

# INTRODUCTION

## THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING GENUINE

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THERE ARE ONLY two certainties in life: change and death. Let's start a leadership book by talking about death, shall we? Seems metaphorically appropriate.

Consider how many of us will go through this life, working for 40-plus years, just plodding along. Some will advance to the highest levels in a chosen career, while others will be happy just to collect a paycheck to pay the bills. Fast-forward to the twilight of our professional career, and at the ripe old age of 65 or 70, we retire and hope we worked long enough to live comfortably. Maybe we'll find a hobby, spend time with grandkids, see the world. At the end of our journey we will, yes, die. Death is inevitable.

Let's say on average you work for 45 years, for 48 weeks a year, and for 40 hours a week. That means you spent 86,400 hours at work. Now, if that doesn't slightly depress you, consider

that many of us live to work and not the other way around. The majority of us will spend 86,400 hours of our life being *not* our best self, but rather a lesser version of our best self. And thus, at the end of 45 years, 48 weeks a year, 40 hours a week, we spent 86,400 hours slowly dying by a thousand paper cuts.

Let me tell you a story about Joe Burton, CEO of Whil Concepts, Inc. Joe should have died by age 50 (he's not quite there yet). In his early forties, Joe made a choice.

Whil Concepts offers digital well-being training programs to help people live healthier, happier, more engaged lives. Joe and I met for my *Executives After Hours* podcast to talk about his personal journey. Prior to this role, at only 40, Joe was chief operating officer (COO) at McCann Worldgroup (an Interpublic Group company) and head of the Microsoft global business, a position he held from 2006 to 2009. Many people in the advertising industry would kill to be at that level at that age. But Joe decided to step down. When he advised the CEO of his decision, the CEO said, "Are you crazy? You're in a job that you can coast through and retire. That's the job you've got. You're insane." Joe's reply was, "I'm going to go start my own business. I want to do something that matters." The CEO's response was lacking in subtlety: "You're an idiot."

Looking through the CEO's lens, Joe *was* an idiot for quitting, and at some level Joe may have agreed, but what the CEO didn't fully appreciate is that for nearly forty years the air around Joe had been slowly sucked up by drama, and he was suffocating. As Joe says, "I'm running the global Microsoft business; we've got fifty thousand employees around the world. I'm basically flying around the world stressing people out, showing up, telling employees to be faster, cheaper, let's get this done, let's hit the numbers, let's win!" It was this mentality that catapulted Joe to COO.

However, in the race to the top, Joe's competitive drive was compounded by his fair share of personal challenges, and with

each challenge Joe's sense of true north began to shift and his focus was redirected inward. Over a two-year period, Joe lost his older sister to a heart attack and his twin sister took her own life after decades of addiction. His father died twelve years earlier. Adding to the personal challenges, Joe's body and mind were beginning to break down. It was almost like a snake eating its tail: the higher Joe rose in the organization, the more he traveled, the less time he devoted to keeping fit, and the more weight he gained. All of this resulted in two herniated discs, insomnia and asthma. Sounds pretty awesome, doesn't it?

A by-product of Joe's drive to climb to the top of the mountain by 40 is that Joe lost Joe. He didn't know who Joe was. His body didn't know who Joe was. And Joe's mind—well, I think Joe could probably tell you better... it got lost on its own journey as well. Joe was a stranger to his authentic self. As Joe was losing Joe, a doctor suggested he try meditation. At 40 Joe felt that this was "hippie-dippie" stuff. Furthermore, he was sure that he would get laughed out of the boardroom if they found out he was practicing mindfulness. As happens in life, the nudges were piling up and Joe was falling down. Fast-forward to age 43 and Joe came to the realization that a course correction was needed. He wanted to find himself, reengage with his family, repair his mind and body. He began a mindfulness practice.

What Joe found is that by spending ten to fifteen minutes a day on mindfulness training, he was able to recalibrate his core self and begin a journey of personal transformation, find his new true north. During this journey, Joe's competitive drive for external validation of his success was swapped for a deeper understanding of himself, a more meaningful relationship with his family, and clarity around his relationship with his father. To Joe, this was his awakening, and from it was born Whil.com.

When you listen to the full podcast interview of Joe's journey (episode 76), what stands out the most is his passion for what he is doing now. Whil is a direct reflection of Joe's desire to share

his transformation with a larger corporate audience. I think the largest takeaway from his story is the role of all life's nudges in taking him to a point where he made a life-altering decision—to change direction by leaving the advertising industry behind in a moment of, in some people's eyes, insanity.

Many of us set out on a particular career path in our early twenties because we want to achieve something great. However, we don't know what "great" means. We typically think "great" is associated with making wads of money and having an impressive title and trophies on the mantel. But this runs contrary to Joe's story. Joe had "greatness," if you define it in terms of money and recognition. But he was running from his childhood and from his environment in Pittsburgh. He wanted to be something different, and I admire and respect him because I often feel the same way.

What's ironic about life, whether we like it or not, is eloquently stated by Mo Gawdat, the former chief business officer for Google X, in his 2017 book *Solve for Happy*. One of Mo's core beliefs is that life will give us nudges to move us in the direction we are meant to travel. And when you resist going in that direction, Mo says (and I am paraphrasing), life will kick you in the face and knock your teeth out. This is what happened to Joe: his teeth metaphorically got kicked out. His back was shot, two of his sisters had passed away, his dad had passed away and, I think he would agree, he was slowly killing himself. Fifty was looking like a bleak landscape.

Over the course of a meteoric career, Joe got lost in the sea of success and was left searching for his authentic self. He knew his authentic self was there, deep down inside—and I mean *deep*. Like many who have come before him, and many who will come after, Joe found out that the view from the mountaintop is not all it is cracked up to be. He realized that he needed more of what life was capable of giving, and in his case that realization came in the form of a spiritual awakening, one that led to

an understanding of the need for compassion: compassion for those around him, compassion for his wife and, most importantly, compassion for Joe.

As I took notes on my interview with Joe to prepare for this book, I found myself reflecting on the fact that many of us do a job because we think that's what we're "supposed" to do, not because it's what we *want* to do. Many of us lack the will to pursue our passions, for any number of reasons. One reason may be our parents' voices echoing in our head, telling us to be a lawyer, doctor or accountant, and not a philosopher, musician or rocket scientist.

When I was an assistant professor at a private university in the U.S., students would come to my office and share the pressure their parents put on them to pick the job that would make the most money. They rarely said, "I wish my parents would stop telling me to follow my passion." They sat across from me, a tissue in hand, and I could see the agony on their faces as they tried to balance their parents' wishes with their own desires. I found myself overwhelmed with compassion for them, and often counseled them to screw their parents and follow their passion, aiming to nudge them onto that path. As Joe's tale points out, success at the top is rarely as glorious as it seems. The Notorious B.I.G. said it best: "Mo Money Mo Problems."

As a dad of four, I know that the paternal pressure to make sure my children succeed in life (whatever that means) is real. That pressure is particularly palpable in the U.S., where many parents want to get their kids into the best private schools, have them take music lessons and play on the best sports teams. How many languages does your kid know? And it's all in the name of getting their child into the best universities. I would never fault a parent for those desires, and I fight the temptation. Yet I fall for it all at the same time. These expectations can produce a culture of impressing others with titles and positions . . . and a deficit of

personal happiness. For most of us, this is how the long journey to inauthentic living starts.

What do Joe Burton's story and my brief parental discussion have to do with authentic leadership? Everything! We bestow a false glorification of happiness and authenticity onto our children in the hope of providing them with the foundations for "success," but it's hollow. Why? Because we provide them with false narratives about happiness and authenticity. Who wouldn't get lost on such a journey?

### **Why and How I Came to Write About Authentic Leadership**

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I would love to share some meaningful story about my journey to this book, but I don't have one. The topic found *me*. When I arrived in Australia to pursue my PhD, I asked myself what I wanted to accomplish over the next ten years. As I stared at a blank page, I began to see myself at 43. I didn't see four kids and three continents later, but what I did write down was that I wanted to complete a book. So, with that goal sitting somewhere in the back of my mind, in 2015 I began *Brave Endurance Wellness Podcast*. The aim was to learn as much as I could about the corporate wellness space by interviewing industry leaders. Over the next seventy or so interviews, I wanted to get a better understanding of the messy concept of wellness, so I asked every wellness leader how *they* defined wellness. This was going to be the crux of the book: *The Wellness CEO*.

However, at about interview number 50, something started whispering in my ear. Now, if you haven't listened to a podcast, shame on you. Go to iTunes, search for *Executives After Hours* and subscribe. Have a listen to one of the 140-plus interviews. I will wait . . .

So now that you have listened to a podcast or three, you know that I take the listener on a journey from my guest's childhood through the present day. My tagline is "I care about who you are, not what you do, because who you are defines what you do." At episode 70 of *Brave Endurance*, the themes I had noticed emerging by episode 50 kept making an appearance, and that had me curious and excited. I became intrigued about *all* leaders, not just leaders in the wellness space. I decided to change the title of the podcast to *Executives After Hours* to explore some new directions, and a book on authentic leadership was born.

To gain a deeper understanding of authentic leadership, I talked to leaders across a plethora of industries: health and wellness, finance, marketing, hospitality and resorts, publishing (authors like Bill George, authentic leadership expert), entrepreneurship, tech, consulting, sustainability and more. The executives and other leaders came from more than 140 different companies. This book is not a compilation of quotes, but rather a series of excerpts from interviews that tell the guests' stories as we explore this phenomenon called authentic leadership.

As a researcher, you learn that there are two types of research: inductive and deductive. Inductive research occurs when a researcher investigates seemingly random bits of information looking for patterns that inform new and unique ideas. Deductive research is a systematic process in which a researcher starts with a conclusion based on multiple premises that are generally assumed to be true. For this book, I used an inductive approach, starting with a clean slate and developing a model that I then explore. I will unpack it in a few paragraphs.

But first, let's return to the workplace theme. On average a person spends about 40 hours a week at work. You spend more "awake" time at the office than you do at home. So the question I often ask is, "Wouldn't you want to work someplace where the leader will accept nothing less than an environment that allows

employees to be themselves—and their *better* selves—for those 40-plus hours a week?” More importantly, wouldn't you want to be that leader who *creates* the environment for others to be their authentic selves? I hope that this book provides a new perspective on being who you are or can be as a leader, which is as important as who you are as a parent, grandparent, partner or friend. Now, I am sure some of you may be thinking, “Yeah, what type of utopian world does *this* guy live in?” To these opinions I say, fair critique. But what if the proposition put forth suggests that being your authentic self and creating an authentically led organization actually increases the bottom line? What would you think then? Stay tuned.

Finally, I have intentionally avoided defining *authentic leadership* although I do suggest several factors that have what I believe to be a significant impact on one's authentic self. At the end, you will arrive at your own conclusions about leading authentically. The book is meant to be a process of discovery. Every process needs a starting point, so here is a brief overview.

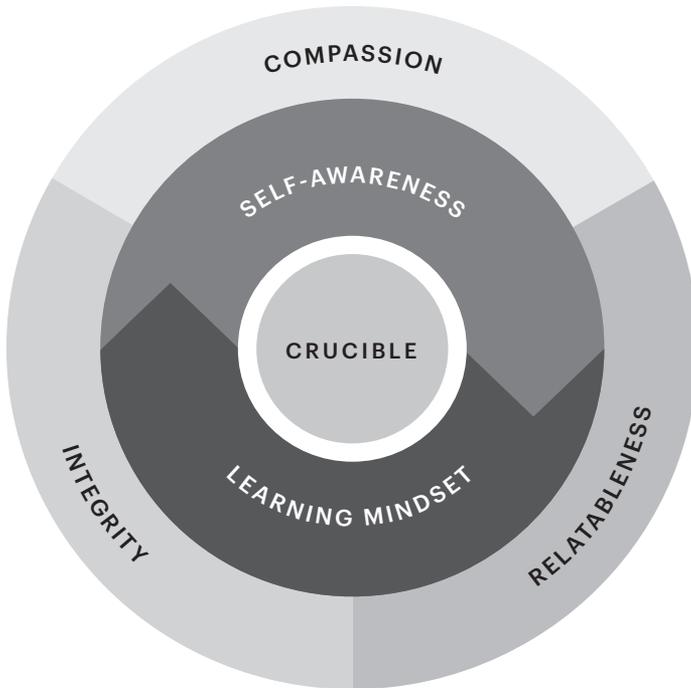
### **Foundations of the Authentic Leadership Model**

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Academic researchers discuss authentic leaders as having four main attributes: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing and internalized moral perspective.

*Self-awareness* is present when the leader is aware of how they process information and come to understand the world. They understand their strengths and weaknesses. *Relational transparency* is present when the leader is authentic in their interactions with those around them. They are honest and present their true self, while keeping that presentation appropriate (that is, within bounds). They engage in *balanced processing*: maintaining an objective perspective and looking at all relevant information

before making a decision. The final aspect is the *internalized moral perspective*. The leader acts according to their moral standards and will not corrupt them despite external pressures or fear of consequences.



**AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP MODEL**

This book goes beyond the literature to discuss three more concepts that I believe have a significant impact on a leader's authentic self. First, similar to concepts put forth by the late Dr. Warren Bennis, the distinguished leadership professor at the University of Southern California, a leader's personal or professional crucible is at the center of their personal or professional growth. Second, borrowing from Carol Dweck's work

on growth mindset, I discuss the support of learning for an individual's growth. Finally, mixed in all of this and at the same level of relatableness (relational transparency) and integrity (moral perspective), is the impact of compassion on a leader's ability to create moments that relieve colleagues' suffering.

As I started to build the framework for the book, a clear order of cause and effect emerged, along with a model of authentic leadership. The model consists of three layers that interact with one another depending on the leader's crucible—the stage of personal and professional growth—and mindset.

At the center of the Authentic Leadership Model is the crucible, which is discussed in chapter 1. The crucible is a significant moment, positive or negative in impact, which forces a leader to become introspective. It also creates an opportunity for an individual to assess their strengths and weaknesses, leading them to become more self-aware. Lisa McDonald, a former Canadian television personality and author of children's illustrated books with a twenty-five-year history in social work, provides an example. Here's what she has to say about her crucible:

When we initially spoke, James, behind the scenes quite some time ago, you would know that I don't believe in coincidences. I really believe that oftentimes our darkest periods within our own lives, our own experiences, pretty much [dictate] the path that we feel that we're intended to be on, and so as a result of some unfortunate things that happened in my childhood—namely, abuse, sexual abuse—I always felt naturally drawn to people who are going through difficult times. As I learned to empower myself, find my voice and stand up for myself, I began to make good choices along the way.

Not always, but always aspiring to do so, and being very committed to my own growth and evolution of self, I just naturally fell upon the line of work that allowed me to advocate for other people. To help other people empower themselves. To find their own

voices, as you never know what life is going to throw at you, and I believe that a lot of it comes down to choice. We can wallow in self-pity, we can become victims in our life or we can take the unfortunate things that have happened to us and find the lesson, find the gift. (Episode 102)

Lisa's crucible allowed her to take stock of her life, appreciate her journey and embrace her professional and personal growth. Stated another way, Lisa used her self-awareness to instigate changes.

In chapter 2 we tackle the impact of self-awareness on our ability to grow and strengthen our professional and personal self and connect the process of increasing one's self-awareness to crucibles.

John Toomey is an Australian known around the world as a fatigue prevention expert, author of the *Life Wisdom Newsletter* and a *Huffington Post* contributor. John and I discussed the overwhelming impact a personal development course called Avatar had on his self-awareness and growth:

I had an amazing experience with my dad giving me this brutal belting. For years, because he was a big guy, my dad, I had this charge on my dad being a bully. I wasn't even looking at this [when] I was looking at something else, [a situation] that comes up repeatedly in my life, and I was exploring it. You're not exploring it through thinking or analysis; you're feeling your way into it. I landed in that situation and I went, "Oh God, *this* is where that comes from." Then as I explored it, I went, "Oh, *that's* what I did to my dad just before that happened."

It was like I could see how my dad, what he did was in response to something I did—those sorts of things. When you're doing the [Avatar] course, it's your own exploration. Nobody's telling you what you've got to find or what you should find, because nobody else knows. (Episode 56)

Next, the Authentic Leadership Model suggests that heightened self-awareness leads to integrity, compassion and relatableness.

In chapter 3, I present the concept of integrity as a key attribute of an authentic leader. I break down the moral integrity and behavioral impact they have in a leader-follower relationship.

In chapter 4, compassion is discussed as a tool authentic leaders use to create shared meaning with their colleagues, and also as a process for leaders' own personal development. Additionally, I make the business case as to why compassion can help the bottom line of the organization. Across my interviews, I found many leaders who are authentic and compassionate. They were eager to relieve the suffering, big or small, of others around them. They shared stories of sadness and stories of how happiness provided them an opportunity to gain a unique perspective on others' lives.

Jay Scott, co-director of Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation, was galvanized by the death of his daughter, Alex, to work to relieve the suffering of others. He told me why he does this work:

So, the easiest thing would have been for us [Jay and his wife, Liz] to just walk away and move on with our life. But we talked, and we decided that, you know what? We could help a lot of people, a lot of kids, if we keep what Alex started going. The downside of that was we were going to have to relive things over and over and over again. So, if you talked to me ten years ago and said, "Did you make the right decision?" I would say I'm not sure, but if you ask me now, I'd say, "Yes, we made the right decision. It's not about us; it's about the kids." We've gotten over a lot of the difficulty in retelling the story. (Episode 44)

In chapter 5 we look at the final aspect of the impact self-awareness has on relatableness, a core attribute of authentic leadership. I think *relatableness* is a made-up word, because there's always a

red squiggly line under it when I type it. But it makes the point I want to make. Leaders in my interviews who identified that they had a crucible—one that led to the realization of compassion—were able to create shared meaning with people across their organization. I found that relatable leaders actively seek out people across their organization to learn more about them as individuals. They realize that making a personal connection creates a moment that can impact that person's life, whether it's for the day, for the week, or for the month. I found these people amazing to talk to—they seemed to have the ability to be present, to listen and to be insightful. For example, Elise Carr, MA, sexuality expert (yes, and a leader) and former model, discusses her favorite threesome (head out of the gutter, please):

That's why I often speak about my favorite threesome, as I term it, and I've written an article on this. It's about the three relationships you should always be in. The first one is with yourself. I call this your soul, and you need to nourish that in some small way every single day, like it's a nonnegotiable, even if it's five minutes with your cup of tea in the morning, you know? Whatever it is that nourishes you before you get going.

And then you move on to your second relationship, which is with spirit, god, goddess, divine, universe, Buddha . . . whatever you want to call that higher power. Sometimes people refer to it as their higher self—whatever resonates with you. Having a connection—let's just call it spiritual connection—having a spiritual connection every day, whether that's going to church, sitting on the yoga mat, being under a tree, connecting in some capacity and opening yourself up for some divine guidance that nourishes your cup, fills you up, reconnects you.

Then, once you've nourished those two relationships—and these are both nonnegotiables every single day, no matter what, whether it's five minutes or five hours—you're then ready for your

third relationship, which is with your tribe. So for you, James, as an example, this is your four angels and your beloved. That's your tribe. Once you've nourished *you*, you're in a better, calmer, more compassionate, loving, kind place to be of service. As a beloved, as a father, and then from there to step into the arena as a professional or [whatever] you do to be of service. (Episode 74)

Those leaders who embraced their crucible grew their self-awareness, integrity, compassion and relatableness, and they excel at learning. Authentic leaders have a drive to learn about who they are, about who their colleagues are, about what their profession is and where their profession is going. They want to learn how they can increase their impact on the organization culturally as well as improve the bottom line. Their stories are told in chapter 6.

Brad Stulberg, who co-authored *Peak Performance: Elevate Your Game, Avoid Burnout, and Thrive with the New Science of Success*, discusses his passion for learning. Brad is less reflective here on the role a particular crucible had in his self-awareness, but if learning is the driver of growth, Brad demonstrates it:

Man, where do I begin. I think probably the number one reason, and it's hard to number them, but one of the predominant reasons that I really like writing is simply because I'm very curious and I love to learn. I think that I have the best job in the world because I get to talk to fascinating people, hear their stories and learn from them, too. There aren't too many other jobs where you get paid to go talk to experts that have dedicated their life [to something], whether it's to a new scientific theory or to the physicality it takes to win gold medals in the Olympics. They want to talk to you, and they want to tell you how they did it. (Episode 32)

Chapter 7 is the wrapping on the present, and where I bring the Authentic Leadership Model into full focus. The leader's drive to

learn is what helps guide them on their journey. In this chapter I revisit key themes and present some questions to determine where *you* are on your journey to authentic leadership.

## The “So What?”

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As I spoke with executives over the last three years, many indicated that the concepts discussed in this book are important for personal development, but that often an argument emerges around how the organization earns money. It can be tough to quantify the outcomes of having a more compassionate workforce or of putting relationships before profits. I get it. Many of the interviewees in this book work for publicly traded companies that are responsible for returning profits to their shareholders. As a result, the whole conversation about organizations acting more authentically inside and out cannot be restricted to leader-follower relationships. The message needs to involve the shareholders, the board and the public in general. However, with a goal of speaking the language of those who hold the financial purse strings, I want to provide some information on the financial “So what?”

According to the Gallup Organization, employees in the U.S. and Canada are engaged only 31 percent of the time, the lowest rate for a workforce in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). Globally, the average employee is only 15 percent engaged in the workplace. This varies by region, but overwhelmingly workplace engagement is not a net positive experience. In the U.S., this amounts to a loss of productivity of between \$450 and \$550 billion.<sup>1</sup> Add to this the \$1 trillion a year the global economy loses due to depression and anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

Now, what about those organizations that have high engagement? In the same survey, Gallup found that the organizations in

the top quartile of the results have employees who are 17 percent more engaged and that the organizations themselves are 21 percent more profitable than those in the bottom quartile.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Jessica Grossmeier, the lead researcher, asked a simple question: “Do publicly traded organizations that prioritize employee health and well-being outperform the competition on the stock market?” To answer this question, Grossmeier and her colleagues began with publicly traded organizations that scored high on the HERO Employee Health Management Best Practices Scorecard, which was co-created by the Health Enhancement Research Organization (HERO) and Mercer (a global HR consulting firm). The researchers determined that the cutoff of the seventy-fifth quartile or higher (a score of 125 out of 200) on the HERO scorecard was evidence of a high-performing organization as far as the organization’s health and well-being were concerned.

After determining which organizations would be included in the research project, the research team explored how the forty-two chosen organizations compared to organizations on the S&P 500 on a simulated stock market for 2009 to 2014. This is where explaining the nuances of the experiment becomes difficult, and I encourage you to read the article (see the endnotes), but here is the key takeaway: the team assigned every organization with an initial investment of \$10,000, starting in 2009 (they also staggered the investments over three years due to companies completing the HERO scorecard at different periods). Each January, they rebalanced the investment portfolio, to account for any biases due to performance, and reinvested all dividends. They then compared the results of the high-performing portfolio with the S&P 500 during the same period. What they found is that those high-performing publicly traded organizations appreciated 235 percent compared with the S&P 500 portfolio appreciation of 159 percent, based on the original investment of \$10,000.

Finally, a 2014 study by researchers out of the U.K. found that happiness in the workplace resulted in a 12 percent increase in workplace productivity.<sup>4</sup> Professor Andrew Oswald, Dr. Eugenio Proto and Dr. Daniel Sgroi from the University of Warwick's Department of Economics used randomized trials to find causal evidence that happiness leads to more productivity. Their research included four different experiments with more than seven hundred participants. They conclude that when employees are happier, they use the time given to complete projects more efficiently, resulting in simply getting more done.

The literature is unequivocal, and I could bore you with study after study. I won't, though, because it is clear that organizations are suffering because *people* are suffering. People are not as productive, happy or engaged as they could be. Companies are losing money on the one area where investing in innovation pays off—their human capital. More and more research is coming out showing the positive financial impact of creating a happier and healthier workforce. Taking this a step further, countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Bhutan have dedicated governmental offices that focus on creating the conditions for a healthy and happy citizenry. Research suggests that there is a significant financial impact for organizations that take care of their employees. To be more specific, I believe there is a significant emotional, social, mental and moral impact for organizations when they are led by authentic leaders.

### **What This Book Is and Is Not**

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This book was born out of my life nudge and is a reflection of the interviews I culled to help develop the Authentic Leadership Model. At the end of each chapter, exercises are suggested

to help you grow your authentic self. These opportunities for growth were developed by my colleagues Dr. Seth Gillihan and Dr. Kara O'Leary. Dr. Gillihan is a clinical psychologist who received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania and has a practice in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Dr. O'Leary received her PhD from Columbia University and is a practicing clinical psychologist in St. Louis, Missouri. Dr. Gillihan and Dr. O'Leary have a combined twenty-five years of experience working with a cross-section of the population who experience anxiety, depression, OCD, abuse and much more.

This book is also about providing you with insight into the humanization of successful C-suite leaders and subject leaders. I have always felt that hierarchies are a necessary evil, but it's one that I struggle with. (That is why, I maintain, the military would never have wanted me.) But when you learn about other people's strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, you start to see that even the leaders among them are not all that different from you and me. Authenticity can be the great equalizer in human interactions.

Finally, I did not set out to write an academic book. There are many, many academic studies on leadership, and volumes of academic leadership books. You can go to any bookstore, if you still go to one, or go on Amazon and search for leadership titles, and the number will impress you. But as I said, this is not an academic work. I don't list study after study. Rather, I present a concept born out of the interviews that I conducted for my *Executives After Hours* podcast, and at times I turn to literature to excite you to think about your relationship to yourself and others in the context of authentic leadership.

So, sit back, grab yourself something to drink—perhaps a Dewar's on the rocks (currently my favorite nighttime beverage) or any other beverage of choice—and partake of the journey many leaders have taken to be authentic.