

Stop Lying to Yourself about Who You Really Are

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Introduction

It was some years ago when I made the career transition from a musician in the British Army to an Executive Coach. It was an enormous step and one that had, among many, two very strong emotions attached to it -- excitement and anxiety. It was a tough journey and I became a prisoner of my anxiety, and began to lose the excitement. I was losing sight of who I really was.

As Daniel Goleman puts it, our emotions provide us with intelligence from which we can make decisions. I wasn't being very intelligent and my emotions were running away with me. In the grip of my anxiety I lost all belief in myself, and started lying to myself. On the one hand I had the sense that this was the right career for me, but much of the time I was a prisoner of my anxiety which was constantly saying to me, "You're not good enough; forget this!"

I was lying to myself. I can't remember if it was a seminal moment or a series of events which led me to feeling good about myself as a coach. For sure it helps to experience some external victories, get good feedback, produce positive results and win repeat business. But the real victory was when I really started to believe in myself; a private victory. As I found the real, authentic me, my belief grew, literally immediately. As I trusted myself more, my confidence improved and my performance transformed. Do I still have anxieties? Yes, of course I do. But I manage these emotions way more effectively.., not all of the time, but a lot more than not!

Who are you?

Have you ever really answered this question? Deeply? Most people tend to describe what they 'do' rather than 'who they are'. So it's no wonder that people lie to themselves about who they

really are when they find it difficult to express or even discover this. Discovering the real you – your Authentic Mode - can be extremely liberating and powerful. I help leaders around the world do precisely this, and at the same time help them to honestly appreciate two other modes we all have:

- ‘Who I pretend to be’.., in control, knowing what needs to be done, understanding, compassionate, etc... Whilst these are all quite positive mindsets or attitudes to have about oneself, if they are underpinned by some sort of pretence then they are flawed. This is what I call our Survival Mode. And what triggers this?
- ‘Who I’m afraid I am’.., not up to the task, not good enough, not loveable, etc... I call this our Limiting Mode. Whilst the initial temptation is to try to rid ourselves of the Survival and Limiting modes and only focus on the Authentic Self, this cannot be done. The key is to embrace all three and make deliberate, conscious choices about who you are really being at any given moment. Herein lies the challenge; understanding and knowing ourselves deeply enough to do this.

Take the example of a senior executive in a blue chip multi-national I’m currently coaching. He’s about to move from a big European role to an even bigger role in Asia, and asked me to help prepare him for how to ‘land’ in his new role as best as possible. How often do I hear this? My question back to him was.., “Do you really know **who** is going to land? Do you know **who** you are going to introduce to your new team?” After a pause, he eventually understood my point. The focus of our next session will again centre on who he is, as well as how he lands in his new role. He’s had a very challenging prior 2-3 years, so it’s very fertile territory for him to gain deeper insights.

How do you find out more about who you really are?

When I start coaching leaders I often get asked to interview their people, team, boss or peers about them; your classic 360. Whilst this is sometimes useful, it mustn’t be the starting point

for an inquiry into “*Who are you?*” It’s *your* journey, no one else’s. Teams will change and people move in organisations, so the starting point must be with yourself. Feedback is useful, but must only serve to provide insights and an opening for relationship conversations. It can’t be the only source of a person’s discovery into who they are. After all, it’s very difficult to embrace an opinion from another if we fundamentally disagree with it, and even more difficult trying to change yourself, your behaviour or your personality based on feedback that you disagree with.

Create your own true picture of yourself; go on your own journey first, looking at yourself, and only you. How do you do this? Well, I’ve learned that the questions here are not overly complicated, but in fact quite simple in their form. You don’t need many. The challenge comes with the way we apply ourselves as we inquire into these questions, which is ultimately influenced by how well we know ourselves. The less we know ourselves the more complicated this will feel, and the lying continues. The more we know ourselves the better, and the lying becomes less.

Try these, in any order; play with them and see what you find:

- Who are you?
- Why are you, you?
- Why are you a success?
- Why do you fail?
- How do you limit yourself?
- Why do you limit yourself?
- What gives you pleasure?
- What annoys and frustrates you?
- What do you believe about yourself that empowers you?
- Put your life into a story; tell it to someone you love.

Who makes your decisions?

If you answered the above questions with depth and honesty then you have already answered the question, “Who is making your decisions?” I’m talking about the decisions YOU make that impact your life -- decisions that you make for YOU; not the decisions your boss makes for you, or that your government or people in authority make. What I want for lunch today is hardly a decision that needs much thought or reflection (unless my dietary needs are significant). Whether I want to laze around in the garden this weekend or go out with friends, again is not really significant. Nor are most of the decisions we make.

However, every now and then a big one comes along that can have a huge impact on us, our families, our careers, our futures. These kind of decisions need to be made from the Authentic Mode. The stress or anxiety we attach to them can actually divert us away from our Authentic Mode and put us into one of the more Limiting Modes. We sometimes end up making a decision we regret, but this actually isn’t quite true; the regret comes from WHO made the decision, not necessarily the decision itself. Decision making under duress is where our Authentic Mode is most needed.

The benefits and an example of stopping lying to yourself:

Being the real you more of the time just feels good. In fact, in some situations where things don’t turn out the way you wanted or expected them to, being the real you is the only prize. I was having a conversation recently with a Project Manager of a big mining company. We’re working on the biggest project this company has ever taken on and it’s his job to land this huge challenge. His boss is a real micro manager and my client finds this incredibly frustrating. He asked me for some ideas as to how to deal more effectively with his boss, other than just telling him to back off! When I asked him to describe their relationship, he said he didn’t trust him as

far as he could throw him. I asked if he was willing to have a different conversation with his boss about their relationship; he said he's tried and it didn't work.

I pressed him and discovered that when he's around his boss he tries to be tough and macho; not the real him. I suggested that it might make a difference to just be himself around his boss, offer him some empathy, and ask him to talk about their relationship. He asked, "What if it doesn't want to?" I replied, "Then the prize you walk away with is that you were true to you, and you stopped lying to yourself."

The more you offer people the gift that is the real you, the more they will warm to you., maybe not immediately, but in time. In order to do that, you need to offer them your Authentic Self, and stop lying about who you really are!