

# NINE TIPS FOR BECOMING REAL: THE JOURNEY TO AUTHENTICITY

By David Irvine, Best-Selling Author and Leader's Navigator

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**F**or more than two decades I have been working in the leadership development field, teaching leaders in all walks of life, from CEOs to entrepreneurs, community activists to parents, how to amplify their impact in the world. A few years ago, in our research with a wide range of organizations we asked, "What do you want from your leaders?" What we heard was, "We just want our leaders to get past the fads, the gimmicks, and the flavors of the month and be *real*."

Based on this response, I started to write a book about "real" leadership. What I discovered was that before one can be a real leader, one must first be a real *human being*. I believe that what we want from our "leaders" is essentially what we want from ourselves. My book, *Becoming Real: Journey To Authenticity*, originally intended for leaders, emerged as a very personal book on living an authentic, "real" life, a life true to your voice. And then, from that realness a strength of *presence* rather than the force of *position* materializes. This is what authentic living and leading are all about.

"This above all," wrote William Shakespeare more than 400 years ago, "to thine own self be true... And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any [person]." With all the inspiration that you will be getting this month from our Olympic hopefuls, remember that the greatest achievement you will ever reach in this lifetime is to find and be true to your own voice. When you discover and live true to your authentic self, in the midst of a society that tells you how you "should" be, you will not, in the long run, hurt anyone else and will, instead, be a tremendous force for good in the world. Living aligned to your authentic self means greater balance, simplicity, and inner peace and allows you to have a positive impact on the lives of those you love and serve.

Excerpted from my book, here are nine tips for living authentically in 2009. Don't try to tackle all these strategies at once. Start with one that fits for you today and resolve to develop some new habits this year.

1. **Take a daily sabbatical — a time away from the demands of the world.** Even if it's five minutes, make time for daily solitude, silence, and to attend to the

voice within. Authenticity cannot grow in the soil of over-busyness or over-commitment to what others expect from you. S-l-o-w-d-o-w-n to the speed of life and tune in to your inner signals.

2. **Spend some time every day in nature.** Put your feet on the ground. Feel the pulse of the earth and of the universe. Feel yourself being a part of all that surrounds you. Nature teaches us a reverence for life, and awareness that plants don't grow better because we demand or threaten them. Plants grow only when the conditions are in place. Nature, in all its storms, seasons, and beauty, are manifestations of realness in its purest form.
3. **Find a confidant.** Authentic living is a lonely journey, but it can't be done alone. A confidant is someone you can pour everything out with, who will lift you high enough to see a new perspective, and support you to discover and honor your true voice. Over the years, it has been women who have taught me the value of real friendships.
4. **Align your life with your values.** I define simple, balanced authentic living as living in accord with your values. Take a little time away from hectic demands to: (a) write down your top five values; (b) take an inventory and rate your life (on a scale from 1-10) in each area; (c) schedule in time every week for each value.
5. **Be a cathedral builder, not a bricklayer.** Try reaching for a higher purpose in every activity each day. Have and share your vision of your work and life with the people who matter to you. A story that summarizes the power of vision is the tale of three bricklayers who were working side by side:

When asked. “What are you doing?” the first bricklayer replied, “I’m making mortar.” The second bricklayer said, “I’m laying bricks.” The third bricklayer responded, “I’m building a cathedral!”

When considering living a life more in tune with your authentic, real self, reflect on the question, “What is my own personal and unique cathedral that helps me start my day with renewed, life-giving energy?”

6. **Align your work with your gifts and your passion.** Real living means living life in harmony with your unique talents. Try another exercise: (a) track the percentage of time you spend each week doing work — paid or unpaid — that brings you *deep satisfaction*; (b) reflect on what you would like to say “no” to in order to increase the time you spend doing what you love; (c) negotiate with those you are accountable to, and develop a plan for creating increased value (at home or at the office) by focusing on your heart’s desires.
7. **Spend time with children.** We are all born authentic. Children do not come into the world timid about being real. They are naturally themselves until such time as the world starts to shape them. Hanging around children helps bring you to your true nature because they are so close to their authentic self. Uncontaminated by the world’s expectations for how they “should be,” children are an inspiration for all of us to be more fully who we are.
8. **Practice self-acceptance and unconditional kindness.** Compassion is the pathway to healing and renewed living. Once again, it is women who have taught me this over the years. Compassion

begins with accepting ourselves for who we are. With so many voices in the world demanding how you should be, real personal growth begins when you see, hear, and experience yourself as you *are*, not as you should be. When you are able to value yourself with the same degree of compassion that you bring to others, then helping and serving can come from overflow, not emptiness. As Nellie McClung said to my own grandmother in 1930, “*be good to yourself.*”

9. **Develop an attitude of gratitude.** With all the economic and political challenges in the world these days, we still have never lived in better times. Gratitude means having an appreciation for the beauty and awe of living in this world, and simply experiencing the wonderment of being alive. The best present you will likely ever give yourself or others is to be fully present in the present.

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David Irvine is sought after internationally as a speaker, author, and mentor. His work has contributed to the building of accountable, vital, and engaged organizations across North America. He is the co-founder of the Newport Institute for Authentic Living whose focus is to build authentic organizational cultures that attract and retain great people. David is the best selling author of five books. His most recent book is *Bridges Of Trust: Making Accountability Authentic*. These are available in bookstores or can be ordered at [www.davidirvine.com](http://www.davidirvine.com)

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