

Workbook Chapter Sixteen

Take Responsibility for Your Life

Self-Assessment Tools:

HOW THE FALSE SELF OPERATES IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

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We all operate out of our False Self from time to time. For example, if someone asks you, "*How are you?*" you generally are not going to tell them the whole truth because you know they really don't want to know. It is just a social convention that we have adopted when we greet each other. When people ask me, "*How are you?*" I typically reply, "*I'm grateful.*" This is usually true for me and if they are really interested, they can ask me for what I am grateful.

Another common way that people use their False Self is to avoid conflict with others. This is the most common way that people handle potential conflicts in their life. I decided if I had a conflict with someone, I would only confront that person if one of the following three conditions existed:

1. I have a contract with this person, who has asked me to confront them if I see a certain behavior that they are wanting to eliminate.
2. If another person gets in my face, meaning they cross some personal boundary that I have.
3. If I would like to be closer to them. Avoiding conflict creates separation and addressing the conflict leads to more closeness.

What are the hazards of living out of your False Self? In this book, I describe how living out of your False Self can get you into lots of trouble in parenting your children, or relating with your spouse or friends and at work. In all situations involving parenting, intimate relationships and at work you have a choice about which "*you*" will show up.

The important first step in recovering your True Self is to realize that you actually have a True Self different from your False Self and you understand the difference. You might believe the Self you present to others is the only one you have, which by reading this book you will realize is not true. For most people, your True Self is your wounded inner child who was cast aside due to a lack of positive support.

You may have to build a relationship with your inner child in order to reclaim your True Self.

I grew up in a narcissistic family whose chief worry seemed to be, "*what will the neighbors think?*" They constantly measured what they said or did by the possible reaction of others. It is hard to take responsibility for your behavior, if you are operating out of your False Self. The motivation is to be what we think others want us to be.

In narcissistic families, parents main concern is not letting those outside the family to see what was really going on inside the family. They also. Had to make sure their children never would do or say anything that would reflect poorly on them as parents. That is a classic narcissistic stance. As an adult long after I left my family of origin, I wrote a book that contained two sentences that they thought reflected poorly on them.

As a result, my mother totally disowned me for three years before finally shifting out of that stance. The price of belonging to my family was to always provide perfect narcissistic mirroring for them. I found out what the consequences were for not doing that all the time.

I recall an incident that happened when I was 8 years old. My parents and I were invited to have dinner at couple friends of them. After I had finished my meal, they lingered over their meal talking and sharing stories. I started to get up from my seat at the table and my mother quickly said to me, "*Barry, ask to be excused from the table.*" In all my innocence, I replied, "*Well, I never heard of that one before.*" My parents were mortified and I was puzzled about their over-reaction to my innocent comment. Their friends thought it was cute.

This reminds me that I sometimes took honesty to an extreme. I remember when Janae and I started our relationship, I insisted that we each share our sexual history with each other, including what we each learned from our prior sexual relationships before we had sex together. Janae thought this was pretty weird, but she complied.

Throughout our relationship we were committed to coming clean with each other about our fears and our wants and needs. I insisted that Janae ask me directly for anything she wanted or needed from me. I would say when I realized

she was not being totally direct and instead complaining, *"You know, I flunked mind-reading 101 in college. Please tell me what you are wanting or needing from me."*

When I started teaching high school history, I was still very shy. It was very difficult for me to get up in front of a classroom of teenagers and to teach them what I knew about history. I think what helped me the most was that I totally loved history and I could reach into that place inside of me and find that love of history and do my job. Gradually, I got more comfortable being in front of others.

MY EPIPHANY

When I was teaching a class at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay where I was also the Director of Counseling, one day my Student Administrator at the Counseling Center and also a student in this class approached me while we were at the Counseling Center.

He said, *"I don't know if you are aware of it or not, but you are a much different person when you are teaching our class than when you are here at the Counseling Center."* I asked him to tell me more. He added, *"You seem very rigid and uptight when you are teaching and I don't see much of that here at the Counseling Center."*

I got to thinking about what Dave had told me and I began to realize that I was not being as genuine as I wanted to be when I was teaching. I was in a role that was not genuinely me. So, I thought about what I could do to be more authentic and get out of the role as *"the instructor."* I still I wanted to them to know about the subject I was teaching, which happened to be Social Change Theory.

So, the next class session, I arrived early and arranged the chairs in a circle. Then I sat in one of the chairs with my head down so as not to make eye contact with any of the students. I continued to look down jotting some-thing on a pad in front of me, as the students arrived. After some uncomfortable silence one student said, *"Well, I don't think he is going to teach us today, maybe we should just leave?"* Then another student

said, "Well we were assigned to read several chapters in the textbook, so why don't we just start discussing what we read?"

They all agreed to stay and discuss the reading assignment, and when appropriate, I would enter into the discussion as a participant, not as the teacher. I continued teaching this class in this manner for the rest of the semester and the students rated it as one of the best classes they had ever taken.

After that experience, I gradually changed my teaching methods so I could be more genuine. I employed lots of experiential learning in my classes and I always insisted that we arrange the chairs in a circle.

HOW I LEARNED THE POWER OF BEING AUTHENTIC

While I was teaching at the University of Colorado-Colorado Springs, I taught a course in Conflict Resolution to the M. A. students. It started as an elective, but after teaching it for several years, the students insisted that the course be a required course for all students. I was aware of how much the students changed as a result of taking this class. So, I decided to do research on why this much change was happening to students who took the class.

I designed and validated a pre-post self-inventory about stages of consciousness around people's beliefs about conflict resolution. It was based on the work of Robert Kegan at Harvard who wrote a book titled, *"In Over Our Heads."*¹ The book looked at how people moved through five stages of consciousness. So, I validated my instrument to measure beliefs about conflict that was tied directly to the five stages of consciousness in Kegan's theory.

Because it was a required course, only one-half of the students took the course in one semester. This gave me a control group consisting of half of the students, who

were not taking the course in that given semester. Well, the pre-post analysis of variance results showed that those who took the course had shifted their consciousness significantly when compared to those who had not taken the course. The probability beyond chance of this happening was .0001 or one in one thousand.

However, this result did not tell me what in the class produced these changes. In order to determine this, I held focus groups with those who had completed the class. I asked them if they could identify what happened in this course that had the most direct effect on their change in belief about conflict. A summary of what they told me was three-fold:

1. They said I personalized the content so they got to apply what they were learning to help them resolve their current conflicts instead of just role-playing how to resolve a conflict.
2. They pointed to the experiential nature of the course where I broke them into small groups of two or three to process what they were learning.
3. Finally, they said it was my authenticity that made the most difference. I talked about my own conflicts and how I resolved them.

This showed me the power of being authentic in whatever I am teaching or writing. Since that time, I have always been very transparent when teaching and writing. This book is no exception. I plan to share what I have learned about my own False Self and how I was able to move more into my True Self. This book covers the main areas of people's lives where the False Self typically shows up. These include parenting your children, being in a close relationship and on the job, as well as collective realms like politics and the fall of Empires.

Jordan Peterson states that the main reason why Empires fall is not because of a ruthless and autocratic leader. Instead, according to Peterson, it is the inauthenticity of the citizens these leaders serve. Yes, according to Peterson, the False Self can be so powerful a collective force that it can bring down an Empire.

He writes the following in his book, *The Twelve Rules for Life*. He wrote, "*The prideful, rational mind with its certainty, enamored of its own brilliance, is easily tempted to ignore error, and to sweep dirt under the rug. Kierkegaard said this mode of Being is 'inauthentic.' An inauthentic person continues to perceive and act in ways his own experience has demonstrated false. He does not speak with his own voice.*"

*"Did what I want happen? No. Then my aim or my methods were wrong. I still have something to learn. That is the voice of authenticity... The voice of inauthenticity: The world is unfair. People are jealous and too stupid to understand. It is the fault of something or someone else. It is not too far from there to 'they should be stopped' or 'they must be hurt' or 'they must be destroyed.' When you hear about something incomprehensibly brutal, such ideas have manifested themselves. The sins of the inauthentic individual compound themselves and corrupt the state."*²

That is what I see currently happening in this country. Without an understanding of the hazards of living out of their False Self, people act in ways that undermine the civil society and play into the hands of autocratic leaders. If the citizenry were able to be more authentic in their interactions with each other, there would be more stability and less chaos.

Even the people who are supposed to be leading the way on getting accurate information to the general public on how to effectively stay safe during this pandemic have fallen into communicating out of their

False Self.

Case Example:

Bill was a very depressed young man when I first met him. He had flunked out of college after his first semester. He partied most of his first semester and was out drinking often. He did not study and was overwhelmed with being on his own first the first time. He was clearly a “failure to launch” kid. He was now living in his parent’s basement. Most of the time he was playing video games and drinking. He was into music and I connected with him on this topic. We compared some of the musical groups we liked to listen to. He also played guitar and during one session, I had him play a piece he had learned. Basically, I became the functional father that he needed.

At first, he tried to blame his unsuccessful attempt at college on his parents. I refused to work with him on that and he shifted. I got him to stop drinking and look for a job. He did stop drinking and found a part-time job that at least helped him to structure some of his time. I kept working with him using my four-step model and getting him mobilized to get out of his depressed state.

Finally, he applied to another college, one closer to his home town and near where his parents lived and he got accepted. I helped him structure what his first week on campus might look like and how he would resist any and all attempts to go back to alcohol. He made a very successful transition this time and got with some classmates who helped him make a good adjustment this time. The last time I talked with him, he was doing well. He was making good decisions and connecting with other classmates I believe he experienced a successful launch.

