

LAXMI EASWARAN



The Authenticity Gap Handbook

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INTRODUCTION

The Cost of Playing It Safe



Sarah had built something remarkable. Five years of consistent results, innovative solutions that transformed outcomes, and a track record that spoke for itself. Yet when the big opportunity came the promotion, the partnership, the spotlight, she was overlooked again.

This time for someone with half her experience.

"I don't understand," she told me in our first coaching session.

"I do everything right.

Why am I invisible?"

The answer wasn't about her skills, her work ethic, or even politics.

It was about authenticity.

Or more precisely, the lack of it.

The Invisible Prison We Build

Here's what most high-performers don't realize:

You can't get recognized for who you are if you're not actually showing who you are.

During the course of life we learned that our authentic self, our real thoughts, our natural communication style, our unique perspectives, wasn't quite right for the world, or the professional world.

So we started editing. Moderating. Conforming. We told ourselves it was strategic. Professional. Smart.

But what we actually created was an authenticity gap, the distance between who we really are and who we show up as in our work and leadership.

And that gap is costing you everything.

The Assessment

Take the 60-Second Authenticity Audit

1

In important conversations or meetings, do you edit your ideas before sharing them, or stay quiet altogether?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

2

When you accomplish something significant, do you downplay it or deflect the credit?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

3

Do you wait for explicit permission or validation before taking action on your ideas?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

4

Do you mirror other people's communication styles instead of using your natural voice?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

5

When you disagree with something, do you stay silent to avoid conflict or judgment?

☐ Always ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely ☐ Never

Calculate Your Score

Give yourself:

- 0 points for "Always"
- 1 point for "Sometimes"
- 2 points for "Rarely"
- 3 points for "Never"

Now let's see what your score reveals.

Understanding Your Authenticity Profile

0-5 Points: The Invisible Expert

You have the expertise, the experience, and the capability, but you're operating behind a fortress of self-protection. There's a core belief system running in the background that tells you the "real you" isn't safe, acceptable, or credible enough.



What this looks like in real life:

- You rehearse what you'll say in important conversations but often don't speak up
- You watch others get credit or opportunities for ideas similar to yours
- People are surprised when they learn about your background or accomplishments
- You feel exhausted from constantly monitoring and adjusting yourself
- You hold back from putting yourself out there, whether that's for speaking opportunities, thought leadership, or visibility

The underlying belief: Usually rooted in some version of "If they see the real me, they'll reject me" or "I need to be perfect to be accepted."

The cost: You're being systematically overlooked for opportunities you're absolutely qualified for. Decision-makers, potential clients, partners, and stakeholders don't know what you're truly capable of because you've never shown them.

6-10 Points: The Selective Authentic

You've mastered the art of situational authenticity. You show up as yourself... when it feels safe. With certain people. In specific contexts. But you're constantly running calculations about risk.

What this looks like in real life:

- You're authentic with peers but not with senior stakeholders or high-value clients
- You share ideas in small settings but not on bigger platforms
- You're yourself in private but wear a "professional mask" in public
- You have moments of visibility followed by periods of retreat
- You edit your content, your message, your presence before putting it out into the world



The underlying belief: "I can be myself, but only when conditions are perfect" or "Authenticity is risky—I need to be strategic about when I show it."

The cost: This half-visibility keeps you in the "doing good work" zone but blocks you from the recognition, influence, and impact you're capable of. People experience you as competent but not memorable. Capable but not compelling. Reliable but not remarkable.

11-15 Points: The Emerging Leader

You're already showing up more authentically than most people in your space, and others notice. But there are still specific pockets, certain situations, particular audiences, high-stakes moments, where old protective patterns kick in.

What this looks like in real life:

- You're confident in your zone of genius but doubt yourself in unfamiliar territory
- You advocate for others or your team more easily than you advocate for yourself
- You're authentic until the stakes get really high, then you retreat to safety
- You have visibility but sense you're still holding something back
- You build strong relationships but struggle to leverage them for your own growth



The underlying belief: "I'm mostly okay as I am, but there are parts of me that still need to be managed or hidden."

The cost: You're close to a breakthrough. It's about identifying which specific situations trigger your self-editing and unpacking the belief that's driving it. Once you do, you'll step into the kind of presence and influence that creates lasting impact and opens doors.

Why the Authenticity Gap Exists

Understanding your score is step one. But here's what you really need to know:

This isn't your fault.

The authenticity gap doesn't develop because you're weak or flawed. It develops because you're smart.

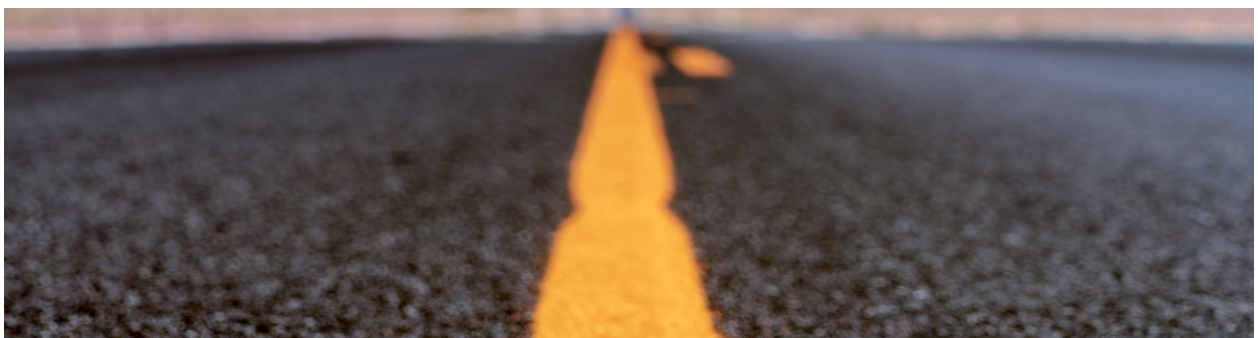
At some point, maybe in childhood, maybe early in your career, maybe during a specific experience that left a mark, you learned that being fully yourself came with consequences.

Maybe you were told you were "too much" or "too intense."
Maybe you shared an idea and were shut down or ridiculed.

Maybe you watched someone else be authentic and get punished for it.
Maybe you were raised in a culture or family system where conformity was survival.
Maybe you were the only person who looked like you, sounded like you, or thought like you in the room.

So you adapted. You learned to read the room, moderate your energy, edit your thoughts, and manage other people's comfort levels.

And it worked. You stayed safe. You avoided conflict. You kept moving forward. But now that same protective mechanism that once served you is the very thing blocking your growth.



The Real Cost of Inauthenticity

Let's get specific about what this authenticity gap is actually costing you:

Opportunity stagnation: When you hide your real capabilities, people can't see what you're capable of. They choose the person they know, not the person you're hiding. Promotions go elsewhere. Partnerships don't materialize. Speaking invitations don't come.

Exhaustion: Performing a version of yourself all day, every day is cognitively and emotionally draining. The fatigue you feel isn't from your work—it's from the constant self-monitoring.

Missed connections: People connect with authenticity. When you're not showing up as yourself, you're not building the kind of relationships that open doors, create opportunities, or turn into meaningful partnerships.

Impact limitation: Your unique perspective, your specific way of seeing problems, your natural strengths—those are your competitive advantage. When you suppress them, you suppress your ability to make a real difference. Your work becomes transactional instead of transformational.

Revenue and compensation gaps: Authenticity and income are directly linked. People who show up fully tend to negotiate better, charge appropriately, advocate for themselves more effectively, and be seen as more valuable. When you hide, you undercharge and under-earn.

Influence ceiling: You can't lead from behind a mask. Real influence comes from people knowing who you are, what you stand for, and what makes you different. Without authenticity, you hit a ceiling on your ability to inspire, mobilize, or create change.

Loss of self: Perhaps most damaging, when you spend years performing a version of yourself, you can start to lose touch with who you actually are. The mask becomes so familiar you forget you're wearing one.

The Path Forward: Closing the Gap

Here's the good news: Your authentic voice isn't something you need to create or develop.

It's already there. You just need to stop suppressing it.

But that's easier said than done, right?

Here's how to start:

Step 1: Name the Belief

Every authenticity gap has a limiting belief at its core. What's yours?

- "If I speak up, people will think I'm arrogant"
- "I need to have all the answers before I contribute"
- "Being myself is too risky"
- "I'm not [senior /experienced /credentialed/polished] enough"
- "People won't take me seriously if they see the real me"
- "My success depends on fitting in, not standing out"
- "Being too visible makes me a target"

Write it down. Get specific. This belief has been running your behavior unconsciously.

Bringing it into consciousness is the first step to changing it.



STEP 2: QUESTION THE EVIDENCE

Is this belief actually true? Or is it a story you've been telling yourself?

Look for counter-evidence:

- When have you been authentic and it went well?
- Who in your life accepts and values the real you?
- What would someone who loves you say about this belief?
- What opportunities have you seen go to people who were unapologetically themselves?

Often, we're operating on outdated data. The belief was true once, in one context, and we've been applying it everywhere ever since.

STEP 3: RUN SMALL EXPERIMENTS

You don't have to step onto a stage as your fully authentic self tomorrow. Start small.

- Share one unfiltered thought in your next important conversation
- Use your natural communication style in a message instead of over-editing
- Advocate for yourself in one small way this week
- Say "I disagree" or "I see it differently" once, respectfully, when you genuinely do
- Post something true to who you are, even if it's not perfectly polished
- Lead a meeting or conversation in your natural style instead of mirroring others

Notice what happens. Collect data. Most of the time, you'll discover the consequences you feared don't materialize.



STEP 4: FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Authenticity is easier in the presence of people who value it.

Who in your world already shows up authentically?

Who gives themselves permission to be real?

Spend more time with them.

Their permission to be real will help you give yourself the same permission.

STEP 5: WORK WITH A GUIDE

If you've been operating behind an authenticity gap for years, it can be hard to see your own blind spots or challenge your own beliefs effectively.

This is exactly what identity-based transformation coaching addresses, helping you identify and shift the core belief that are keeping you small, so you can show up fully and get the recognition, impact, and compensation you deserve.



Remember Sarah from the beginning?



Six months after we started working together, she stepped into an opportunity that had seemed impossible before, not the one she'd been passed over for, but something bigger that aligned with who she actually was.

What changed wasn't her skills or her output.

What changed was her willingness to be seen.

She started speaking up with her real perspective, not the sanitized version.

She stopped downplaying her accomplishments and unique approach.

She brought her natural communication style to her work and presence.

She advocated for herself and her ideas without apology.

And suddenly, she wasn't invisible anymore.

The expertise was always there. The capability was always there.

What was missing was the courage to stop hiding it.

Your Next Step

Look at your score from the audit again.

What is that number really telling you?

Not about your skills or your worth, but about how much of yourself you're willing to let the world see.

Because here's the truth: **The world doesn't need another person playing small to make others comfortable. The world needs you – the real you – showing up fully.**

Your authentic voice, your unique perspective, your specific way of being, that's not something to manage or moderate.

That's your advantage.

The question is: Are you ready to stop hiding it?



If you're ready to close your authenticity gap and step into the recognition, impact, and compensation you deserve, let's talk.

Let's explore what's possible when you stop performing and start showing up as who you really are.

You're invited to book a free call and explore this together.

Schedule Your Call