

The Three Keys to Authenticity

Have you ever had a moment when you tried to project an image that wasn't real and failed? I did.

Based on circumstances early in my career, I sought a job change from the training industry into consumer products. Why? The training role I had was exciting and glamorous at first. I was mentored and trained by some of the best in the industry to make crowd-pleasing presentations, sell dynamically, and exercise effective human relations skills. I often spoke at local civic clubs or non-profit organizations to polish my newly developed abilities and generate business leads. The role was fun, but it wasn't paying the bills. With a young family and a baby daughter, I needed to find a more stable position.

Back in the day, jobs were posted in the newspaper help-wanted ads. I looked at the paper every day for a new job opportunity. I finally saw a territory sales role with The Hershey Company. "Who doesn't like chocolate, right? It should be an easier product to sell than training," I said to myself. So, I sent my resume to the address listed in the ad and received a call to schedule an interview a few weeks later.

I prepped for the interview and thought it would be a slam dunk. I had consumer product sales experience from an earlier job. Combined with my newly developed skills, I thought I would nail the interview.

I arrived at the hotel and stepped into the interview room. Wanting to portray a very polished image and look the part, I dressed in my best suit, tie and shoes. That's when I met Rick and Al. Over a couple of hours, I successfully answered their questions, conveyed my skill set, why I was an excellent fit

for the role, and wooed them with my training background. They gave me buying signals, and I walked away from the interview confident that the job was mine.

The next day, I received the anticipated call for a second interview. I was so excited. I prepped just like I did for the first meeting. I remember walking into the hotel interview room and being greeted by Rick and Al again. They asked the first question, and I went into presentation mode, mustering all of my training and skills to impress them.

Rick interrupted, "Preston, hold on. Can you lasso the bullsh**?"

"Huh?" I thought.

Rick continued, "We believe you have all of the skills to be successful in our organization except one thing. You seem too polished, almost plastic. You communicate well, but you're not connecting with us. Your approach is inauthentic. To be successful with customers, you need to be real. And, you seem a touch arrogant; it's all about you."

I was baffled. Rick's comment cut to the quick and shook my soul. I worked so hard to develop my skills and wanted to impress them during the interview. I needed the job so badly. "I've blown it," I thought.

Rick said, "I'm not sure we want to continue, but I want to ask you one last question... When's the last time you did something for someone else?"

I paused for what seemed like an eternity and began to sweat. I thought to myself, "I'd better stop pretending, drop my guard and quit trying to portray a perfect image with them or I'd be out of the running."

Then, I told Rick and Al about how my wife recently went through childbirth delivery complications and surgery. I

shared how hard it was to see my wife incapacitated and the challenge of caring for our baby daughter in the midst of it all. My voice cracked as I told the story about serving my young family in a time of need. I was anything but polished. I took a risk and was vulnerable with Rick and Al.

After hearing the story, Rick smiled and said, "That's what I was looking for. I was wondering if there was any humility inside of you. You are real, and customers will like you if you let the person we just saw out."

The great news is that I got the job and was successful while at Hershey. I learned to be authentic and connect with customers. More importantly, Rick became a trusted mentor and friend over the years. I appreciated his challenge to be authentic.

Authenticity is the quality of being believable and genuine. It's a critical building block to trust. Folks are attracted to someone real because they feel comfortable, safe, and respected. If people know and like you, they will believe you. So, how do you develop authenticity? Here are three foolproof ways:

1. **Stop Pretending.** People can sniff out inauthenticity. Be yourself and not what you think others want you to be. Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself; everyone else is taken."
2. **Let Your Guard Down.** Vulnerability is the key to connecting with others. If you're open and honest with people, they will like and trust you.
3. **Quit Trying to Be Perfect.** Don't be obsessed with your image or reputation. Embrace failures, brokenness, and hardships and share how you've grown from your challenging experiences.

Do you struggle with authenticity? If so, how does it impact your relationships? Do you have trouble connecting with others? What would it look like if you stopped pretending, let

your guard down, and quit trying to be perfect? My challenge to you is to *lasso the bullsh***, and you'll become an authentic leader.

Want to discover more about becoming an authentic leader others will gladly follow? Visit my website, prestonpoore.com, today!

Cheers,

Preston