

RESPECTFUL

Authenticity

BRINGING YOUR
BEST TO WORK
AND BRINGING
OUT THE BEST
IN OTHERS

DAVID GROSSMAN

ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA

THE
GROSSMAN
GROUP



I want to introduce you to what I call *Respectful Authenticity*, which at its core is about being true to yourself and acting in ways that are consistent to your values. Plus, there's a secret that authentic leaders know that most other leaders don't.

Authenticity

—*the concept*—
has been around
for a long time.

I'm adding the word respectful to help distinguish it as a powerful tool in the workplace. Adding the notion of respectful helps eliminate many of the downsides that can come with plain old authenticity.

In this eBook, I'll address how to be more authentic, and will share some proven tools to help others get to know you better. I hope you don't mind that my thoughts in this eBook are a little more personal than you might typically read.

Because, as you'll see from my story, Respectful Authenticity is—in the end—hugely personal...



The “*Supposed To Track*”

Growing up, I followed the “Supposed To Track”—get a part-time job at 16, earn good grades, graduate high school and college with honors, find the perfect corporate job, marry a gorgeous Jewish woman, have the cutest kids ever, and live happily ever after.

The feelings I allowed myself to have as a child, teenager and adult were solely happy ones; the rest of my feelings went into this deep, dark black hole never to be discovered or talked about. At 33, I had achieved what I was “Supposed To” and more, yet found myself in a therapist’s office, almost to the week of the anniversary

of my father’s death, with a confusing message. Here’s what I told her: “I’m married, have this house with a white picket fence and wonderful life in the suburbs, but have discovered that I’m gay and I’m going to have to leave my marriage and I’m really happy about all that.”

“Really?” my therapist asked, wondering how I can be happy, knowing the traumatic events that were about to follow—coming out, and leaving my wife, home and life as I knew it. She saw right through the veneer of my polished, professional self.



It's then that I grabbed
the pillow next to me and
clenched it to my chest.

Hard.

My therapist and I now laugh about the pillow that launched my journey of authenticity. In that moment, there was a huge disconnect between the words I was saying and my feelings. I thought my therapist would mirror my happiness that day and that we would wrap everything up in a nice bow in 6 sessions. Instead, what she did was question my happiness and help me reflect on what a difficult thing I was about to do.

Discovering oneself

As I reflect, there were a number of things holding me back from being myself. My sexuality was so repressed that I didn't feel that I was lying. I felt that I was authentically in love with my wife at the

time I was married. It didn't feel like a lie or pretending. I had a ton of coping mechanisms to deal with the anxiety I felt.

*Make no mistake.
What I'm sharing
with you in this
eBook isn't a coming
out story; it's so much
bigger than that.*

It wasn't easy or fun coming to terms with being gay, although it became relatively black-and-white. The larger questions about who I was—the real me—and how to find contentment in life, how to deal with life's stresses and

worries—were more difficult. I know many of us might have thought about the larger question of, Who am I?; I'd like to suggest if you haven't or haven't recently, it's worth thinking about. It's a BIG question, and a critically important one that influences how you lead.

Who are you today? What do you value? How do you ensure your life reflects what matters vs. just being carried by the waves of the day-to-day, or like me, feeling caught on a "Supposed To Track." Having answers and understanding yourself at a deeper level will change your inner dialogue, how you spend your time, and most importantly how you relate to others today. Plus, it gives you a view into the person you are yet to become.

Part of therapy for me was also a unique experience of having a relationship with someone who I really didn't know, and where I couldn't tap any of my chameleon-like qualities. Much like a chameleon that has the ability to change colors, I had the ability to change my thoughts or feelings or attitudes in social situations to try and fit in. To be liked. To be accepted. Who doesn't want that?

One way to get to know someone, of course, is by asking them questions...and I tried that with my therapist, figuring that the more I know about her, the better I could relate to her. For every question I would ask her, she'd ask one in return...without answering my question: "If I did answer that, what would the answer mean to you?"

I was relentless in my asking questions of her, and she was relentless in her desire not to answer. All distractions from the real task at hand.

“The Difficult Road”

I quickly learned that I was going to have to go down what I now call “The Difficult Road”—this was very different from the “Supposed To Track” I was on—to get to where I wanted to be. I didn’t question it. Deep inside, I knew this was a journey worth traveling. I was finally not terrified of being sucked into that black hole. If I did get sucked in, I knew I wasn’t going to get lost in there forever; someone was going to pull me out. And it turned out that someone was me.

Starting on your path

If you’re thinking about how to differentiate yourself in the future, or how to find your authentic voice and build trust with your teams, or help others do that, or lead a more fulfilled life, I have a few thoughts that I hope are helpful for you.

Growing up, I watched way too much TV. My Saturday morning favorites were Sigmund and the Sea Monsters, HR Puff ‘n stuff, Scooby-Doo, and the Super Friends with its famous Justice League of America. I was always rooting for the hero...and wanted desperately to have a superpower! Being the good guy or hero and making a difference was always important to me.

Starting on a path toward Respectful Authenticity is a way to make a difference—for yourself and others. And if you only take one thing away from this eBook it’s this: If you haven’t already, start your purposeful journey toward respectful authenticity today.

Authenticity matters

Authenticity has never been more important. We continue to see high-profile business leadership and ethics scandals in the headlines. Trust in organizations today is eroding. On average, according to multiple studies, only 1/3 of US employees are engaged and less than half of that percentage globally. And there’s no lack of stories about Bad Bosses today.

Authentic people get better business results, have healthier work lives, and excel in real, meaningful relationships. They have high ethical and moral compasses because they know themselves and are outwardly focused. And they sleep better at night.

Employees feel more comfortable with an authentic leader. There are fewer question marks about what’s on the leader’s mind because employees know what to expect, and that’s hugely motivating. People like them. They follow them. They’re influenced by them in a way that’s seamless. In the end, authentic leaders create fundamentally different relationships with the people that they lead and their peers.

*Every person
could benefit
from being more
authentic today.*

Every team could benefit from members who are more authentic. Every organization could benefit from employees and leaders who are more true to themselves.

Imagine...

With the significant focus on diversity, equity and inclusion inside workplaces today, Respectful Authenticity is more possible than ever before. There are tremendous positive outcomes from creating a work environment where anyone who's different is embraced and included for what they bring to the workplace...because everyone is being true to who they are.

If you see all this as possible, or aspire to help make the workplace better, or just want to be better yourself, I want to help you with this journey by coming at it from a place of self-knowledge and security in yourself.



Authenticity isn't a skill

What I know for sure from my research and consulting... from my interviews with senior leaders and practitioners...and from my experience—authenticity isn't a skill. It's a component of one's self that a person can accentuate or work on to become better, whether it's on the job, in your relationships, or at home, to lead a more fulfilling life.

No one really learns the skill of authenticity. The skill is communication. When you come at communication from an authentic place, communication becomes much easier and much more effective. I believe communication done well is a superpower because of all it can do for you, and not just because I wanted to have a superpower as a kid.

Here's the thing about communication—it's a skill that anyone can have, and it's easy to acquire.

For a little bit of effort, the payoff can be significant. And for how many things in this world for a little bit of work can you get a great result? Yet, I know it might not always feel like communicating is easy; in fact, it might feel easier to NOT communicate. But not communicating IS communicating so you might as well get better at it.

What respectful authenticity means

For me, Respectful Authenticity has 3 components:

- First, Know Yourself
- Second, Be Your Best Self
- Finally, Have Quiet Courage as you relate to others

Early in my career, I was fortunate to work with some incredibly inspiring leaders who brought out the best in me. I gravitated toward them because of how they made me feel. I trusted them because they were genuine, authentic, and because they demonstrated much more confidence in me than I had in myself. They stood for my potential, which was incredibly motivating for me as a 20-something professional, and only spurred me on to be even better.

When it was my chance to lead, I was determined to lead in a similarly authentic way. I tried to take the best strategies from each of them. After all, imitation is the greatest form of flattery. Still, I made my share of mistakes as a new leader, and then I realized an important lesson: Leading authentically isn't about being like someone else. Instead, it's about knowing yourself and being who you are.

Sure, you can “try on” strategies that work for others. Yet in the end, leading authentically is about finding what works best for you. And when you are genuine, you have “full power,” which is what the Greek root of authentic—*authentikos*—truly means.

01 KNOW Yourself



Know Yourself is the first component.

How do you do that? Here are a couple of ideas to consider; you choose what's best for you:

Pay attention to what you already know about yourself. Maybe we don't always know ourselves totally, but we can stop and examine an experience we're having, and know whether it feels good or bad. And trust our gut feeling on it. As you have experiences, think, "Is This Me, or Not Me?" Get to know yourself as well as you can today...in this moment, and know that as time goes on, you will change and grow. Think, as you have experiences—"Is This Me, or Not Me?"

Make an inventory. Think about a half dozen instances where you were told or you felt you weren't authentic. Try and get an understanding of what got in the way. Then ask yourself, if you could have a do-over, what would you do differently? What learnings can you take forward to help you be more of who you are.

Get a better sense of your leadership style, and there are a myriad of ways to get feedback. Do a 360. Myers-Briggs. Read StrengthsFinder 2.0, or many of the other fine books that included leadership diagnostics. Use the results as an opportunity to hold a mirror up to yourself to see what you can learn further about yourself and how you lead.

Make a list of people you admire who are authentic. Write down what they do that leaves you with such a positive feeling. Try one of those behaviors for a week and ask yourself, "Is This Me, or Not Me?"

Have a "truth teller" or two around you.

Each of us has a best friend outside of work who tells us what we need to hear, even when it's tough love. We need the same at work. All of us have blind spots, and it's a truism that the higher you go in an organization, the greater the tendency is that people will tell you what they think you want to hear. Instead of what you need to hear. Truth tellers can help us know what we can't see ourselves.

I don't know who said this, but it's spot on. You can do a pretty good job of combing or brushing your hair or tying your tie staring out the window. But you're going to get better results if you use a mirror. Any strategy that allows you to hold a mirror up to yourself can be helpful here.

In the end, the more you know yourself, the more effective you'll be.





02 BE YOUR Best Self

The second component is to *Be Your Best Self* and act in ways that are consistent with who you are.

This is your own self-awareness as you relate to others. This means behaving in ways that are in sync with your values instead of simply trying to please others or get something from others.

Recall how I described myself as a Chameleon and would change my thoughts or feelings based on how I thought others would react to me?

Today, I strive to be my authentic self regularly. What it looks like; how I act really doesn't change very much. What does change is how I feel on the inside. When I acted as a Chameleon, I did it out of a desire for people to like me. I wanted people to like me. When I relate to others from an authentic place today, I do it with a sense that people will like me. I don't worry that they won't. They might not, and that's their choice—that's okay. I'm not consumed with the need for people to like me.

There's no agenda. I'll let you be you, and I'll be me, and if you like me, you like me, and if you don't, that's okay!

How do you know if you're being your best self?

Talking out loud can help you know whether what you're thinking about is in sync with your values. Just being able to listen to yourself day-to-day allows you to self-correct—because there's a difference between self-talk in our heads and actually saying something out loud and hearing yourself, along with seeing the impact we then have on others.

You need to be able to say, “Wait a minute. I just heard what I said, and I'm changing my mind on that.” Or, “That doesn't feel like me.” Remember, “Is This Me, or Not Me?”

You can listen to yourself on your own, or for more challenging topics or situations, enlist someone else to listen to you—not to make suggestions, but to listen to you express your thoughts and feelings, which is one of the many roles a great executive coach or therapist can play. This also can be a best friend, a colleague, spouse...the key is that you need to listen to yourself.

*This isn't about
someone else listening
to give you advice.
They're listening so
you can hear yourself
and determine what's
best for you.*

03

HAVE QUIET

Courage

And finally, the third component: *Have Quiet Courage* as you relate to others.

Authenticity is about this constant process of being truthful—first with yourself and then with others. To say the things that need to be said, and to do it in a kind and respectful way. Being authentic isn't about saying whatever you think or feel. That approach can be damaging either to you personally or to the company. Being authentic doesn't give you license to be an S.O.B. We all know people who've taken this kind of approach—the “This is me—like it or not!” attitude or “I'm mad and am entitled to yell at people.” By contrast, Respectful Authenticity isn't about doing whatever you want and not caring about the people around you.

Remember the secret that I said the best authentic leaders know that other leaders don't know? The most successful authentic leaders share their truths with quiet courage, and with a sensitivity to others' needs.


They understand that their work is not solely about them, but about building a powerful, effective team. Authentic leaders also flex their leadership style. They consider what the audience can understand, process and make use of. Giving someone information they have little

way to process or to understand, can just create confusion and anxiety. All this requires reflection on your part before you speak or act. In other words, you have to be planful and purposeful (you can't wing it), and that allows you to respond in a more grounded way. When you do, you can trust yourself more and be more confident when you know you've thought things through.

From a communication standpoint, authentic leaders understand the audience and context, and then flex their style to meet the needs of their audience. While this might sound like Communications 101, to be audience-focused, it's not common practice. One of the most common mistakes leaders make is to communicate from their perspective. We're all clear in our heads what we think. Moving someone to action isn't about what we think; it's about helping someone else think differently so they then act.

If you're wondering about how you relate to others, one of the best ways to know is to ask. Authentic leaders want to hear feedback and how they're impacting other people. It comes from a place of really wanting to know so they can shift what they're doing to better meet an employee's needs or to better motivate that employee. It's a different way to hold a mirror up in terms of understanding how you impact others by being interested and taking their feedback to heart.

I hope you can see why Quiet Courage, as I call it, isn't Rambo courage, but an internal kind of courage that comes from deep inside.

A person wearing a blue coat and a red hat is walking away from the viewer down a path in a forest. The path is covered in green moss and fallen leaves. The trees are tall and have thick, gnarled trunks. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect on the ground. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

we all have
More Courage
than we realize

My Mom passed away eight years ago. I knew the day would come, yet it was way too soon. She had been diagnosed with leukemia, and the worst kind.

GG, as she was called, had two goals, and was uncharacteristically direct with her doctor the day she was diagnosed: “I have a grandchild coming and my grandson’s wedding, and you’re going to help me get there,” she said, pointing at him. My Mom abhorred pointing.

I thought to myself, “That’s what I call determination.” I would come to find out how determined she was. I always thought I was a courageous person. Someday, I hope to have half the courage she had. The Yiddish word is “Chutzpah,” which means guts; gall. At one point during her chemotherapy, she said to me, “I’ve realized that I have more courage than I ever thought I had.”

I think that’s true for all of us. We have more courage than we might think. It’s often the moments that challenge us most, where we can learn the most. We don’t need to wait for some terrible event to internalize this realization and to bring forward the Quiet Courage we have and the vulnerability that helps us connect with others.

Three things to take with you on your journey

If you're up for the journey—and I hope you are—here's what's important to have with you at all times:

First, your curiosity. I asked a lot of questions as a kid. In fact, it got me in huge trouble with adults. I was the precocious kid who wanted to know how things worked, and why the world was as it was. To be authentic, you need to be curious about yourself, about others, and about the world.

You can't be authentic without the ability to reflect and be self-aware. You have to be able to be curious despite any of the other feelings you might be having—whether it's concern or worry, or other much more uncomfortable feelings like fear and shame. If you can be curious, you can look at anything. You can say, “Hmmm... Wow that's interesting...is there something worth exploring here? Is there something I can learn about myself or others?” To get ahead in business, you need to continually be learning and growing.

Plus, curiosity will make you a better listener. Each of us, and the leaders we work with, can improve their listening. The better you listen to others, the better they will listen to you. The better they listen to you, the better your relationships will be, including your most important relationship—the one you have with yourself.

Second, embrace who you are. After all, it's our imperfections that create connections with others. People say all the time to “let it go”—the phrase that made the movie, “Frozen,” so popular. You can never let go what you haven't embraced. You have to say, “This is mine. I can hold it. I can own it. Now, I can let it go.” Once you really accept it, saying, “Yes, this is me. It's not my favorite part of me and now I can begin the process of letting it go and setting it aside because it doesn't really control me.”

Last, focus on what you can control. Think about all you have control over, and focus on that. Not the economy. Not your competitors. Not what colleagues are gossiping about. But what's in your control. You can expend all your energy on what you can't control, or take that energy and passion and use it for good—to focus on meaningful change.

One of the things you can control is how you communicate. Being planful and purposeful can significantly increase your chances of being heard and achieving your goals.



As you think about authenticity, remember that you have power—and you have choices...

You are stronger than you even know. Earlier on in this eBook we talked about how much courage you have inside you. And you always have more choices that you might think.

No matter what you seek, you can create the next steps for yourself versus follow someone else's pre-determined path.

A big part of my journey was learning about myself—about how to not get trapped, and that I always have choices, even when I'm not at first able to see them. The choices are there; I now know I just have to look harder.

As you move forward on this journey—know that you aren't going to fail; you will succeed and continue to learn about yourself. If you find yourself stressed, or feel stuck, just listen to yourself, to your gut, take a step back and try to see the forest through the trees. When you're approaching a mountain and are miles out, it seems really small. When you get to the bottom of the mountain and look up, you realize it's huge. When life gets too big, back up a little bit. Sometimes when you're too close to something, it can feel

overwhelming. You feel incapacitated and can't take the first step. Or, get to the base and don't look up; just put your nose down and start. A CEO I used to work with often would say, "Jump in; the water's fine!"

The value of feeling authentic

I now know the value of feeling authentic. This is the other side of the anxiety I felt. I had all sorts of ways to fend off and cover up my anxiety. The process of looking at yourself can be very difficult in the beginning. But the value at the other end can be so worth the process.

Today, I know there is no black hole that I'm going to slip and fall into. There is a great level of security. It's this level of security in oneself, and the whole spectrum of feelings that go with it, that I wish for you. To become un-frozen from what gets in the way... enjoy the pleasure of being even more of who you are...and relish in your Quiet Courage.

Your courage to be truthful, curious, embrace who you are, and focus on what you can control.

I shared with you what the
“*Supposed To Track*” looked like
for me. Fast forward to now.
If you’re still not sold on
authenticity, I want to share
a few more very personal
reasons to embrace the journey.

This is my husband Steve and my daughter, Avi. She's 11, going on 14 or 16, depending on the day. She's our Old Soul. Avi loves Anime, Cosplay, *Stranger Things*, and has my perfectionist tendencies, which we're working on.

And to the left is her little sister, Noa. She's eight. She's kind and has a wicked sense of humor. A good moment of silence, which can be rare in our family sometimes, can lead to a one-liner that's remembered for years. She's obsessed with cats, although our busy home is a pet-free zone, except for a tank full of fish, which I agreed to after a few too many Margaritas. Noa also loves Anime, which I think is also a nod to how much she looks up to her sister, and how close they've become after so much quality time together.





Noa was the grandchild my Mom was waiting for. And thank goodness she came early. Two weeks early. The minute we could leave the hospital we whisked her up to Milwaukee to meet my Mom.

And I'll always remember the moment I took Noa from my arms and put her in my Mom's. And for that one moment, everything was perfect in the world!

My Mom held Noa five times before she decided to stop treatment, and died.



My Journey

started with a pillow and took me down
the “*The Difficult Road*,” and lots in between,
and brought me here, to this moment,
and will take me forward.

How will your journey start?

The time is now. The choice is yours.

What will your first step be?

Chad Is



Call

312.829.3252

eMail

Results@YourThoughtPartner.com

Find

YourThoughtPartner.com

Connect

 David Grossman

THE
GROSSMAN
GROUP





DAVID GROSSMAN, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CSP

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders. A four-time author, his latest award-winning book, **"Heart First: Lasting Leader Lessons from a Year that Changed Everything,"** features interviews with 30+ leaders inside a variety of organizations, each of whom share extraordinarily candid insights and unique leadership lessons. His leader**communicator**™ blog is ranked the #1 blog on communication by Feedspot seven years in a row. David is Founder & CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-

winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy. The Grossman Group's clients include DHL, Emergent BioSolutions, General Mills, Kaiser Permanente, Lockheed Martin, Molex, Stanley Black & Decker, and more. David is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society, the Forbes Communication Council, and a Trustee to the Board of the Institute for Public Relations. In addition, he is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), an MBTI® Certified Practitioner, a Prosci Certified Change Practitioner, and taught graduate-level internal communications at Columbia University in NYC.

David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

NBC NIGHTLY NEWS

TODAY

Chicago Tribune

FAST COMPANY

Los Angeles Times

> The Grossman Group is proud to be a Certified Diverse Supplier through the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce since 2008.

LET'S PARTNER

If you're looking to improve how your organization navigates the evolution of the workplace today, we can help. These are just some of the ways we're supporting organizations today:

- Develop strategies and plans to keep employees informed, connected and inspired
- Facilitate focus groups to learn from employees what's working well and what could be better, to help inform decisions you make as an organizational leader
- Coach leaders to be even more effective during times of change
- Provide tactical implementation writing and communication support
- And more



Visit us online
www.YourThoughtPartner.com



Reach us directly
Results@YourThoughtPartner.com



Connect with David on
LinkedIn



Follow The Grossman Group on
LinkedIn



Subscribe for regular updates
www.YourThoughtPartner.com/eThought-Starters