
THE AUTHENTICITY PARADOX AND SPIRITUAL GROWTH

There is a paradox to authenticity.

When you start something new and different in your life you feel strange, like you are faking it, and you can even feel like a fraud. However, in doing that new and different thing you may find a part of yourself you never knew existed. You may find that your identity can incorporate new dimensions of what you can be, of what you are becoming. This concept is called the “authenticity paradox” by **Herminia Ibarra**, author of *Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader*

Authenticity does not mean doing what you’ve always done or being who you’ve always been.

That definition of authenticity would mean that you never grow and never change. You never become who you were meant to be if you devote yourself to this kind of “authenticity.” Ibarra applies this concept to the world of leadership and it has excellent applications there, however I would like to apply it to the area of spiritual growth.

We want to be different; but we don’t want to change. This was the core claim Steve DeNeff and I make in the book *SoulShift*. I believe Ibarra’s “Authenticity Paradox” aptly explains why we lack that motivation to change even though we do, at our core, want to be different.

Authenticity has become somewhat of a shibboleth for our culture; it is the word everyone throws around to let people know they are “keeping it real.” People act as if anything implying they need to change is infringing upon their identity. Under this distorted view of authenticity we would all remain children, never changing from our childlike states of self-centeredness, neediness, and codependency. Now that I think of it those words might actually define our culture in general right now. Our distorted view of authenticity has stunted our growth spiritually, so that we all remain childlike.

Instead (when it comes to our spiritual lives at least) **God is doing something new in us.** He is making us into something new. He is changing us.



Things will be different—but we have to change first. Yes, this feels odd at the start. It may feel strange; it may feel like you’re faking it; and perhaps even like you are a fraud. But you are *not* a fraud, you’re merely doing something new and as Scripture says the old person in you is dying. The new person you are becoming is emerging forth (Romans 6).

So, the next time you use the word *authenticity*, remember this paradox. If you are resisting change in your own soul because it feels new and different, remember that **God is the only one who fully knows the authentic you**—the you that you are becoming, if you follow his lead and are willing to change. –DD

Reflect or Discuss:

- 1) Can you think of examples of an overuse or misuse of the term “authenticity”?
- 2) What is something new that you’ve done that felt strange at first but fit you well over time?
- 3) How might you apply Ibarra’s “Authenticity Paradox” to your current life situation and choices?