

Living Full -- Living True: The Authentic Life

by Suzanne Zoglio

In the early stages of life we are often focused on pleasing others...parents, teachers, bosses, and spouses. In an effort to get our needs met, we learn to play by other people's rules. But as we mature, we become more competent, independent, and able to meet our own needs. We are then less motivated to do what others want us to do. We tire of keeping up appearances, and care much less about what other people think. We no longer want to chase someone else's dream; we want to live our own dreams. In short, we come to grips with the idea of being our own person. Now we just want to live a life that feels right. We want to be free of inner turmoil and outer chaos. Instead of approval, we are more likely to seek a sense of inner peace...the kind that accompanies authentic living.

I suspect that you can probably name several people who have taken considerable risks in order to lead more authentic lives. Perhaps you know someone who turned down a promotion to have more time with her family, forfeited a steady income to start up a new business, or left an unhappy marriage facing the firm disapproval of friends and family. Maybe you know someone who started a family after forty, got a high school diploma in midlife, or took early retirement in order to work full-time as a volunteer.

When you fashion a life where the decisions you make and the actions you take are considered, deliberate, and in harmony with what's important to you, you are living an authentic life. It is not necessarily a life that others admire or think is right for you, but a life that you know in your heart is right for you. It may not be a life that has been your habit, but it is a life that makes you greet each day with enthusiasm and sleep peacefully at night.

The more honest you can be -- with yourself and with others -- about who you are and what you need to be fulfilled, the more likely you are to create a life that's right for you. But excavating your truth may seem like a daunting task. With all the busyness of our everyday lives, self-reflection may seem self-indulgent. "I don't have time to sit around contemplating my navel," you might think. "I've got responsibilities to meet."

But that's the irony. If we move as fast as we can down a path that leads us away from our true desires, we end up backtracking anyway, or going around in circles searching for the place that feels like home. When we don't take the time to tune in to what's best for us next, we actually waste time with many false starts and journeys that might otherwise be avoided. An authentic life is built from the inside out...with attention to one's inner wisdom. Perhaps you could simply begin each day with a question: "What is important to me?" Or spend 20 minutes in meditation each morning, letting your inner voice surface. You might try 10 minutes of journaling every day for week, and then see what wisdom surfaces. Maybe you could take one weekend a month and retreat to nature for an hour or so where you could reflect on what kind of person you have become and what kind of person you aspire to be. To live authentically you need not spend two weeks on a mountaintop in Tibet (although that might be terrific too). You simply have to make time on a regular basis for self-reflection. Tune in to who you are, what you want, and what is best for you next. The rest will unfold.

Once you are clear about what resonates for you and you align your outer behavior with that inner truth, your life will flow in a direction that is exquisitely meaningful. You will not expend energy on denial, survival, or suppression. Instead, you will gain energy from insight, evolution, and expression...from being authentic. When your inner and outer worlds are congruent, the pieces all seem to fit...everything clicks. If you know at your core that you are living a life that is aligned with your purpose, filled with what you love, and supporting your growth, you are living an authentic life. Your outer behavior is fueled by your inner truth, and you lead a life of dignity and self-respect. There is no pretense to keep up. What you do reflects what you believe, how you feel, and what you know.

When you live authentically, you know what you stand for and make conscious choices to honor those values. Your highest priorities consistently get the lion's share of your time, and your actions are consistent with your beliefs. If you say fitness, family, meditation, and service are important to you, you make time for them in your life. When you are complimented, you feel personally validated because it is

the "real" you that is being appreciated, not a "persona" that you play very well. The energy that fuels an extraordinary life is harnessed from within your heart. On the other hand, if you live in a way that just doesn't feel right, you might be concealing or ignoring parts of yourself that long to be acknowledged.

Perhaps you feel tired, empty, or depressed because you are draining energy as you push your inner desires to the rear of your awareness. Denying inner truth is like trying to keep the lid on a pressure cooker that has built up too much steam. Try as you will, you can't contain it. If you know in your heart that you're not using your most precious gifts or pursuing your dreams, you will not feel passion for the path that you are on. A certain numbness may even take hold, where you go through the motions and even perform pretty well, but at the end of the day you do not feel full. Rather it feels as though something is missing...and it is...a special part of you. To live authentically is to make a difference with the gifts we've been given and to follow the dreams that ignite our passion.

Being authentic also requires the courage to face personal truth. That truth might be how you really feel about yourself, what fears are blocking your success, which habits are perpetuating the life you have, or what dreams you have suppressed. Until you choose your actions based on emotional awareness, you will not experience harmony. You may dance as fast as you can, distracting yourself from the inner work that needs to be done, but frenzied activity will not fill that void you perceive. To increase inner peace we must find the courage to examine and embrace all aspects of ourselves...the light, the dark, the new, the old.

To see if enhancing authenticity in your life might add to your joy, see if the following statements ring true for you.

- ▶ You are skilled and successful in your career, but not doing what you love
- ▶ You don't know what you want, but you DO know it's not the life you have
- ▶ You want close relationships, but escape to work, food, or alcohol, instead of developing your own esteem and emotional aptitude.
- ▶ You know what changes would make your life more meaningful, but still find many excuses for not making the changes just now.

If you related to any of the previous statements, give some thought to what would bring your inner and outer worlds into finer alignment. Taking more time to tune in to your inner voice? Examining your gifts and how you might use them to make a difference?

Facing your fears about taking a leap toward what you really want? Whatever it is, consider the time and effort as a worthwhile investment. The return on your investment is to live as you wish and have no regrets in the end.