

**Purpose:** To increase your understanding of Authenticity, its role in effective leadership, and its ability to amplify social force.

**Intended Outcome:** This chapter prompts reflection on your authentic self and inspires you to choose actions that increase your capacity for being authentic.

Authenticity is the matchless, irreplaceable essence that defines you. The most celebrated leaders live authentically as individuals first, using Authenticity as a source of personal strength and then infusing it into their communities to make them stronger. Authenticity is a highly potent aspect of Positive Leadership. We are compelled to trust people who know themselves. They command our respect because we know we are dealing with individuals who present themselves as they really are. We find them credible. We watch what they do and hear what they say. We realize they are not easy targets for manipulation. We find ourselves listening to, trusting and even being led by them. Such is the force of “Authenticity.”

### Authenticity Principles

**1. Self-knowledge** – Self-knowledge is a continual process of looking inward and taking an introspective inventory of yourself: the positive, the negative, and the unknown. Accurate self-knowledge is essential to Authenticity. Gaining clarity of both our positive and negative dimensions allows us to be more effective wielders of social force.

**2. Self-Acceptance** – Self-acceptance is a constant evaluation each of us conducts throughout the day, ranging from self-acceptance to self-rejection. Authenticity demands that we own up to the truths about ourselves that we would rather not own—addictions, mistakes, limitations, etc. Self-acceptance also demands that we embrace our virtues—natural gifts, ideals, and aspirations.

**3. Self-Development** – Self-development begins by being able to focus on areas that are already an extension of our natural talents (“water the flowers, not the thorns”). While you may view your natural talents as nothing special, they are actually the areas in which we have the greatest capacity to truly become excellent. Self-development is a lifelong pursuit. The more you authentically develop your personal potential, the more artfully you are able to lead change that you identify as meaningful.

**4. Self-Assertion** – Self-assertion is the quality of advancing one’s self—your values, aspirations, views, etc. It is a necessary component of Positive Leadership because it meets the right balance of taking appropriate action without waiting for permission from someone else. It allows you to pursue the directions you want to take while making space for others to do the same.

## Four Ways Authenticity Increases Social Force

**1. People have a visceral response to Authenticity.** When we hear someone speak from conviction, rather than insincerity, it is powerful and can move us to respond and react. Listeners automatically scan speakers for Authenticity. When gaps in integrity emerge, deception detectors sound an alarm.

**2. Credibility rises to the degree one is authentic.** To the degree a leader is viewed as authentic, less time is given to evaluating the leader and more time is available for creativity, solutions and progress.

**3. Authentic leaders foster Authenticity in others.** Authenticity is contagious. Community members take cues on how authentic they can be from their leader. If the desired response I want from others is greater connection and openness, then the positive action I can take is to model this openness by revealing more about myself first.

**4. Authenticity increases your level of engagement.** When your energy and attention is freed up for the things you most enjoy, you will find yourself aligning your activities with your positive personal traits. When that happens, you will experience more positive emotions. The result will be a sense of flow and engagement. Extending this further, when you create a climate of Authenticity for others, you foster their engagement.

## Authenticity Inhibitors

**1. Other people's truths** – When we see someone else's truth, it is tempting to be lured on a path away from our authentic selves. Just because something is true for one person does not make it true for us.

**2. Desire to please others** – We often develop an imagined audience that guides the way we design our lives and can impede our authentic choices.

**3. Self-doubt** – It is hard to be authentic when you doubt your talents, experiences, and insights.

**4. False ideas about yourself** – You may have received messages, ideas, and labels from other people about who you are. Authenticity requires us to reassess the ideas we have of ourselves.

**5. Absence of introspection** – Without taking time to learn about who you truly are, you may find yourself conforming.

**6. Life's little trappings** - People go into debt, distort their bodies, and make false promises for want of the external things that seem so important at the time but have little lasting impact. How do life's little trappings pull you in directions that are not in line with your Authenticity?