

“An excellent guide to practicing authentic leadership.  
Engaging, witty, brilliant!”

– Marshall Goldsmith, a *Thinkers 50* top-ten global business thinker

# Wired for AUTHENTICITY

Seven Practices to Inspire, Adapt, & Lead



Henna Inam

## Praise for *Wired for Authenticity*

“If you’re not leading with authenticity, your employees know it. In a time when companies must retain top performers to succeed, it is critical to lead with compassion, clarity, transparency, and trust. In this terrific guide, Henna Inam explains why leaders must change their approach and shows us how with vivid examples. Practice authentic leadership with *Wired for Authenticity*. It is excellent!”

– **Marshall Goldsmith a *Thinkers 50* Top Ten Global Business Thinker and top ranked executive coach**

Ironically, despite most human beings’ natural tendency to be authentic, as leaders it is easy to lose this quality in the struggle to be the ideal leader. Henna Inam’s *Wired for Authenticity* shows us that one of the most powerful tools for effective leadership already exists within us and is waiting to be unleashed and nourished for stronger relationships, genuine engagement and, ultimately, ideal results.

– **Pat Esser, President Cox Communications**

*Wired for Authenticity* goes to the heart of what is most critical for enduring leadership impact: becoming the author of our life and our leadership. It is full of pragmatic and profound insights critical for leadership success today.”

– **Kevin Cashman, Senior Partner – CEO and Executive Development, Korn Ferry and Best-Selling Author of *Leadership from the Inside Out* and *The Pause Principle***

*Wired for Authenticity* is the definitive guide to your journey of self-awareness. Along the way, you will meet the colorful cast of characters that inhabit *and* inhibit you, and you will develop the skills you need to recognize, confront, and influence outcomes. Henna Inam’s vulnerable and irreverent style will enable you to unleash your inner authentic self.

– **Alex Wellen, CNN, Chief Product Officer**

Authenticity is not something one arrives at one afternoon, but rather intently practices throughout one’s life. *Wired for Authenticity* is a companion piece for leaders who want to live and lead with genuineness and strength and create cultures rooted in authenticity.

– **Thomas Ebeling, CEO at ProSiebenSat.1 Media AG**

In *Wired for Authenticity*, Henna Inam re-introduces us to our original nature and offers practices to bring that authentic person to life! When our true selves show up to work, we can better connect with our teams, colleagues, family and friends. Even more powerful, we give those around us permission to do the same. It is contagious!

– **Kathleen Ciaramello, President National Food Service and On-Premise, Coca Cola Refreshments**

When people work with a positive mindset, productivity improves. Our own mind can either sabotage our efforts or be our best friend and ally. Henna Inam expertly coaches us to those better voices. Get inspired by her book, call out your saboteurs, rally your allies, and reach your full potential.

– **Shirzad Chamine, New York Times bestselling author of *Positive Intelligence***

Authentic leadership is at the root of cultures whose employees are engaged and alive in their work, and share their enthusiasm with customers and clients. *Wired for Authenticity* shows how genuineness in leadership can inspire the best in your people and build your reputation with everyone your company touches.

– **Hala Modellmog, President Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, former President Arby's Restaurant Group**

At Delivering Happiness, our first core value is “be true to your weird self”. We believe that being true to your authentic self, actualizes passion and purpose. In a very similar way, *Wired for Authenticity* shows that the leaders best-suited to inspire greatness are the authentic ones. Whether you call it weirdness or authenticity, Henna Inam’s book is the premise upon which to build company cultures of openness, trust and engagement.

– **Jenn Lim, CEO & Co-Founder of *Delivering Happiness***

Authenticity is infectious. A culture of trust and transparency can spread right through to your frontline’s relationship with the marketplace and into each client and customer experience. *Wired for Authenticity* shows how authenticity in leadership can and should become the character of your company.

– **Gail Evans, Best-Selling Author *Think Like A Man, Act Like A Woman*, former EVP CNN**



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## The Importance of Being Authentic

The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.

—C. G. Jung<sup>8</sup>

### The Upside of a Midlife Crisis

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It was a weekday morning in December 2009, and I awoke with a general feeling of “blah” hanging over me. I couldn’t quite motivate myself to get out of bed and go to work. It was as if someone had taken a giant nasal aspirator and sucked out all my energy.

I couldn’t figure out what was zapping me of my drive.

For most of my almost twenty-year career, I had been a self-motivated, high-charging corporate executive, climbing determinedly, rung by rung, up the corporate ladder toward nirvana—or so I thought. It seemed that for every rung I reached, the euphoria lasted just a little less time. Like a junkie, my drug of choice—achievement—was no longer giving me the high I wanted.

*I thought achievement would make me happy!*

To the outside world, everything looked just great. And technically, by external standards, it was. Then why wasn’t I jumping for joy? What was missing?

I realized I was in a full-blown midlife crisis (a little early, actually!). The thought of getting a red Porsche or a nice Botox job or a trophy husband did briefly cross my mind. Then my personal hard-charging inner critic stepped up to take center stage. I fondly call her Flog Me Now. Her philosophy is “The flogging will continue until morale improves.” When she’s around, it never really does (but don’t tell her that).

**Flog Me Now (FMN):** Look, you’ve got more than 99 percent of what other people have. Be grateful and get to work.

**Me:** But I’m tired. I’m just not motivated.

**FMN:** You got a good night’s sleep. There’s work to be done and a paycheck to be earned! Put on your big-girl panties and get going.

I did get up and get off to work. I found myself sitting there, staring rather blankly at the blank laptop screen.

But wait—something new inside of me was showing up to replace Flog Me Now. A part of me wanted to know why I was feeling this way. She wanted me to get my mojo back, to help me figure out what was missing. She wanted life to be fun and full for me again.

I didn’t recognize her back in December 2009, but now I call her my inner Dancing Queen. She’s the part of me that stands up for me. I imagine her in disco boots and a bright-orange satin jumpsuit with sequins underneath a spinning disco ball. I guess this would be an appropriate time for me to confess that I am a big ABBA fan (that Swedish pop group from the 1970s). Dancing Queen urged me to slow down, to look deeper within me, and to stand up for my own fulfillment. I realized slowing down was a challenge for me because it forced me to face my own discontentment. Who wants to go in *that* deep, dark hole? Not me!

As I mustered up the courage to descend the deep dark hole, I started to discover what was missing. It was a part of *me*. From the time I was a child to this now ripe old age of forty-three, I had made some assumptions about who I needed to be and what I needed to do in order to be happy: be smart; work hard; have a plan; make it happen; move fast; and be in control. And most importantly, don’t let them see you sweat (or, for goodness’ sake, cry).

I was discovering that while these assumptions were a good recipe for my success in corporate life, they were not so much for my feelings of fulfillment. This, of course, came as a surprise.

I discovered that I had been telling myself a few lies over the years about who I really was. I had ignored the part of me that needed to slow down, to take a break, and to care for myself. I was burned out. I had ignored the part of me that had emotions. Yes, I had the emotional bandwidth of a smiley-face cardboard cutout. I had ignored the part of me that lit up when I was helping people to find their aha moments. There had been too many days since I had used my creativity. Instead, I was reviewing my tenth version of a PowerPoint presentation for an upcoming meeting.

Over the past few years, I have realized some important lessons:

- ▲ We are not who we think we are. We are made up of a rich array of facets, many of which we ignore because we label them as “bad”.
- ▲ This discord between who we are and the cardboard cutout image we create to look good to ourselves and others slowly kills our *aliveness*.
- ▲ When we ignore or suppress parts of ourselves, it lowers our mojo, our sense of fulfillment, and our personal effectiveness as leaders. This lowers our contributions and impact in our workplaces.

The sum of these lessons was that I wasn't being authentic. I was perfecting one dimension of me but ignoring the other parts, and that one aspect of my being was not adequately defining the entirety of who I was. It was limiting my potential and killing my mojo. Does any of this sound familiar?

### **Why Be Authentic?**

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There is a great book by Bronnie Ware, a hospice nurse, entitled *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. In it, she asks patients on their deathbeds, at the time perhaps where they can see most clearly the value of life, about their greatest regrets over the course of their lives.<sup>9</sup>



What was their number-one regret?

***“I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.”***

Being true to ourselves is about having courage to define our own version of what it is to live a successful life. It is about being curious about all the parts of ourselves—those we express freely and those we hide from ourselves and others. For me, it’s about making peace between that hard-charging, results-driven executive who still wants to achieve and the peace-and-love hippie who wants to hang out in an ashram and dreams of a better planet for all. I now accept that I am all that and that these parts can peacefully coexist within me, ready to be called upon by my Center Intelligence Agency (my authentic self) for what serves the greatest good in each moment.

As soon as we limit ourselves—that person we should be—we limit our aliveness. We may achieve success but not fulfillment because we are not living out *all* the important truths about ourselves.

When leaders are rooted in authenticity, it creates enormous benefits for these leaders, those they lead, and the organization overall.

## Rooted in Authenticity



## **We're Wired for Authenticity**

Have you done a polygraph test? Since we're sharing secrets, this would be a good time to confess. The test tells the person administering it whether you are lying. How does it know? Lying causes stress in the body.

As part of the test, six nodes are attached to the body to measure vital signals. When the person is lying, the detector shows a significant change in physiological responses by sensing a faster heart rate, higher blood pressure, and increased perspiration. Telling a lie creates stress in the body, and research shows that continuous stress can contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression, and obesity.<sup>10</sup> I suspect that hiding the truth about ourselves or suppressing parts of who we are creates similar stress in our bodies.

You might say we're simply wired to tell the truth.

## **Authentic Connections Are Good for Our Well-Being**

Authenticity also helps us build deeper connections with others. Stop and think of the last interaction you had with someone where you let your guard down. Can you recall that feeling now? How is your body responding now as you recall that moment? As I recall that, my shoulders drop, I feel more relaxed, and I breathe from a deeper place.

In her book, *Love 2.0: How Our Supreme Emotion Affects Everything We Feel, Think, Do, and Become*, Dr. Barbara Fredrickson redefines love not as “a stable behemoth” but as micromoments of connection between people.

***“We each carry an intricate machinery of love, calibrating and attuning our moods and bodies to one another.”<sup>11</sup>***

Fredrickson's research shows that our capacity for experiencing connection is linked with our health and longevity. Authentic connections with others build the health of our vagus nerve, the main nerve that originates at the stem of the brain and travels through the chest, connecting the brain to the lungs, digestive tract, and most notably, the heart.<sup>12</sup>

People with high vagal tone are typically happier, less stressed, and less likely to suffer from depression. They also have better memories, are better able to focus their attention, and have increased brainpower. Studies also show that these people who are able to experience these authentic connections are usually healthier, as the vagus nerve is involved in insulin production, cardiovascular health, and immune responses.<sup>13</sup>

How do we build these authentic connections? We let our guards down. We step into our authentic selves to seek to see the human being behind the labels we attach to ourselves and others. Being with others in this way eight to ten hours a day is good for our health, perhaps even more than the company gym or health care plan (yes, that's the peace-and-love hippie in me talking).

### **Authenticity Creates Trust in Teams**

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In our flattening hierarchies, it is more important than ever to be able to influence others who don't report to us. Studies show that productivity, revenue, and profits are linked to the level of trust in the organization. Trust is *the* key factor in how well people work together, listen to each other, and build effective relationships. Author and leadership guru Ken Blanchard reinforces this point in his research of over one thousand leaders. Fifty-nine percent said that they left their company due to trust issues, citing lack of communication and dishonesty.<sup>14</sup>

*Leaders who create trust are honest and transparent  
and follow through on promises they make.*

I believe trust can only be built when we are practicing authenticity.

### **Authenticity Drives Innovation**

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Innovation is the lifeblood of all organizations—and not just in R&D. It is innovation across the spectrum of all our value-creation activities in every single function and at every single level. What if all employees came to work thinking about how they could best innovate, contribute, and bring their best talent to the workplace that day? Richard Branson, CEO of

Virgin, is a master at this: “Innovation happens when people are given the freedom to ask questions and the resources and power to find the answers.” His company has demonstrated disruptive innovation in many industries from music to mobile phones to an ambitious undertaking in commercial space travel—but not without failure.

What if people had the freedom to fail in pursuit of a bigger vision that was important to them? How do you as a leader handle failure? With the crash of Virgin Galactic’s SpaceShipTwo in its experimental flight, one test pilot died, and one suffered serious injuries. Both dedicated their careers and lives to working toward what was previously impossible—advancing safe travel into space.

Acknowledging their courage, Branson said, “[Virgin Galactic] will not push on blindly. We’re going to learn from what went wrong, discover how we can improve safety and performance, and then move forward together.”

Is he giving up on the dream? No. Branson said that the company’s goal is still putting people safely into space: “I think millions of people in the world would love one day to have the chance to go to space, and this is the start of a long program.”<sup>15</sup>

What does all this have to do with authenticity? Authenticity allows us to engage with each other in powerful dreams that make the impossible possible. We are called on to persevere despite failure and pursue a purpose beyond the paycheck. This is at the core of innovation. It requires aligning the dreams of each individual to the broader dream of the organization.

## **Authenticity Contributes to Great Customer Experiences**

Professional services organizations where talent is a significant source of differentiation and competitive advantage, such as consulting firms or high-touch, customer service-oriented companies, can create significant value through the practice of authenticity.

Studies conducted by Ernst & Young on engagement teams globally show that when employees rate highly their ability “to be fully themselves” in



their work environment, it results in greater client satisfaction ratings and stronger client retention.<sup>16</sup>

## **Authenticity Creates Engagement in Organizations** •

According to a 2014 KPMG study, a staggering 93 percent of respondents said their organizations are considering or currently undergoing business transformation.<sup>17</sup> Restructuring is the new normal. It creates fear and stress in organizations, undermining employee engagement, yet restructuring successfully requires high engagement—a tough paradox for leaders to hold. Authentic behaviors by leaders are the key to operating in this paradox.

The complexity of business and speed of change in virtually every industry today requires the full engagement of each employee. Decisions can no longer be made at the very top of organizations. Traditional hierarchies just aren't equipped to handle how nimble most organizations need to be to respond to opportunities and threats. We are increasingly working in virtual teams spread around the globe. This makes it tougher to influence, rapidly implement decisions, and create strong and consistent corporate cultures just from the top.

The spread of social media creates transparency into the organization at a level we've never witnessed before. Now, a single employee having a bad day can create significant risk to a company's reputation through a 140-character tweet or a video gone viral. Reputation impacts consumer and investor decisions. Increasingly, more of those investors are studying the Trust Index Employee Survey to assess the culture in organizations.<sup>18</sup>

The bottom line is that the motivation and engagement of each employee counts. Many organizations have put proactive initiatives in place to measure employee engagement. The needle is moving north, but not fast enough. Employee engagement measures the degree to which we are excited about the work we're doing, whether we feel connected with our coworkers, and whether our bosses care for our well-being and success.

Gallup has conducted employee engagement surveys for over thirty years with research involving over 17 million employees in 192 companies in

49 industries and 34 countries. Interestingly, over those three decades, the numbers have remained consistent with only 13 percent of employees engaged, 63 percent not engaged, and 24 percent actively disengaged.<sup>19</sup>

This last group is comprised of people who show up to work every day with such low morale that they actually undermine the efforts of their coworkers and the organization at large.

***Companies are actually better off paying that 24 percent to stay home!***

Employee engagement directly impacts the bottom line. The latest Gallup research conducted in 2012, which included over 1.4 million employees, showed that the top quartile of the 192 companies with the highest employee engagement numbers have:<sup>20</sup>

- ▲ 37 percent less absenteeism
- ▲ 25 percent lower turnover
- ▲ 28 percent less shrinkage
- ▲ 10 percent higher customer metrics
- ▲ 21 percent higher productivity
- ▲ 22 percent higher profitability

### **Authenticity Contributes to Talent Retention**

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All this research in the motivation and engagement of workers shows that leaders who are trustworthy and transparent truly do make a difference—even more so in times of crisis and change. These leaders create organizational cultures not by what they say but by what they practice.

Jennifer Hayes, partner at consulting firm Bain & Company (which has been recognized as one of the best companies to work for in multiple surveys), talked with me about the importance of great talent:

Our number one priority is driving great results for our clients. Our people are the most important driver for that. What we have found is that when people are truly inspired by those they are led by, it makes a huge difference to talent



retention and client value creation. We can be working 100 hours a week and yet these teams that are truly inspired are not complaining because they are connected to what's important. The teams that create the greatest value for our clients are also the ones where they report the highest ratings in terms of team experience.

In today's business environment, where corporate restructurings are the new normal, it is very easy to live each day stressed out and worried about job certainty. It's an environment that creates disengagement and undermines loyalty and commitment and trust in leadership. Particularly in this context of constant upheaval and change, the practices of authentic leaders allow them to create trust and connection and to lower the collective blood pressure in the organization.

### **Authentic Leaders Bring Out the Best in People in the Most Challenging Environments**

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They are able to do this in several ways. By being “real” themselves (their willingness to accept and show who they really are), they encourage others to do the same, creating cultures of trust and dependability. They slow down to connect with people. They are curious about the talents of each individual, what energizes them, and where they can make the best contributions. In tough situations, they are able to have authentic conversations with people and give direct feedback with both power and grace. The bottom line is that we really need the evolution of the leader at every level in the organization.

I will leave you with my dream for this movement for authenticity in the workplace. Imagine a workplace where amid all the change and turmoil:

- ▲ We can have open, transparent conversations with colleagues to make tough decisions in a trusting environment.
- ▲ We are able to work through tough dilemmas to align our personal values with what must be done for the greater good.

- ▲ We can create workplaces where *each person* brings his or her best thinking, creativity, engagement, and contributions despite the uncertainty of corporate restructuring and jobs.
- ▲ We can collaborate with people anytime and anywhere despite competition for resources and differences in ideas—simply because we trust each other.
- ▲ We can be agile in responding to the often conflicting demands of multiple stakeholders because we ourselves are willing to flex while being rooted in our values.
- ▲ Authenticity practices become a performance enabler.

My dream is that we can create this together. Will you join me in dreaming this dream for your workplace?

### ***The Three Big Ideas from This Chapter***

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1. The discord between who we are and the image we create for others slowly kills our *aliveness*. When we ignore or suppress parts of ourselves, it lowers our sense of fulfillment, effectiveness, and unique contribution. We may achieve success but not feel fulfilled because we are not living out the important truths about ourselves.
2. Human beings are wired for authenticity. Authentic connections with others build the health of our vagus nerve, which connects our brains to our hearts, lungs, and digestive tracts. People with high vagal tone are typically happier, less stressed, have better memories, are better able to focus their attention, and have increased brainpower.
3. Now, more than ever, organizations need authentic leaders at every level who are honest, transparent, and trusted. Authentic leaders are



at the root of trust, engagement, innovation, great client experiences, talent growth—and ultimately, results.

### ***Questions to Ask Yourself***

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1. What's exciting to me about being my real self?
2. When I'm grounded, centered, and operating from my core, what does it feel like inside? What is my impact on others when I am being my authentic self?
3. Who is the most authentic leader I have encountered in my career? What impact did his or her *being* have on me? What did he or she do that demonstrated authenticity? How did he or she bring out the best in me?
4. What is my dream for myself as a fully expressed, authentic leader in my world? What impact will this have in my relationships? In the workplace?

### ***Experiments to Try Today***

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Our ability to be authentic is rooted in our ability to fully see and appreciate who we are right now, including our strengths and our flaws. Here are three experiments to fully see and accept yourself as you are.

1. Stand in front of a mirror. Take in who is looking at you. Start with the physical. Look into your own eyes with curiosity, compassion, appreciation, and gratitude for at least sixty seconds. Looking at your physical features, notice what you don't like and find something to appreciate about it. For example, these days, I often see gray hair as I look in the mirror. When I stand in gratitude, I can see that my gray hair is well earned. I say, "I am grateful for my gray hair. They have come with greater self-acceptance and the ability to not take myself so seriously." Do this exercise for twenty-one days, and you will notice a shift in how you relate to yourself.

2. Finish your mirror exercise by standing tall and saying with conviction, “I am learning to be grateful for who I am right now.” Repeat this five times.
3. Start a gratitude journal. Start by writing in your journal what you’re grateful for about yourself in this moment. You can write what else you’re grateful for, as well. Neuroscience is helping us learn how a gratitude practice helps strengthen our immune system as well as our overall feelings of well-being and health.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

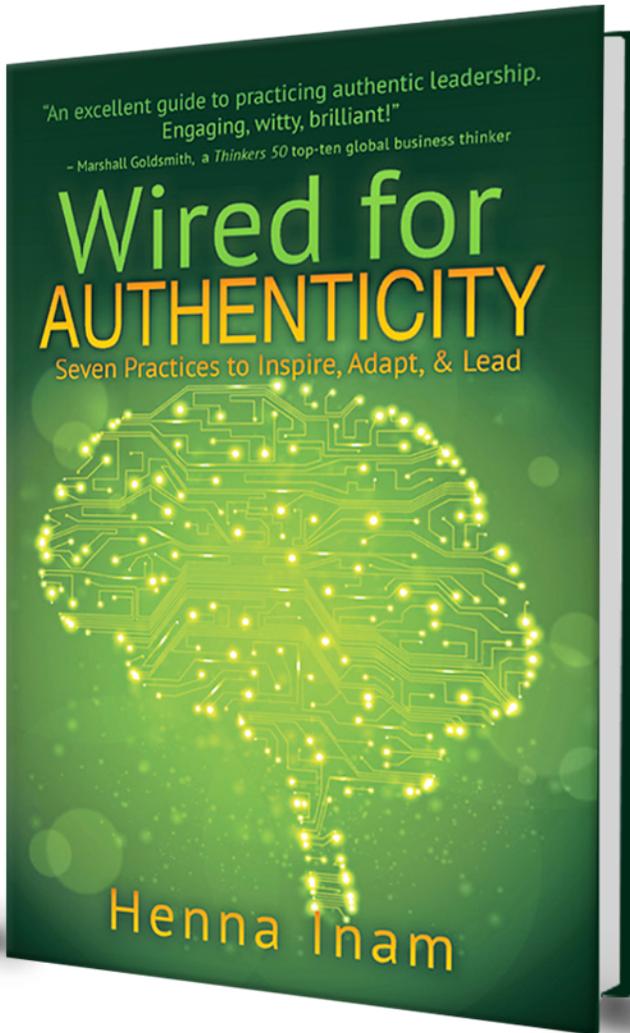
Henna Inam is a sought after speaker, successful author and CEO of Transformational Leadership Inc. Her book *Wired for Authenticity* (May, 2015) serves as a touchstone for leaders who seek both authenticity and adaptability in a 24/7 dynamic, fast-paced workplace. Her unique workshops, tools and online community help managers create innovative, engaged teams that drive measurable results.

Henna and her team at Transformational Leadership. partner globally with Fortune 500 companies to deliver executive coaching, leadership development and team workshops. Clients include Coca-Cola, Google, Johnson & Johnson, Novartis, CNN and Bank of America. Prior to starting her company, Henna worked for 20 years at Procter & Gamble and Novartis, including C-suite and P&L management roles. She has lived or worked in seven countries across North America, Europe, Asia and Africa.

Henna is a leadership blogger for Forbes and is an organizer for TEDxWomen. She is on the Board of Counselors for the Carter Center.

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