

1.

Title card

2.

Coming up in this module, we'll briefly pick up on virtue signalling, as we mentioned in the previous module on brand, and of course we'll look for a definition of authenticity and what benefits it might offer us. We'll be challenging the phrase "bring your whole self to work" and thinking practically about honesty in the workplace. To give you a change in style from templates and modern practice, we'll be looking at the philosophy of authenticity, and giving you a break from worksheets. This is because we'd like you to revisit your earlier worksheets if you haven't already, with a new lens - particularly leadership, strategy, and brand.

3.

When people talk about virtue signalling, it usually means one of two things. As the Cambridge dictionary would have it, it's: an attempt to show other people that you are a good person, for example by expressing opinions that will be acceptable to them, especially on social media. Virtue signalling is the popular modern habit of indicating that one has virtue merely by expressing disgust or favour for certain political ideas or cultural happenings.

When used in this individualistic context it's never clear whether it's a legitimate criticism of someone who is all talk and no walk, or whether it's a lazy shutdown of someone with good intentions by another person who doesn't even have the wherewithal to engage them in proper dialogue about it. Social Media folks.

But it goes beyond the individual to organisations, as illustrated by this meme I was sent about 100 times throughout June 2020 concerning empty statements on Black Lives Matter. It's also what the LGBT+ groups would call rainbow-washing, or environmental groups call green-washing, and every network has their equivalent. Again, it could be that some people don't agree with the sentiment at all, and that's why they call it virtue signalling. But for most employee networks, they recognise this all too well as a lack of specific action. The critique of an organisation's character in this instance is best handled by clearly communicating WHAT you're doing, not just your sentiments. As ever, it always comes back to strategy. I wouldn't encourage you to use the term virtue signalling within your internal conversations, precisely because of the ambiguity of how this can be interpreted. But it's certainly worth keeping an eye on your social media for accusations of such.

4.

Staying with definitions, it can seem that there are as many different definitions of authenticity as there are psychologists, philosophers, and people with a TED talk. This dictionary definition goes with: The degree to which an individual's actions are congruent with their beliefs and desires, despite external pressures..

I think most people interpret this as being true to your own personality and values regardless of your surroundings. You're honest and take responsibility for your mistakes, so

you come across as genuine. But I think there's a counter-argument to this that it's not about seeing a "right" way to do authenticity (for example overcoming externality to express your inner self), but understanding the gap between your values and actions and making an informed choice about that. I'm going to just seed that idea and hopefully it will grow over the next few slides.

Either way, it isn't easy to live authentically, especially when it means going against the crowd. It may mean missing certain opportunities in the short term, in order to get greater satisfaction in the long term.

For employee networks, having a definition of authenticity is almost crucial. Because it's a word that gets used a lot in the D&I space. It's really the link between leadership and strategy. We find that because a lot of networks had their roots in protest groups, or emerged from the fringes in difficult times, that spirit of rebellion and need for independence can come through with a leader's passion, but not necessarily lend itself well to strategy, and real change. How far do you align to the organisation to get stuff done, without feeling like you're selling out, or not really representing your members any more?

To reiterate, there's no individual worksheets this week, because it's best to use this time to reflect, and revisit your earlier worksheets using this new lens. But If you want to give yourself one task - I would say it's to create your own working definition of authenticity that your network can agree on. And that's why we're going to explore more perspectives on that now.

5.

Let's take a break from ambiguity for a short while and try to focus on some benefits of authenticity, as they are commonly interpreted.

Trust and respect: At the very least, if your approach to authenticity means you have a consistent set of values and actions, then people know what they're going to get with you. They may not necessarily agree, but you won't be seen as someone duplicitous.

Integrity: When you act by clear values, that people can believe in, then even if you fail at least your intentions were clear. Depending on your audience, this might be more important than immediate success or growth.

Coping with problems: Your resilience should be emboldened if you've managed to reconcile your internal and external worlds. This means you're more able to focus on the issues at hand, and incorporate different perspectives, without being challenged on a personal level.

Seeing potential: By using more internal frames of reference, you can see potential in your own actions, rather than trying to fit into someone else's framework...

Confidence and self-esteem: ...Which in turn, leads to higher confidence and self-esteem, optimism, and satisfaction.

Less stress: And underlying all of this is the relief you feel from not having to put on a front. People generally perform better, operationally and creatively, when they don't have to think about how they'll be perceived by others. And of course living with the stress of not feeling like you're safe is damaging for mental health.

6.

Taking into account all of those benefits, it seems sensible for organisations to say that they support you in "bringing your whole self to work". Who could possibly criticise that? Well we could, so here we go.

First of all, in case you haven't encountered this yet, the idea seems to have been widely popularised in the corporate world by Mike Robbins. Here you can see the book *Bring Your Whole Self To Work*, and also the TED Talk, which I've put a link to in your further reading. The basic premise focuses on the benefits of being yourself in the workplace, as we've just noted in the previous slide. Robbins talks about how empowered he felt by that, and the moment he asked someone in a meeting if he could "just be himself". OK. But what you might want to ask as you watch the video is how exactly his environment wasn't matching up to his internal world.

Imagine for a moment a time when you felt truly uncomfortable, or maybe unsafe - it doesn't have to be in your current role. What if someone had told you that everything will be better if you "just be yourself"? It's not great advice is it? And yet without organisations explaining specifically what they're doing to make sure that "being yourself" isn't even something you need to consider anymore, that's exactly what's happening. "Bring your whole self to work" can be seen as an instruction that puts the responsibility on the individual to change their behaviour, even if they don't feel comfortable or safe to do so. Would a vulnerable employee walking around an office with these posters everywhere feel empowered or challenged by that. And how is this interpreted by people who find themselves in the majority? In these examples it all depends on what pressures you are under, internal or external, as to whether you need personal motivation, or an acknowledgement of a problem.

Think about the contexts in which you've seen this phrase being used and try to look at from different perspectives. In previous conversations with our ENLP grads, comments have ranged from "I think it's just a well-intentioned goal" to "If I brought my whole self to work I'd be fired - they don't deserve my truth." To hear a practical and I think encouraging example of this idea in action, I recommend you go to our Bonus Content section and hear the interview with Belton Fluornoy from Protiviti.

7.

Honesty, with yourself and others, is an important part of authenticity. But there's a difference between being brutally honest and being truthful with others. Just think of anyone who's said "I'm just being honest, just being myself" and it's likely that you might have felt they were being a bit - "in your face". So let's break it down into something helpful with yet more definitions.

This time we're going deeper than a dictionary, with psychologist Dr. Harriet Lerner's book "The Dance of Deception". It says that honesty can sometimes represent our uncensored thoughts and feelings, while truth requires tact, timing, kindness, and empathy with the other person. She says that not only is it nicer to be truthful, but uncensored honesty will likely be seen as judgmental, aggressive, arrogant and puts relationships and careers at risk. I could say "it's about strategy" again, but even simpler, we have the ability to think fast and slow for a reason, and that's to make better decisions. So considering brutal honesty that represents your uncensored thoughts and feelings as authentic is, in my opinion, dishonest.

Dr Lerner also says "Sometimes pretending is a form of experimentation or imitation that widens our experience and sense of possibility; it reflects a wish to find ourselves in order to be ourselves"

This is a powerful idea that gives permission to - as some would see it - inauthentic behaviour of trying out different roles so that we can use more diverse experience to make better choices for ourselves. It perhaps contradicts the idea that there even is a "whole self" to bring to work. And you can read even more on that from Dr Susan Harter in an online pdf I've put in your Further Reading. It's actually the whole Handbook of Positive Psychology, but if you don't have time to read 848 pages by next week, then I've marked out the relevant chapter on Authenticity.

She says that everyone has a number of different identities at work and in their personal life. For instance, you're leading a network, you have your day job, you're a friend and a colleague, and have a home-life.. Since you have several roles to play, do you have to act the same in each, in order to be authentic?

Dr. Harter argues that our personalities can't be "fixed." So, we need to be flexible, and this

flexibility can allow us to change and grow and realise new opportunities. She says:

"Honesty, therefore, is often not the best policy if it does not contain the elements of truth-telling that will facilitate, rather than jeopardize, relationships."

Dr Harter begins her article by acknowledging that there is little if any empirical evidence regarding studies into authenticity, and instead turns to writers and philosophers past with quotes like "To thine own self be true" and "Know thyself". And so I'm going to offer you something different in this course, taking a break from corporate jargon to see how great thinkers of history have approached this issue.

8.

And so let's begin with the phrase that Dr Lerner's takes inspiration from: "Know Thyself". This is attributed to the Oracle of Delphi in Ancient Greece, and cited by many philosophers and graffiti artists. Its power lies partly in its ambiguity - is it advice to a leader that they should be more honest about their intentions, or a curse of self-obsession (as it was for the mythological Narcissus, whose life ended when he came to know himself through his reflection).

Socrates perhaps embodied this challenge better than anyone of that age. He took the motto of "Know thyself" as his reason for being. He expressed his authenticity as anti-authority, questioning all the received wisdom, social mores, and religious rituals that had come before him. He and his students developed a method of examining society and their own lives by asking questions, scrutinising, and cross-examining. He started from a position that he knew that he knew nothing. The Socratics didn't take anything for granted, or blindly inherit the beliefs of their peers.

But this was seen as a corruption of the youth by Greek authorities, and he was put on trial. Socrates was found guilty and offered exile or death as a sentence. In response he chose death and reportedly spoke the words "The unexamined life is not worth living". To Socrates, philosophy (the love of wisdom) and the quest to "Know Thyself" was more important than death.

9.

At about the same time in the 5th and 6th centuries BCE, Buddha and Confucius were exploring similar territory. Although the path of authenticity as a term is largely traced in the West, I wanted you to know that the principles behind it were emerging simultaneously across other cultures, in this case India and China.

One of Buddha's main concerns in this field was that you should recognise your agency - and question what you as an individual can do in your circumstances. He famously sought to transcend suffering, and part of that was to stop saying your circumstances are everyone else's fault. Because accountability was key for Buddha, he said the purpose of life is to live it as well as possible. He noted the challenge was that it's much easier to make bad decisions than good.

Confucius was much more interested in the context of this. By acknowledging individual truth and experience, Confucius rejected ideas that could become ideologies, and societies that dictate behaviour. He said that the individual is responsible for researching and acting with knowledge and sincerity (for its own sake). And that's not about a source of truth, he said: Everytime you ask me the same question, you'll ask it in a different circumstance, and that's why you'll get a different answer.

Why did these ideas arrive at the same time in different continents? This period of history saw the emergence of trade, travel, farming, coins, cities. The importance of tribalism in binding a society together was starting to disintegrate, as people started to mix and integrate. And so the question of how do we live together peacefully was important to anyone who didn't want to directly profit from conflict.

Confucius, Socrates and Buddha all believed that change was an essential condition of living. They realised that in order to understand people with different experiences, we must take the time to evolve our own thinking and recognise the role we play in creating a society.

10.

The renaissance is the re-emergence of classical-era thinking, and so we start to see echoes, like the oft-used quote "To thine own self be true" as a shadow of "Know thyself". It was Polonius's advice to Hamlet, and this is often thought of as meaning "to be honest with yourself", and while that's partly true, as with most things in Shakespeare, it has many interpretations. "Self" wasn't quite the psychological term we think of now, it referred more to societal self, and your position in it - so not as individualistic and anti-authoritarian as we might think now. "True" could mean honest, or it could mean "to your benefit". Polonius could be empowering Hamlet to do whatever he feels like, or he could also be reminding him of his princely duties, or he could be advising him to act in a way that would benefit himself - such as please Hamlet go back to school and don't start fighting with poisoned daggers. Doesn't questioning everything like Socrates spoil the fun.

11.

Skipping ahead to the Enlightenment now, and we really do start to see an obsession with the self as we'd know it, versus a society that is evolving rapidly with scientific thinking and industry.

Our first example, Rousseau, believed that people were inherently compassionate and it's society that corrupts us. And so we are at our most authentic - yes, the term is actually used at last, and you can practically feel a thousand D&I experts quiver with anticipation - We are at our most authentic when we're passionate, not using reason. We've all heard leaders praised for their passion, authenticity, and doing what they think is right. Rousseau would have approved.

But by contrast, Kant thought that an inherent part of authenticity is autonomy. That we must be able to govern ourselves to be true to ourselves. Genuine freedom, he thought, isn't acting on whatever grips you in the moment. He believed independence was about assessing new influences and deciding whether it was something you wanted to act on. But he thought this was a reasoning process that was common to everyone - universal, like the scientific method - and not so much about an authenticity that enhances your uniqueness.

12.

The 20th century adds a fair amount of darkness to the authenticity story - which isn't too surprising given the horrific world wars...

Heidegger thought that authenticity is based on acceptance that all things will end - especially ourselves. In this light people who say "I'll get round to that" or "things will change over time" are being inauthentic, and authenticity is about deciding what to do in the present. He would equate authenticity more closely with responsibility, than honesty. The German translation is actually more akin to "owning" in it's ambiguous construction. His critics would often argue - own what? What is the moral consequence of accepting what society has given you? Which we have to acknowledge is brought to light by the fact he was a member of the Nazi party.

Sartre, inspired by Heidegger agreed that authenticity is primarily about awareness of the present, but ever combative with him disagreed that we act as an avoidance of death. He suggested we avoid being our authentic selves because we just accept roles that are given to us rather than questioning our freedom to choose. As an example he would say a waiter might be acting a waiter, rather than being a waiter, because it's a role they've accepted as inevitable, rather than chosen the action of serving food. Or in more relevant terms: a leader leads a network because there's a role called "leader" without examining why they really want to do it, and what it means for their present.

13.

Well we had to make it through most of recorded history, but finally we get to hear from some women. Iris Murdoch had an enjoyably antagonistic association with Sartre, and observed that these authentic heroes as described by the male existentialists, were only possible in a moral desert with the world sucked out of it. They just didn't think much about other people, and almost entirely disregarded notions of ethics. She said that in order to engage in realistic and good actions, authenticity can only be one value among many, and we need to think more deeply about all the values that drive us to know whether being authentic is even a good thing.

In fairness to Sartre, he did bring in moral values as part of his authenticity explorations saying that the only real moral value we can base decisions on is the search for freedom. His partner and co-philosopher Simone de Beauvoir took that further by including the efforts to make other people free, an essential part of that value too. She brought in sociological understanding that we are fundamentally social animals, and that the notion of having a unique self, is perhaps not that useful when it comes to authentic behaviour.

Her take on authenticity was that as children we are given societal rules with the same authority as the laws of science, and that it's a comfort to us knowing that things are safe and decided. As we get older the illusions that adults or authority figures know what they're doing is shattered and so we start to work back towards reclaiming that authentic certainty we once had. And that's where conflict between doing what is right, authentic and understood to be certain comes in.

At this point we start getting towards developmental psychology and gender roles in

society with her book *The Second Sex* so it's a good place to wrap things up.

I hope this has just given you a flavour of how many interpretations there are of authenticity and that it's not just a buzzword created by D&I consultancies, but the distracted musings of many a meddlesome mind.

14.

If you take one thing from this module, I hope that it's to recognise how widely interpreted authenticity is, and to acknowledge that if you're going to use it in the workplace - either as an encouraging motto or a lens for your strategy, that you need to come to a consensus on what it means, with the people it affects. On that note, as much as we'd like to ponder this subject for hours, we've put together some tips for encouraging authenticity which you can feel free to use to construct a plan of action. But if you do just want to go and sit cross-legged on a mountain for a bit, that's fine too.

1. Act On Your Values

If you're take on authenticity is living according to the values and beliefs that you hold most dear, and that personal goals will emerge from these, your first step is to identify your core values, and then to commit to living and working to them. You then need to set goals that align with these. Sometimes you might have to make an ethically challenging decision; this is when knowing your core values will help you do the right thing, as you see it. Try to get perspective on how you're specifically acting on your values, rather than just articulating them.

2. Mind the Gap

There may be a gap between your values and actions, but another gap you'll want to mind is where or who you are now, and where you want to be. By acknowledging whether we think we're being too removed, or aggressive, or flippant, we can plan an action to move away from that, and towards our behaviour goal. Rather than trying to leap the void in one go, choose one aspect, audience or behaviour at a time to monitor. This might be summed up in a single word like "openness" or "assertiveness", or "leadership meetings". It will help you focus on small steps to keep you moving in a positive direction, rather than feeling overwhelmed and removed from your own authenticity.

3. Be accountable

Analyze the daily choices that you make. You may feel you authentically and intuitively know what the right and wrong choices are: and you should certainly listen to your conscience if it tells you that something is wrong. But don't forget to challenge your own habits and assumptions so that if you need to, you can adjust them and be authentically accountable for your evolution.

4. Speak openly

This is a reminder about brutally honest vs helpfully truthful communication. We can all say what you mean, while respecting the needs and feelings of others. But this is also about clarity. Don't drop hints, use passive aggression, or jargon. Asking people to tell you what they understood from your comments is a good way to avoid misunderstandings. And if you've committed to something openly, then seeing it through it will support your reputation for authenticity.

5. Positive assumption

We all make snap judgements, it's just how our brain works. But interrupting that process with some critical thinking is important, and trying to push those assumptions into a positive place is a really powerful tool. Assuming that people aren't actively trying to be underhand or deceptive means you have a common ground to build from. When we assume negatively, we're only ever in a state of conflict, which is not only exhausting, but usually unproductive. Of course sometimes people's actions will prove detrimental, but then you can address that by critiquing the actions, rather than challenging their identity. It's much easier in the long run to change people's actions, than their habitual thought processes.

6. The "Selfs"

Authenticity requires resolve and resilience, especially when others are pressuring you to act in a way that doesn't match your values. That's why it's important to find out what builds you up, and to practise that regularly. By the "Self's" we're talking self-confidence which helps you to trust your own judgment and abilities. Broken down, we can see that as self-efficacy, which comes with achieving our goals and seeing that our skills are valuable when they come into play. You can build this by setting achievable goals, and playing to our strengths. And secondly self-esteem, which comes with a general sense that we have a right to be happy, and can cope with what's happening in our lives. This is often controlled by our experience of how people approve or disapprove of us, which to some extent is beyond our control. But taking note of who around you builds your self-esteem, and who drains it, can help you manage the time you spend with them, so that you're generally in a

state of being built up.

7. Channel passions

When you consider authenticity, you'll want to release your passion - it's probably why you got into network leadership in the first place. But you also need to consider others' needs and do your best to treat them with courtesy and respect. In stressful situations, this means knowing how to manage your passions to be productive. You may think of the spectrum between Rousseau and Kant, and consider where you sit between passion and reason when it comes to your own authenticity.

A lot of this module has been about bringing us to the present moment, and critiquing that minute and rapid process between thought and action - that has such big consequences for our relationships and reputation.

Next time, we'll move further away from what is, into what might be, as we examine how your network can influence change.