

Authentic Relationships — 5-Question Exercise to Explore How You Show Up In Relationship

The focus of this article is to explore what it means to be authentic in the context of being single in the dating world and/or in the context of coaching singles.

My purpose here is to offer you some thoughts and ideas about authenticity and take you through some exercises that will support you to explore your own relation to, and experience of, authenticity and what it means to be authentic in relationship.

What I'm offering is simply what has worked for me and my clients. So there's no given that what I'm working with must work for you. In fact, if there's something that resonates with you, perhaps take it away with you for further exploration and leave behind anything that does not resonate with you.

For this experience, you'll need some paper, a writing instrument (or computer), your mind, heart, soul and your breath.

First, set your intention to be present for this exercise, fully, and let go of your day. Perhaps visualize a balloon and place your cares, concerns, problems, challenges in your balloon and when you're ready just allow your balloon to float up and away, leaving you free to be present in mind, body and spirit.

Sense your feet on the floor and notice your breathing. Then, take a few deep, deep breaths into your belly and make the sound AAH on the exhale. AAH is a primal sound that brings, relaxation, pleasure and letting go. This sound opens the heart, the lungs and helps to melt tension while contributing to an overall sense of well-being. So, take another deep breath or two, exhaling with AAH. Now, let's begin.

Since coaching, for me, is all about asking powerful and provocative questions. This exercise explores five questions around authenticity in relationship:

1. What is authenticity and what does authenticity mean to you?
2. What are you do-ing and how you are you be-ing when you're authentic?
3. What obstacles get in the way of your being authentic (e.g., beliefs, self-images, attitudes, emotions, etc.)?
4. On an authenticity scale (1-10), where would you say you are, generally, and where would you like to be in six months?
5. And what first step might you take to begin moving in that direction?

So, our first question:

What is authenticity and what does authenticity mean to you?

Take a minute and write down all the words and phrases that come to you when you think of the word authenticity. What comes up for you? Take a breath and go inside. Sense and feel your body as you do this part of the exercise.

So, what was that experience like for you? Was it completely mental? Were you aware of your body — feelings and sensations? Were you relaxed? Did you experience any discomfort? How is your breath? Is it deep and relaxed or shallow and tight? Did you notice any negative self-talk from your Inner Judge and Critic? If so, are these familiar judgments?

It might support you to be curious about what you noticed about yourself, especially if you experienced any discomfort or negative self-judgments. This can be food for further exploration about your relationship to authenticity.

The Cambridge Dictionary defines authentic as: something real and true, as the quality of being real or true:

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines authentic as conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features; as not false or imitation and as being true to one's own personality, spirit, or character and implies actual character not counterfeited, imitated, or adulterated; it also connotes definite origin from a source.

So, the operative words, for me, are essential source and spirit and character. That is, being authentic relates to the pure and innate qualities of the person I was when I was born, my true and real self, my essence, not an idea that I created and continually create with my ego mind.

So, it might be curious to explore how this loving, precious, pure and authentic child has morphed into adulthood and be curious about how we show up authentically in adulthood.

So, let's continue with our second question:

When in a dating situation, what are you "do-ing" and how are you "be-ing" when you're authentic?

What behaviors reflect your authenticity? Perhaps reflect on your words, your actions, your thoughts, your emotions and your feelings. How do these support your authenticity?

Take a minute and write down some of the ways you express your authenticity.

Here are some examples of do-ings and be-ings clients have come up with which express being authentic:

- consciously choosing to be with my partner exactly as he or she is, on the positivity rather than on obsessing on reasons why it can't work
- supporting my partner in his or her choices, desires and dreams and consciously supporting one another to grow and evolve as both individuals and as a "we"
- honoring my partner's truth, and uniqueness rather than focusing on possessing or fixing or changing him or her
- having the strength and courage to tell the truth especially when I believe it is unspeakable
- being consciously conscious and respectful of both my partner's boundaries and my own
- asking questions for clarification and communicating rather than jumping to assumptions
- having the strength, self-discipline, courage, compassion and commitment to resolve differences as opposed to overtly fighting or being passively aggressive
- focusing on what I appreciate with gratitude, focusing on solutions, not problems
- being conscious of paying attention to my partner and not taking him or her for granted
- being honest, and honoring my beliefs
- living in integrity, nonconformity, and sticking to my values,
- living without spoken or unspoken judgments and creating a real environment of harmony, well-being and trust and where we can both live authentically, and in integrity as ourselves
- expressing hurt and pain and not hide behind anger, judgment and criticism
- not deferring to my partner in a way that makes me uncomfortable or passive aggressive
- being intentional about expressing what I want
- not interacting with a hidden agenda
- staying conscious in my heart as well as my head

- sharing what I think and feel about my immediate experience
- I accept my undeveloped areas as well as my strengths

So, sense into your self. What is your experience right now? What thoughts, feelings or emotions are you aware of? What's going on in your mind, in your heart? What's your body telling you? What's your breathing like?

How is it for you right now to explore this idea of authenticity?

Our next question points to obstacles to being authentic.

So, it's time to explore some of the obstacles that get in the way of your being authentic — obstacles such as your beliefs, your images of who you think you must be, your attitudes, assumptions or beliefs.

Perhaps one way of exploring this question is by asking if there's a noticeable difference between two YOUs...the one who is standing naked at 4:00 am in your bedroom when no one is watching, and the one who walks out the door and into relationship?

So, take a minute and write down any obstacles which you feel prevent you from showing up as the real and true you.

Before I suggest some obstacles, listen to these client statements:

I'm not the same person in relationship as I am when I am alone at 4:00 A.M.

I feel I need to wear a mask and put on another personality so I'll make an impression and be accepted and approved by the person I'm with.

Because I can't tell the truth or be honest about my feelings and beliefs, I often feel like an imposter.

In order to fit in with a particular group when I'm dating, I feel I compromise my real and true self and lack the courage to speak my mind and make my voice heard.

I often feel I need to change who I am order to be with someone else? I change my thoughts, my language, my views, and my feelings.

I feel I have to sell myself out when it comes to my requirements, needs and wants in order to maintain a relationship.

In many relationships, I feel I am moving away from being on purpose.

So, the question is, if you are different from your true and real self, what do you think or feel accounts for this difference?

Here are some common obstacles that bring one to compromise their true and real self, their authenticity:

- Allowing others to dictate who I think I should be, for example, my family, friends, society, reality TV, the media, or perhaps just my own ego
- Ego-driven needs for control, recognition and approval, to be "somebody" at the expense of thinking or feeling like I'm a "nobody" in some way-mentally, physically, emotionally, socially, financially, etc.
- Feeling or belief that my feelings and emotions, needs and wants are not worthy or appropriate, and "don't count."
- Fears of losing my bachelorhood, fear of rejection, not being good enough, being hurt, fear of commitment, or divorce later on
- Fear of telling my truth and of being judged and criticized; fear of sharing my experience in the moment, fear of saying what's up for me, right here and right now.
- Self-image and ideal that says I am perfect in every way.
- Fear that others will reject me if they know who I really am

So, what was this exercise like for you? Was it easy, difficult? Is there anything that piques your curiosity about your self? Did you experience insights or AHAs? What's it like to acknowledge these obstacles? How do they make you feel?

So, change and transformation always begin with awareness, and awareness is the goal of these first few questions.

And now that perhaps we've raised our level of awareness a bit, let's look at our final two questions which are related:

On an authenticity scale of 1-10, where would you say you are right now and where would you like to be in six months?

And, what first step might you take to move in that direction?

Take a few minutes and respond to these two questions.

So, is your action step observable and measurable? What will you be doing, being or having that supports you to move forward toward showing up more authentically? How will you know you have successfully completed this step? How will you be different in a dating context in some way, shape or form?

Do you have a sense of when you'd like to accomplish this step? Are you aware of potential obstacles that might get in the way? And, how can you deal effectively with these obstacles?

So, I hope these questions and exercises have been useful for you in some way as you explore who you are and how you are in the context of being a single in the dating world. For coaches of singles, I hope these questions and exercises might provide an additional tool or two to support your work with singles who are exploring the relationship area of their lives.

So, I'll end with one final thought.

The Law of Attraction is a very powerful force in the Universe. The Law of Attraction says that what you focus on, consciously or unconsciously, what you give your attention and energy to, you will attract. Do you expect others to be authentic with you when you are fearful of being authentic with them? Authenticity is not a one-way street. Authenticity does not flow in only one direction.

The Law of Attraction applies in relationships as well as in every other area of life.

So, my belief is that one must exhibit the authenticity one expects in others. When we show up as less than our real and true self, the Law of Attraction says we will attract others who are also less authentic.

Being authentic, we will attract others who are authentic and there's no better foundation than authenticity to create and cultivate a lasting, loving and healthy relationship.

(c) 2007, Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D. and SpiritHeart. All rights in all media reserved.

(c) 2012, Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D. and True North Partnering. All rights in all media reserved.

Peter G. Vajda, Ph.D, C.P.C. is the founder of True North Partnering an Atlanta-based company that supports conscious living through coaching and facilitating. With a practice based on the dynamic intersection of mind, body, emotion and spirit, Peter's approach focuses on personal, business, relational and spiritual coaching. He is a professional speaker and published author. For more information, www.truenorthpartnering.com, or

pvajda(at)truenorthpartnering.com, or phone 770.804.9125. You can also follow Peter on Twitter: @petergvajda