

Express Your Authentic Self in the Workplace

Brief Summary

Are you able to be **authentic** and share your beliefs at work? Or, do you actively and knowingly alter your external stance (on your personal life, on DEI, and other topics) from that of your true beliefs in order to feel accepted by your peers? The behaviors of managers and colleagues can significantly impact your willingness to be honest and open in sharing your views.

When an individual is unable to be authentic in the workplace, they feel a need to “**cover**”, meaning they feel pressure to downplay their differences in order to feel accepted by their peers. The energy spent covering takes away from job performance ; this “**emotional tax**” can take a heavy toll on employees, particularly people of color.

Note of caution: Authenticity does not mean saying everything you think. No one’s right to express themselves should come at the cost of disrespecting the identity of another.

Challenge

Some employees fear exclusion, retaliation, or negative consequences for expressing divergent opinions. Others fear this can happen simply because they hold different values, have a different sexual orientation or gender identity, are from a different race/ethnicity, come from a different background, experience personal challenges, or otherwise live a life that differs from the norm.

Covering in the workplace is common. Three out of four (75 percent) **research participants** state that they have covered their identity; and, surprisingly, half (50 percent) of straight white male respondents report hiding their authentic selves on the job. The impact is detrimental to individuals and workplaces.

Recommendation

When employees are able to express themselves **authentically**, their engagement and well-being increases.

Inclusive leadership enables your team to embrace differences, fosters a climate of dialogue and learning, and ensures freedom from negative consequences, criticism, judgment, or emotional tension. It's important to make space for conversations across differences with a focus on learning, not debating.

When leaders communicate their authentic (not performative) support for DEI, this unleashes authentic expression in many different ways.

Proposed Actions

1. Reflect on your personal values, beliefs, and identify. Note any areas of incongruence between your internal feelings and external expressions, and how that impacts you.
2. Build trusted relationships: Seek out safe and respectful spaces to have open and honest conversations where you can feel heard and supported.
3. Be courageous: take risks and express yourself honestly in safe spaces, without feeling the need to change your own beliefs to fit in. Tell your story to allow others to feel safe, too.
4. Practice active listening and speaking up in a respectful and non-confrontational manner that fosters dialogue instead of judgment to enable others to be authentic.
5. Learn how to build safe spaces for others and encourage the expression of ideas different from your own. Be open to feedback and constructive criticism.



About the Author

Betsy Bagley is Pulsely's Co-Founder and DEI Director.

Valued Guidance

To Read



Forbes: [5 Ways You Can Be More Authentic At Work](#)
HBR: [Communicating Authentically in a Virtual World](#)
Catalyst: [What Is Covering? \(Infographic\)](#)

To Watch / Listen



TED: [The Power of Vulnerability](#)
Stanford University: [Uncovering Authentic Leadership](#)
HBR: [What Does “Just Be Yourself” Really Look Like at Work?](#)

To Learn / Study



HBR: [The Authenticity Paradox](#)
Deloitte: [Uncovering talent. A new model of inclusion.](#)