

DEANNA DOSS SHRODES

29 ways to Become your Most Authentic Self



What does it really mean to be your “authentic self?” You are authentic when your words, actions and behaviors align. Your authentic self is who you really are to your core. It’s not who others expect you to be – it’s who you really want to be deep down, and it’s who you are when you finally get to the place where you don’t care about what others think.

Getting there is easier said than done. We can talk about being our most authentic selves all day long...but how do we really get there? The following are 29 tried-and-true strategies that really work in becoming the true you!

It's time to come into alignment with who God always designed you to be!

1

Think back to what you aspired to be or do when you were about 8 years old. Usually what our heart longs to do as adults is not too far from that. When I was eight, I loved reading and writing. It was pretty much all I wanted to do. There's nothing that lights my fire like it. I do it even when on vacation, or my days off. I would do it whether I got paid or not, and whether anyone ever read what I wrote, or not. I loved riding my bike at 8 years old. I still love it now. My bike that I ride on a regular basis looks just like the one on the cover of this ebook!

Think back...what made you tick at 8 years old? Start doing more of that now.

"We don't stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing."

George Bernard Shaw

2

Catch yourself when you say the words, "I HAVE TO." Do you really HAVE to? Or do you just feel pressured to? Do you feel guilted into doing whatever you keep doing that you despise? Do you say it/do it only because of other people's expectations or do you truly desire it? Is this something God commands or wants for you or are you just responding to the guilt you feel from the demands of others? It's time to let go of what doesn't work for you anymore.

"Guilt is to the spirit, what pain is to the body."

David Bednar

3

Think about the friends who you most feel yourself around. Who can you really let down with, and relax? Who do you not have to be “on” all the time around? Start spending more time with those people. There are two types of people/relationships in the world...energy producers and energy zappers. Know who your energy producers are and prioritize your time with them.

"You shouldn't have to pretend to be as excited as I am just to make me happy. If it comes to that, you shouldn't have to pretend to be anything around me. Friends should be real with each other."

J.M. Richards

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What activity makes you feel most alive?

Do more of that.

What has God uniquely created you to do?

What could you give a presentation on for an hour, with absolutely no preparation time?

What do you never get sick of doing?

Start doing more of that, because that is what you are really born to do.

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

Howard Thurman

5

Do you say things because you genuinely believe them, or because it's expected? Have you been trained to say things because they are "protocol" for the role or position you hold, yet not all the things you are pressured to say are true?

What does God say?

What does God want?

Is God pleased with your words, or are you just people pleasing?

When I am faced with situations like this, I usually take 20 minutes or so to decide beforehand what I am going to say. I think through my remarks completely so that I can make an integral statement.

If I am expected to give false praise to someone publicly who is undeserving of it, (which sadly, often happens to those of us in leadership positions), I ponder a bit until I come up with something that the person is really good at, and that is what I will talk about. Everyone is good at doing at least one thing, and most people are good at a few things. Those are what I focus on.

It is possible to strike a balance between being your authentic self and behaving in such a way that respects the cultural norm of your context.

"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body."
Ephesians 4:29

6

Get comfortable with solitude. Being alone is not the same as being lonely. If you are having a difficult time being alone, that's an indication...you don't like you, or aren't comfortable with you. You can't fully love others or have satisfying relationships if you don't even like yourself or enjoy spending time alone at least occasionally. Get to the bottom of your issues, in order to enjoy spending time with yourself.

"What has really happened when you feel alone is that you've abandoned yourself. You have stopped taking care of your own basic needs — you don't value yourself, you don't listen to your own thoughts, and you don't take care of your physical, emotional, or spiritual self. This is what is causing you to feel alone. You have abandoned you."

Gregg Michaelsen

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Take regular breaks to just breathe and be mindful. Take stock of what's going on, and how you really feel about things. What is unresolved in your life that needs attention? Consider this question:

Am I being my most authentic self in the situations represented in my life right now?

"Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart."

Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

8

Connect with a coach, a mentor, a spiritual director or someone along these lines to help you on the journey to greater authenticity. Think about this...all the best sports players have coaches. Why should you or I be any different? Call it what you will...discipleship, mentoring, coaching, spiritual directing, receiving wise counsel...we all need it! Working with someone in this regard is helpful in seeing your blind spots and drawing out the authentic you that God created. Note that it's important you follow someone who lives an authentic life, or you will probably be encouraged by them at every turn to mask who you really are.

"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."
Isaac Newton

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When you are tempted to shrink back from being your authentic self, remind yourself that being authentic is an important aspect of mental health. A 1997 study from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* showed that people who behave authentically experience greater satisfaction and lower stress levels in the roles in which they serve.

"If you trade your authenticity for safety, you may experience the following: anxiety, depression, eating disorders, addiction, rage, blame, resentment, and inexplicable grief."
Brene Brown

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Have the courage to ask your closest friends if they believe you are being your most authentic self. Listen to what they say and give it careful thought. Hopefully you have chosen friends who don't just tell you what you want to hear, and are authentic, truth-speakers themselves. If not, it's time to make some new friends!

“When you’re authentic, you end up following your heart, and you put yourself in places and situations and in conversations that you love and that you enjoy. You meet people that you like talking to. You go places you’ve dreamt about. And you end up following your heart and feeling very fulfilled.”

– Neil Pasricha, author of *You Are Awesome*

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When you are tempted to give in and be whoever and whatever you are not really meant to be, just think of how amazing it will feel when you are living life as the real you. Picture yourself doing that, right now. It's a beautiful picture, isn't it?

“There is nothing more beautiful than seeing a person being themselves. Imagine going through your day being unapologetically you.”

Steve Maraboli

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Don't be afraid to make a change if something represents who you are now versus who you used to be. We aren't supposed to stay the same! There are seasons of our lives and just as the leaves fall off the trees in the wintertime, and new growth comes in the spring, so it is with our lives.

I wrote a book many years ago that is now out of print. I am so thankful it's out of print, because I don't believe at least 50% of it anymore. I have grown, and some of the things I believe have changed since that time.

The point is...you get to change your mind. In fact, it's part of GROWTH. Anyone who is not changing is not growing.

"If you are willing to change your thinking, you can change your feelings. If you change your feelings, you can change your actions. And changing your actions - based on good thinking - can change your life."

John Maxwell

13

Stop asking friends what they are wearing to an upcoming event/outing. Wear what you love to wear and really want to show up in. Don't feel obligated to match those around you. You were born to stand out, not to fit in.

"In a crowded marketplace, fitting in is a failure. In a busy marketplace, not standing out is the same as being invisible."

Seth Godin

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Order what you want to at a restaurant. It's okay to be the only one eating "real food" when everybody else is eating like a rabbit. Conversely, if you want to eat like a rabbit, go right ahead. It's okay to order dessert even if no one else does. Eat what you really want to have and don't base your choices on what others are doing.

"You have a brain and mind of your own. Use it, and reach your own decisions."

Napoleon Hill

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Be mindful of authenticity in decisions big and small. Authenticity is not just a big idea. It comes down to the daily decisions you make. Do you know how to advocate for yourself, or do you repeatedly suppress your true feelings?

What happens when you go to lunch with a group of friends, and what you order costs much less than your friends, but one of them suggests you all split the check evenly to make things simple?

Will you have the courage to speak up on your behalf, or will you go ahead and do as your friend suggests just to keep the peace and then be angry at yourself all the way home because you didn't have the courage to speak up?

"If you don't stand up for yourself, people aren't going to think you can stand up for them."

Sidney Blumenthal

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When someone asks your opinion, give it honestly yet kindly. Work on getting better at hard conversations. (Great resource about this that I recommend: the book *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler)

“Working to keep negative information out during a difficult conversation is like trying to swim without getting wet.”

Douglas Stone, *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most*

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Take breaks on a regular basis. Practicing a weekly Sabbath is not only healthy – it’s Biblical.

A Sabbath is 24 hours of rest and recreation where you do what restores you. During these times of rest, you will be able to give greater thought to who you really are and what you are really called to do.

"Our patterns of work and rest reveal what we believe to be true about God and ourselves. God alone requires no limits on his activity. To rest is to acknowledge that we humans are limited by design. We are created for rest just as surely as we are created for labor. An inability or unwillingness to cease from our labors is a confession of unbelief, an admission that we view ourselves as creator and sustainer of our own universes."

Jen Wilkin, *Ten Words to Live By: Delighting and Doing What God Commands*

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Get in touch and comfortable with your emotions. It's not only okay but necessary to feel sadness when the situation warrants it. It is important to embrace the sadness, and fully experience the joys as well. For Christians, keep in mind that you can be emotional without being spiritual but you can't be spiritual without being emotional. God created us as emotional beings. Get in touch with that part of yourself. There is no true health without it.

"Not every emotion needs expression, but every emotion needs recognition."

Richard Plass & James Cofield, *The Relational Soul: Moving From False Self to Deep Connection*

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Refuse to play political games just to move up or advance, if you have to abandon yourself to do so. People who play the game may advance but they are usually miserable inside while advancing. No job or salary is worth trading your authentic self for. You will be the most fulfilled when you are promoted as the real you, as opposed to the fake you who just did what was expected, but not what you believe was right.

"If you sell your soul to get ahead it will cost more than you bargained for. When you earn your success and never take something for nothing, no one can lay claim to what's rightfully yours."

Carlos Wallace, *Life is Not Complicated*

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Pursue your passions whether anyone else in your world does that thing you love, or not. Time waits for no one. Go do that thing.

I love to dance. Not professionally, just for fun. My husband does not enjoy it. I don't let that keep me off the dance floor. I not only dance as exercise, but I will dance with my kids, or friends, or sometimes even by myself when we are somewhere like a cruise. If we're on the same cruise ship, you will definitely see me on the dance floor when the DJ plays the 70's and 80's hits!

"Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still."

Henry David Thoreau

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Allow yourself to be vulnerable and open about real life things. I'm a speaker, and I will never forget the first time I shared from a stage about issues like my struggle with depression and being on medication. I had a friend or two warn me, "You probably shouldn't talk about those things publicly. It might affect your opportunities, or change how people view you." I didn't listen to that advice, and I'm glad I didn't. Not only does my inbox fill up after I talk about these types of things openly, but my opportunities to help more people increase as well. Best of all, I feel so satisfied, living, moving, and sharing as my authentic self.

"Vulnerability is not winning or losing; it's having the courage to show up and be seen when we have no control over the outcome. Vulnerability is not weakness; it's our greatest measure of courage."

Brene Brown

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Anticipate pruning...and growth. When you are your most authentic self, some friends and family may exit from your life. Let them go. They aren't worth the trade off you will have to make to keep them. The sacrifice would be living fake the rest of your life. As much as you may love those family members or friends, nothing is worth forfeiting who God made you to be, for them. Pruning is painful but we can take comfort that growth always follows. After pruning, you will gain some special people into your life who will love the real you.

"You don't lose friends because real friends can never be lost. You lose people masquerading as friends and you're better for it."

Mandy Hale

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Pursue healing for rejection on issues large and small. It is most often rejection that causes us to shrink back from being ourselves. We morph into whatever people want us to be and do whatever they expect us to do in order to fit in. Learn to be okay with people's rejection, knowing you have God's acceptance, and also realizing the right people will accept you.

"Rejection doesn't mean you aren't good enough; it means the other person failed to notice what you have to offer."

Mark Amend

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Spend time with people who are true to themselves. It is hard to be a real person when you hang with fake people.

"Everybody isn't your friend. Just because they hang around you and laugh with you doesn't mean they're for you. Just because they say they got your back, doesn't mean they won't stab you in it. People pretend well. Jealousy sometimes doesn't live far. So know your circle. At the end of the day real situations expose fake people so pay attention."

Trent Shelton

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Be assertive in sharing what you believe with others, yet respectful and mindful of their beliefs. It is possible to have honest dialogue with people and be kind. Listening is key. Listen as much, if not more, than you talk. Spend time with others who also know the value of listening. Conversations that are truly a two-way street are the most valuable, beautiful and life-changing talks.

"The practice of assertiveness: being authentic in our dealings with others; treating our values and persons with decent respect in social contexts; refusing to fake the reality of who we are or what we esteem in order to avoid disapproval; the willingness to stand up for ourselves and our ideas in appropriate ways in appropriate contexts."

Nathaniel Branden

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Find community with those who share your values, especially when it comes to authenticity. There is strength in numbers.

"True belonging only happens when we present our authentic, imperfect selves to the world, our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance."

Brene Brown

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Spend time with the people who believe in you and are a caretaker of your dream – not someone who mocks your dream or refuses to support it. In the same way, be a good caretaker of other people's dream. Be a safe place for them to share that dream, and support them in reaching it.

When you discover someone who is reaching out to transparently share their story...support them. What goes around comes around and as you share you will find yourself supported as well.

"Surround yourself with people who believe in your dreams, encourage your ideas, support your ambitions, and bring out the best in you."

Roy T. Bennett, *The Light in the Heart*

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Set boundaries and know when to walk away in situations where you are constantly pressured to not be your authentic self. (Great resources I recommend: the books *When to Walk Away* by Gary Thomas and *Necessary Endings* by Dr. Henry Cloud.)

"A hurtful statement can be called a mistake. But a repeated pattern of hurtful statements or uncaring attitudes or even unjust expectations is much more than a mistake. These patterns are misuses of the purposes of a relationship. Why is this so crucial to understand? Because unchecked misuse of a relationship can quickly turn into abuse in a relationship."

Lysa TerKeurst, *Good Boundaries and Goodbyes*

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The greatest strategy of all is to seek God as to who and what He wants you to be. Your creator knows you to the core and will help you to live life to its fullest as the very best self that He made you to be.

Many people speak of running away to "find themselves." There is no finding yourself without finding Him. He gives us identity, meaning and purpose. Run after Him and that is where you will find the real you.

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Matthew 6:33

About the Author

Dr. Deanna Shrodes is an international speaker gifted in candid communication. As an ordained minister, accomplished musician, worship leader and recording artist, she is the sole author of five books as well as contributing writer of five books. Deanna has been featured in many media including CBS Mornings, People Magazine, The New Yorker, Woman's World, and the Huffington Post. She holds a Masters in Ministerial Leadership and a Doctor of Ministry. Deanna has been married to Larry, her college sweetheart, for 36 years. She and Larry have three grown children, four perfect grandchildren and two adorable puppies, Manny and Mercy. When she's not working, Deanna enjoys reading, writing, thrift store shopping, bike riding, true crime books and shows, and finding great coffee.

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