course between conforming to an uncomfortable environment and stridently opposing it. Meyerson argues that it is possible to advocate for your own values without compromising your standing in the organization. She recommends that women take modest and incremental steps while building alliances and gaining support for a series of changes with cumulative impact. With strategies such as turning personal threats into opportunities, quiet resistance, or negotiation, it is possible to push back on the organization to improve the climate.

Developing authenticity is not easy. A variety of environmental forces create scenarios that make it difficult. Early childhood socialization and current organizational norms such as fierce competition and an individualistic orientation may lead you away from a path that is authentic for you. The task of developing authenticity involves learning to live in a way you find comfortable despite social norms counter to your desired direction. However, the rewards of living authentically are great and make the struggle worthwhile. An authentic life can be active, vital, and committed, while promoting a sense of inner peace.