"Nothing less than transformational."

— Scott G. Halford, Wall Street Journal bestselling author

STOP FAKING IT!

HOW TO MOVE BEYOND PERFORMANCE & LEAD WITH **YOUR AUTHENTIC PERSONALITY®**

DALE WILSHER

A COMPLIMENTARY CHAPTER

Welcome to Stop Faking It!

Be true to yourself. Be effective with others.

Start with Chapter 1, “The Mask You Didn’t Know You Were Wearing.” This excerpt invites you to notice the patterns that may be shaping how you show up, and how others experience you.

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Your Authentic Personality®
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CHAPTER 1

THE MASK YOU DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE WEARING



It had been twenty-five minutes, and the new connection I was hoping to network with hadn't paused once. He was charismatic and funny, and he clearly loved the sound of his own voice. I smiled and nodded as he talked about his passions and his business, genuinely interested in what he had to say but still waiting for the moment when he'd say, "And what about you? Tell me about you." But it never came.

By the end of our *conversation*—and I use that term loosely—I had spoken maybe 10 percent, no more than 15 percent, of the time. It was not exactly the mutual exchange I had envisioned.

The real surprise came a week later. We were both attending a leadership group where the topic of the day was personal strengths. Without missing a beat, he jumped in.

"My superpower is listening," he said, followed by a long, enthusiastic list of all the ways he listens so deeply and so well. I looked around the room to see if anyone else was catching this. I had to stop myself from laughing, because this guy was serious.

I see this situation all the time—smart, accomplished professionals who have no idea how they come across to others. Most of us can spot inauthenticity a mile away in those around us. But spotting it in ourselves? That is where it gets complicated.

- The hard-charging, directive manager who can't help but tell people what to do and how to do it insists he's beloved by the team. *Um, maybe not.*
- The jokester who can't go five minutes without delivering a punchline proudly proclaims that she's known for being the most detailed and analytical in her department. *Sorry, but that is unlikely.*
- The stoic director who never shares his personal life in a professional setting describes himself as emotionally intelligent. *Yeah, no.*

I don't believe their words are intentional misrepresentations. Most people are not trying to deceive anyone, not even themselves. But there's a subtle, dangerous gap between how we *see* ourselves and how others *experience* us. That gap is called *self-deception*.

Self-deception is more active than ignorance and more internal than lying. Ignorance means you don't have the information yet. You haven't encountered the truth, so there is nothing to resist. Lying means you know the truth and choose to hide it from others. Self-deception lives somewhere in the middle. You are both the deceiver and the deceived. It is usually not conscious or malicious; it's simply how you protect what you need to believe about yourself. The truth is available to you, and others can often see it clearly, but part of you has decided not to look because what you might find threatens your beliefs about yourself.

The confidence you believe you project may read as arrogance to others. The open door you think you keep may feel closed to everyone around you. The leadership presence you have carefully built may be earning you far less trust than you imagine—and your team has felt it for a long time. No matter how articulate your self-description, if your behavior doesn't match your words, you will come across as clueless at best and insincere at worst. You can call yourself authentic all day long, but others may not see you that way.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said something similar: "Who you are speaks so loudly that I can't hear what you say."[2] People are not experiencing your intentions; they are experiencing your patterns. And the most unsettling truth about self-deception is that you are almost always the last one to know. Your coworkers or your family already see the disconnect because they live with the *effects* of your patterns every day. The question is whether you are ready to see it.

Here's the part that gets me. Research tells us that feeling authentic has more to do with feeling good than being authentic.[3] When people feel authentic, they are experiencing a positive emotional state, a sense that life is going well, they are liked, and the moment feels right. That means the networking guy who monopolized our conversation likely felt completely authentic. Feeling good about who you are presenting is not the same as presenting who you are. And confusing the two is a common form of self-deception.

Why You Don't See Your Own Mask

If you're feeling a little unsettled, good; if you're feeling curious, even better. This mismatch between how we see ourselves and how others experience us is one of the most universal dynamics, and it tends to show up in two places.

The first is your blind spot—where others see an aspect of you that you don't see.[4] This is where you may unknowingly come across as impatient, guarded, or overly intense, with no idea that it is happening.

The second is your mask—where you see an aspect of yourself that others don't see, because you've chosen what version of you to show them. You filter and shape it to earn approval or avoid judgment.

Over time, the mask and the blind spot tend to merge. What you once chose to hide, you eventually forget you were hiding. The mask stops feeling like a strategy and starts feeling like you. It becomes the story you tell yourself about who you are.

And the higher you rise, the worse it gets. *Success is a terrible truth-teller because it rewards results, not authenticity.* Every promotion, every standing ovation, and every "great job" email reinforces the version of you that showed up that day, masked or not, mature or not. What is rewarded starts to feel true.

Robert Kelly, former CEO and chairman of Bank of New York Mellon, is a vivid example of how results can hide leadership problems.[5] On paper, he was an accomplished executive leading one of the world's largest custodial banks. Inside the company, his confrontational, abrasive style eroded morale and made directors worry about losing key people. His leadership style eventually cost him the role when the board decided that the way he treated people had become more dangerous than the performance he was delivering.

Elevated authenticity tells a different story. It is what happens when you stop using your strengths to force results and start using them to serve the people you love or lead. The scoreboard still matters but is no longer the only measure of success; trust, growth, and the health of the people around you become part of the bottom line. That's the kind of leadership we will move toward later in this book.

This effort to appear successful is why self-deception is so stubborn in high achievers. Most driven professionals think about themselves constantly: their performance, their reputation, and their impact. But a profound difference exists between thinking about yourself and actually seeing yourself. One is about managing the image; the other is about honesty.

When your focus shifts from understanding who you are to managing how you are perceived, you stop growing and start curating. The identity you have been performing—the driven executive, the over-responsible parent, the friend who always has it together—can start to feel less like a role and more like the real you. You don't realize you are performing because you sincerely believe the performance is you. That's how you end up wearing a mask you can't see, even when it is shaping how people experience you.

What Is Masking?

Masking is the unconscious misrepresentation of your true personality. It is rooted in bias against your natural strengths, confusion about your natural design, and a growing lack of alignment between who you are on the inside and how you show up in the world. It happens when you over-adapt and assume you possess the traits that others want from you while slowly replacing your authentic self with a version designed for approval.

High performers are often especially vulnerable because their broad range of abilities allows them to adapt so effectively to what is needed around them. We are talking about people with advanced degrees, executive roles, and exceptional capabilities. These are people who, by every external measure, have arrived. And yet they hit a wall. They have spent so long succeeding in environments that reward their abilities that they have never stopped to ask whether the work itself truly fits them. That over-adaptation can dilute their strengths until the way they've learned to lead no longer brings out their best.

Tam is a vivid example. She is a former college professor and high-end interior designer, as well as a great friend of mine. I've known Tam since high school when we were cheerleaders together. She was bright, bubbly, and full of life. Years later, when I released the personality quiz alongside my first book, Tam took the quiz for fun and proudly posted her FactFinder type on Facebook. FactFinders are detail-oriented perfectionists who are serious, reserved, and deliberate in everything they do. I messaged her privately. "I know you pretty well, Tam. That's not your type. It's a mask."

Tam had spent years on the tenure track, a high-FactFinder culture that prizes precision, intellect, and rigorous standards. She assumed that because she could thrive in that environment, that personality type must be who she was. But just because you can do something well does not mean it's your true strength.

By the time Tam reached out for coaching, she was overwhelmed. She had built two careers around doing it all, and the stress was starting to crush her. What she needed was clarity about where her real strengths lay, which ones to double down on, and which expectations she could finally release.

Isn't that the question for each of us?

Now consider the skills you've mastered along the way. Some grew out of work you were good at, so people kept asking you to do more of it. Others were simply what the job required, and you needed the paycheck. Those skills are real, but being capable of something doesn't mean it draws on the best of who you are. If no one has ever helped you recognize that distinction, it's easy to build a life around what you've learned to do well without asking whether it brings you alive.

YOUR AUTHENTIC WIRING

✦ ✦ ✦

In my coaching and teaching, I use personality assessments built on the DISC framework, a four-style model that describes how people tend to move through the world.[6] In this book, I use my Authentic SELF Model, which gives the four DISC styles new names and places them within the larger journey of authentic growth: Sovereign (D), Energizer (I), Loyalist (S), and FactFinder (C). Refer to the Authentic Personality Map before Chapter 5.

Many people encounter DISC as a way to describe behavior: how you communicate, make decisions, or respond under pressure. That method has its place, but behavior is only surface level. Beneath every pattern is a deeper layer of temperament: your inborn wiring, your core motivations, and the way you experience the world that was present long before anyone told you how you "should" act. That is the level we will be working with here.

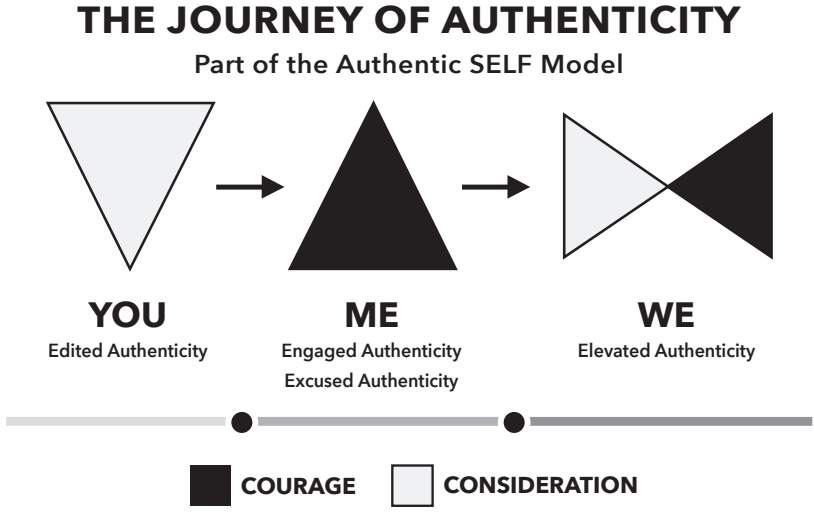
When I talk about Your Authentic Personality in this book, I'm not asking how many ways you *can* perform. I am asking who you are underneath the mask. The SELF types give us language for that deeper layer so we can see the distance between who you were made to be and who the world has asked you to become.

Just last week, I spoke with Lauren, a music teacher in the middle of a divorce who wanted to pivot into a career that could provide the income she would need as a single mom. As she considered what to do next, she listed all the roles she had held, from boarding school house staff to insurance processor to office administrator. And then she said this, "I just need to learn how to discern the difference between what I can do and what I am best at." And that is where we are headed.

Hiding in Plain Sight

Masking can feel deeply personal, like a habit unique to you, born from your insecurities and your history. In one sense, it is. But the shape of the mask is not unique at all.

Years ago, I came across the work of Harvard researcher Robert Kegan, and it gave language to a pattern I was already seeing in my coaching practice. Kegan mapped adult development across several orders of meaning-making. I have borrowed the three adult stages most relevant to masking and adapted them here, translating them into the language of authenticity.



Kegan calls the first stage of growth the Socialized Mind; I call it Edited Authenticity or the YOU stage. Studies suggest that about 58 percent of adults operate primarily from this YOU stage.[7] Picture it as an upside-down triangle. Consideration for others outweighs the courage to be yourself, so other people's expectations press down on your identity until you are balancing on the smallest part of who you are.

Beyond it, Kegan found what he calls the Self-Authoring Mind. Only around 35 percent of adults have developed into this stage, even partially. I call that same territory the ME stage. Here, the triangle turns upright. Engaged (or Excused) Authenticity becomes your foundation, the most substantial part of your identity. You have less consideration of the pressures around you and more courage to be who you are.

In the final stage, in only about 1 percent of adults, Kegan describes the Self-Transforming Mind. I call it the WE stage: Elevated Authenticity. It is where the two triangles come face to face—neither top-heavy nor bottom-heavy—because neither courage nor consideration is meant to dominate. Courage gives you the confidence to stand firm in your convictions. Consideration reminds you that your strengths are meant to serve, not simply express. Elevated Authenticity is the ability to hold both at once, remaining true to yourself while thoughtfully adapting to the needs of others.

(For those of you doing the math, approximately 6 percent of adults are described as operating from an earlier Instrumental Mind, which is outside the scope of this book.)

Most adults never fully leave the YOU stage. A smaller group reaches ME. A rare few make it all the way to WE. That's why this book spends so much time in the first two stages. It is where most of us live, including most of the people we lead—mask and all.

But living there is not the same as being stuck there. The whole aim of what follows is to help you keep moving from a self shaped by everyone else's expectations, to a self you've reclaimed, to a self that is mature enough to hold your own convictions and those of the people you're responsible for. It's where true maturity lives.

Why We Mask

Those stages map where growth can take us, but they don't explain how the mask formed in the first place. Every mask has two origins: the pressures around us and the fears within us. The mask may begin with outside pressure, but it takes root inside through a core fear of rejection.

It doesn't only come from social rejection but from the deeper fear that if people saw who you really are, unfiltered and unpolished, they would find you lacking. That fear shows up in three ways: the fear of being too much, the fear of not being enough, and the fear that who you truly are has no place in the roles you inhabit.

For some, the fear shows up as the *need to be more*: more assertive, more decisive, or more commanding. Somewhere along the way, they absorbed the message that their natural style wasn't strong enough to be taken seriously. This perception is especially common among women in leadership, who often face the impossible standard of being simultaneously warm enough to be liked and tough enough to be respected.[8] The mask becomes the only way to navigate the contradiction.

Melissa built her boutique interior design studio from scratch. She was driven and ambitious. In her mind, those qualities defined her as a leader. But her team described someone quite different, a woman who was warm, generous, deeply relational, slow to hold a boundary, and quick to accommodate others (a Loyalist). Melissa knew she had those qualities, but she didn't count them as leadership. So she built a picture of herself as a Sovereign because that was the only model of success she recognized. She kept pushing herself toward that image, convinced her real style was not strong enough to be taken seriously in the role she held.

For others, the fear shows up as the *need to be less*: less intense, less direct, and less demanding. They have been told their natural energy overwhelms people. So they soften. They qualify. They pull back from the very strengths that make them most effective because those strengths have been framed as shortcomings.

The Bias We Don't See

I learned about unseen biases firsthand in college when I was elected as the scholarship officer for my sorority at the University of Georgia and then invited to attend my first leadership retreat. There, all twenty-five of us walked in and found the floor divided by duct tape into a four-quadrant grid. The facilitator looked at us and said, "Before you sit down, I want you to answer a couple of questions."

"First, are you an asker or a teller? If you are an asker, stand over there, and if you are a teller, stay here."

I wanted to be an asker. I had been raised by Southerners to be polite and agreeable, and I was smack dab in the "Yes Ma'am, No Sir" world of the Deep South where young women who were askers were called gracious and tellers were called something else. So I started to head in that direction until I caught a glimpse of my roommate, who raised her eyebrows at me and sharply nodded the other way. Her look said everything. "You are a teller, Dale. Get over there."

It felt like being outed. My first thought was, *Don't tell my mom; she will be so mad.* But there were women whom I liked and admired on that side of the line, so I took a breath and walked over.

Then, once we had sorted ourselves, the facilitator continued. "Second question: Are you relationally focused or task focused? If you're into tasks, stay on this side. If you're into people, go over there."

Since I had apparently gotten the first question wrong, I thought carefully about this one. *I do like people. Sure. But I really like getting things done. That means I must be more task-based than relationship-based.*

As I was thinking, everyone—and I mean everyone—from the Teller crowd moved immediately to the teller/relational quadrant, leaving me and one other woman, Susan Miller, standing alone in the teller/task box. *I don't even like Susan Miller,* I thought. *What am I doing in a box with her?*

The facilitator looked straight at us. "Let me start with you two. You are the drivers: direct, determined, and dominant." I cringed. I could

hear my girlfriends trying to sell that persona in the Deep South. "Let me set you up with Dale; she's super dominant."

If I had taken a personality test that day, there is no way I would have checked boxes that said "direct, determined, and dominant." Maybe decisive—that one I could admit—but the truth is that I wanted to be someone else. I wanted to be softer, friendlier, and easier to love—anything but the strong, straightforward self that felt like too much for the world I was in.

That desire to be someone else points to a deeper worry that many of us carry, the sense that who we are, as is, may not work in the life we actually want. When you start wondering whether your real wiring belongs in the kind of work you hope to do, the kind of family you want to build, or the kinds of spaces where you'd like people to look to you, it becomes tempting to build a safer version of yourself and live from there. That concept describes the third fear: *believing you're not built for the life you actually want.*

WHAT TEMPTS YOU TO WEAR THE MASK?

The mask rarely stays on all the time, but it is seldom completely off either. Most of us mask situationally in contexts where belonging feels uncertain or approval feels conditional. Knowing when and where your mask goes on is highly useful self-knowledge.

Here are the moments when masking is most likely to show up:

When the stakes feel high. Job interviews, performance reviews, presentations to senior leadership, and any situation where you believe you are being evaluated activate Edited Authenticity. You are acutely aware of how you are coming across and begin managing rather than simply being.

When you are new. Starting a new role, joining a new team, or entering a new organization triggers masking. Before you know what is valued and accepted, you adapt. Sometimes, that adaptation hardens into a habit before you have a chance to show up as yourself. Later in this book, we'll talk about how to reset and introduce more of your real self into roles and rooms that have already experienced you with the mask.

When you are outnumbered. If you are the only woman in the room, the only person of your background, the only introvert in an extroverted culture, the pressure to adapt to the dominant style can be enormous. When you are in YOU stage, you over-read the room and adjust accordingly.

When authority is present. Most people show up differently with people above them in a hierarchy than they do with peers or direct reports. If you mask when you manage up and perform competence, agreeability, or confidence that you don't fully feel, that behavior is worth noticing.

When you want to belong. Social settings, networking events, family gatherings, and any place where the desire to be liked or accepted is strong are prime masking territories. The fear of rejection activates quickly and quietly in spaces where connection feels important.

When the camera is on. With social media, video calls, public speaking, and any form of visibility, the pressure to perform can pull even the most grounded person toward a curated version of themselves. In a world where your personal brand is frequently on display, the line between presenting well and performing constantly gets harder to find.

When you are around certain people. A particular boss, a parent, a competitive colleague, or a partner who expects a certain version of you can trigger specific masks so reliably that you stop noticing the shift. Pay attention to who you are with when you feel least like yourself.

The goal is not to eliminate all adaptation but to become more aware of when and why you are adjusting. Wisdom means bringing as much of your real self as you can while still serving what the situation truly needs. Pay attention to the rooms, people, and pressures that make you want to trade parts of yourself for something safer. When adjusting stops being a conscious choice and becomes an unconscious habit, adaptation has crossed into masking.

The Trap of Impressing

We all want to be seen as credible, competent, and worth listening to. Before I step on a stage or record a video, I think about what I will wear, how I will sound, and the impression I want to make. Those considerations are part of being professional and relatable. But the line between *presenting well* and *pretending* can blur quickly.

And our current moment is not helping. Social media has turned personal branding into a daily performance. Artificial intelligence can generate a version of you in seconds—polished, articulate, and entirely fictional—and few people would know the difference. Curating the most compelling version of yourself has never been easier, or easier to get away with. Which leaves the question: Is how we look more important than what we are?

That question is worth considering.

- Is it more important to look confident … or to be confident?
- To look busy … or to be productive?
- To look like a leader … or to be one?
- To look collaborative … or to be genuinely open to others' ideas?
- To look in control … or to be grounded?

The more we chase the idea of looking impressive, the more we trade away the qualities that create lasting influence such as trust, consistency, and real presence. Edited Authenticity makes that exchange feel reasonable. It never is.

When "looking the part" starts to outrank "living the part," we have morphed into what the ancient Greeks would call *hypokritēs*, actors who wore masks to play roles onstage. The term later came to describe someone pretending to be what they are not.[9] Faking it, in other words. Faking it turns your life into a performance, onstage and off, until the role you are playing starts to feel more real than the person underneath.

I've done that. In fifth grade, I wore a pair of glasses without lenses because I thought they made me look smart. I didn't even need glasses; I just wanted the look. One day, a girl stuck her finger right through the empty frame and into my eye. She literally and figuratively saw through me, and I was furious. I wanted to look impressive enough to belong, and her finger went straight through the image I had worked so hard to project.

The Fallibility of Personality Tests

Here is where self-deception gets measurable. Personality assessments are among the most widely used tools in professional development, and among the most widely misread. Every major personality assessment is self-administered, which means your results are only as accurate as your understanding of yourself. And if that understanding has been shaped by years of adaptation, socialization, and bias against your natural traits, then what you are measuring is the mask, not the person underneath it.

And yet we love taking personality assessments. Eighty million Americans complete a personality assessment every year, and 80 percent of Fortune 500 companies use them.[10] We are hungry to understand ourselves, and that is a natural impulse. But there is a caveat. We want to know about our personality as long as the test provides us the results we are willing to hear. And when we don't get those answers, we simply keep taking tests until we do, or we shrug off the results as "just another label" and never ask what they might be telling us about how we are showing up.

The desire to understand ourselves is healthy. The challenge is that the person answering the questions (you) is often the least objective observer in the room. Research on self-perception suggests that we do not see ourselves as clearly as others see us.[11] Other people are more likely to notice our consistent personality patterns while we tend to view our behavior as flexible and situational. We believe we can act in many different ways, and we can, but we all have themes and tendencies

that show up again and again whether we are aware of them or not. When we cannot see those patterns in ourselves, we turn to a test and accept the results at face value, without questioning whether they reflect our authentic wiring or simply the version of ourselves we have come to believe in.

The broader data confirms this phenomenon. Research shows that between 39 percent and 76 percent of people receive a completely different personality type when they retake the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment after just five weeks—not a slightly different result but a completely different four-letter type.[12] Those percentages do not indicate a small margin of error. They reflect a fundamental reliability problem, which has less to do with the instrument than with the person answering it. Mood, context, and stress all shape how we respond to the questions, which means that on any given day, you may be answering as the version of yourself you wish you were, the version your workplace has shaped you to be, or the version you believe a person in your role is supposed to be. In a leadership context, it means people get hired and promoted into roles that reward the mask they've been performing, not the strengths they actually have, and everyone pays for the misalignment.

The Enneagram personality test acknowledges a version of this, too. A *wing number* can seem to contradict a person's dominant type, creating enough internal tension that they misidentify their core type—naming the adjacent type they lean on rather than the one that actually drives them.[13]

The Enneagram also deserves a more specific word of caution. Unlike most personality frameworks that begin with behavioral patterns or natural strengths, the Enneagram is rooted in what it calls your "core sin" and "deepest core fear," the wound that drives your personality. For self-understanding and emotional healing, knowing those core aspects can be genuinely valuable. But when the goal is identifying your authentic strengths, a tool anchored in your deepest wound may show you what you're afraid of rather than what you're gifted at.

Take perfectionism. For a FactFinder, the fear of getting it wrong is native; precision is part of their design. Energizers and Loyalists, however, can develop that fear by learning that mistakes put approval and connection at risk. Same fear, different types. A tool that reads your personality type primarily through your fears cannot always tell whether that fear is inborn or acquired. It may describe who you became to stay safe, not who you actually are. At that point, it is measuring the mask.

The Gallup CliftonStrengths data reveals the same pattern from a different angle. Achiever is the most common talent theme across more than a million assessments, appearing in the top five strengths of nearly 40 percent of respondents.[14] On the DISC model, that same drive for achievement is most closely linked to the D type—the Sovereign in the SELF Model—which makes up only about 10 percent of the population.[15] The rarest behavioral style in one model shows up as the most common strength in another. These facts don't add up unless you factor in Edited Authenticity. In a culture that prizes productivity and results, people answer the way their environment has taught them to see themselves. They answer from the top of the YOU triangle, not from the bottom.

Even within DISC, the signal is there if you know how to read it. A result that places two opposite styles—a D (Sovereign) and an S (Loyalist), or an I (Energizer) and a C (FactFinder)—at nearly equal scores is rarely a complex personality. It's often a mask. Those types pull in fundamentally different directions, and when they appear in equal measure, it usually means the test-takers are answering partly as themselves and partly as who they believe they should be. The assessment captures the conflict without naming it as a mask.

Practitioners learn that opposite blends like Sovereign–Loyalist (DS) or Energizer–FactFinder (IC) often point to a sense of inner conflict for the person taking the test. Most systems do not explain what that tension might mean or where it comes from. There is no flag in the report, no alert, no invitation to look deeper. That is where

the work of authenticity begins, reading the conflict as a clue that the mask and the true self are tangled together.

Kelly was the CEO of a nonprofit organization when she came to me with what seemed like every assessment in the book: Enneagram, DISC, Gallup CliftonStrengths, Working Genius, and even a Spiritual Gifts assessment. Some she had taken years earlier and others more recently. Together, they told several different stories about who she was.

As we began sorting through them, Kelly told me that early in her career, she had learned to turn up her Energizer side to gain buy-in. She had watched other leaders succeed through charisma and connection, and she concluded that she should be more like them. Even years later, one limiting belief that followed her was that she should be more popular. That pressure had shaped how she saw herself.

Yet beneath the different profiles, a more consistent picture came into focus. Big-picture thinking surfaced repeatedly in her Gallup strengths. Her Enneagram results reflected the drive and conviction that I associated with her Sovereign side. Her most recent DISC profile pointed toward Sovereign and FactFinder, and when I asked someone close to her to weigh in, the COO from her organization, the same pattern emerged. Kelly absolutely had a relational side, but what came most naturally was strategy—seeing what needed to happen, challenging people to think bigger, and moving them toward stronger results.

Kelly's assessments were capturing different layers of herself at different points in her development. Some reflected her natural wiring. Others reflected strengths she had deliberately built because she believed leadership required them. That is what makes self-assessment so complicated. You may be answering as who you are, who you have learned to be, or who you still believe you should become.

For these reasons, treat personality test results as valuable input, not unshakable truth. They are a starting point for discovery. They can show you where to look, but they cannot replace careful observation.

The Masks I Missed

Early in my coaching career, I missed this kind of masking all the time. Back then, my coaching sessions were over the phone. I didn't see facial expressions or body language. I heard only words, tone, and how clients described themselves, and I treated that as the whole story.

One of my first clients, Christen, was a college coach whose assessments consistently placed her in the FactFinder type: serious, conscientious, and highly detail-oriented. Her prep forms were long and thorough, she described herself as a perfectionist, and everything she shared seemed to reinforce the same conclusion. I had no reason to question it.

Then I led an in-person training with her team. Within minutes, I realized I was seeing something I had completely missed over the phone.

Christen moved naturally through the room, checking in with each person before the session began, noticing who seemed anxious, smoothing over awkward moments before they became uncomfortable, and creating an atmosphere where people immediately felt at ease. Her players were drawn to her. They trusted her. While she certainly possessed conscientious habits, the quality that stood out most was not precision but presence.

As I watched her interact with the team, I began to wonder whether I had mistaken well-developed skills for natural wiring. What I was seeing looked much more like a Loyalist with an Energizer blend—someone whose greatest strength was creating belonging, encouraging others, and holding a group together. When I shared my observations, she wasn't convinced.

She had come to identify with being a FactFinder. It felt competent. Credible. Professional. A Loyalist felt like a step backward. A little later, I had the opportunity to meet her new husband, and the contrast was striking. He truly embodied the FactFinder style. There was something innate in him that felt different from the habits Christen had cultivated. Watching them together gave me another piece of the

puzzle. I began to wonder whether she had started identifying with some of the qualities she admired in him, reinforcing a picture of herself she already believed in.

Eventually Christen left collegiate athletics and accepted an administrative role with a large consulting firm. The title sounded task-driven, but the work was all about people. Instead of being the one accountable for win-loss records, performance metrics, and difficult personnel decisions, she spends her days doing what Loyalists do best—connecting colleagues to resources, building relationships across the organization, and creating the stability that helped others contribute fully. She finally found the perfect style fit, and this time, she recognized it.

That experience permanently changed the way I coach. Today, I still use personality assessments, but I no longer rely only on them—or on someone's description of themselves—to tell me who they are. I watch. I pay attention to facial shape and expressions, posture, gestures, pace, energy, and where people naturally go when they stop trying to manage the impression they're making. I notice who they instinctively connect with, how they approach problems, and what comes effortlessly. Those visual cues often reveal what years of adaptation have concealed.

The Deeper Blind Spot

In Chapter 5, you will learn how I identify someone's authentic personality, including your own, by reading visual cues, tracing childhood patterns, and spotting the spouse who is almost always their opposite. But there is a deeper kind of blindness—one that does not always show up on a personality assessment. It appears when you have not yet considered what you stand for or what you refuse to compromise on, regardless of who is watching. This kind of self-awareness is about naming the convictions beneath your choices.

Kim was the director of membership at a Midwestern chamber of commerce and had built a career on connection, bringing people together, inviting them in, and engaging them with genuine warmth and energy.

We met at a regional conference where I delivered the closing keynote. Kim told me she was looking for coaching because, in addition to her day job, she was running for political office. She had to create a candidate website but couldn't answer the most basic questions for her home page: Who am I, and what do I stand for? Sure, she knew the "old guard" in her local government needed a refresh in terms of perspective, a gap she hoped to fill. But the rest she could not name.

We started where I always start, with personality. And the mask was visible before I opened the report. Right there on the cover, her type was listed as Loyalist-Sovereign-Energizer, a triple blend. By now, you know that Loyalist and Sovereign are natural opposites and a triple is over the healthy blend limit, so I knew we had work to do.

I suspected Kim was an Energizer by virtue of her job choice, a role built on high social contact and her general demeanor, which was positive and high-energy. The problem was that, according to her report, the Energizer was buried under the other two masks, blurring her sense of self.

Our initial coaching conversation about her true personality did not get us anywhere, because she was so entrenched in her desire to please others that she wanted to be all the types, including the one she was missing. Her husband's observation did not help, either. Kim said he described her as everything to everyone, which confirmed the mask but did not reveal what was underneath it. We talked briefly about her childhood traits and what personality her husband might be—since we are always looking for those opposites—but it was such a new way of thinking that those conversations weren't productive either.

So I changed the question. When someone cannot see their personality clearly, I stop asking about behavior and start asking about conviction. Behavior can be coached, rehearsed, and rewarded into something it is not. What a person truly values is harder to fake.

Having coached hundreds of clients over thousands of hours, I have observed that roughly 75 percent of a person's core values align with their personality type. Your values and your personality are two

expressions of the same wiring. Your personality tells you how you are built: how you think, communicate, make decisions, and respond under pressure. Your values are the convictions that make everything else meaningful. When you finally see them side by side—when your personality and your values are speaking the same language—clarity clicks.

Kim's mask had been in place long before she sat across from me, and it had hidden more than her personality.

Believing she was a Loyalist, Sovereign, and Energizer all at once meant carrying three value systems at the same time. That is what dilution does. Instead of the specificity of one grounded identity, you get the noise of three competing loyalties, and your personality reads as scattered rather than centered.

The cost of that confusion became especially clear on the campaign trail. Everyone already knew she was warm and social. What she lacked was an answer to the question of what she stood for—and for a woman running for office, that answer mattered far more than being liked. Don't worry. Kim gets a happy ending in Chapter 5.

This is the danger of misunderstanding ourselves. The mask that hides your personality can just as easily hide your values, because the two run on the same wiring. If you have ever struggled to say with real definition what you stand for, that is a values problem—and usually a sign you are wearing a mask you have not recognized yet. The good news is you will learn to name your core values in the chapters to come.

WHAT AUTHENTICITY ACTUALLY MEANS?

Authenticity is knowing, liking, and expressing who you are. Four components make that real, and each one lives or dies in how well you know your own personality.

The first is *self-awareness*: genuine knowledge of and trust in your motives, emotions, preferences, and abilities. If you don't know that you're wired as a Sovereign, you cannot understand why ambiguity drains you or why a slow decision feels like torture. Self-awareness is

what lets you walk into a performance review and represent yourself accurately; you know what drives your best work and why. It is what makes presenting well sustainable instead of exhausting.

The second is *unbiased processing*: the ability to evaluate your strengths and limits clearly, without the rule book that others wrote for you distorting the picture. It is where bias against your own temperament does its damage. An Energizer's enthusiasm gets labeled as "unserious." A Loyalist's steadiness gets labeled as "passive." A FactFinder's precision gets labeled as "cold." When the rule book calls your traits liabilities, you start seeing your strengths through the label instead of through the truth.

And here is what's at stake: You cannot operate at your highest level, tap into your source of genius, or build a professional presence that holds up under pressure if you don't like what you see when you look in the mirror. Liking yourself is the foundation that all else is built on, and it starts with meeting the version of yourself you have been avoiding.

The third is *congruent behavior*: acting in ways that align with your temperament, values, and needs, even when the situation is asking for a different personality. For a FactFinder, it might mean asking for more data before signing off rather than satisfying others with a fast yes. It means knowing which parts of yourself the moment calls for and choosing from self-knowledge rather than self-erasure.

And the fourth is *relational sincerity*: showing up in your relationships, including professional ones, as the temperament you actually are rather than the version that feels the safest under the circumstances. For an Energizer like Kim, it might mean staying as expressive with her team as she is with friends instead of subtracting herself to seem more serious.

Here is what makes all of this work so difficult to hold onto: Edited Authenticity, the YOU stage, works against all four components. It replaces self-awareness with borrowed identity. It replaces unbiased processing with the rule book. It replaces congruent behavior with performance. It replaces relational sincerity with impression management. By the time self-deception has fully taken hold, your performance is no longer for an audience but is the only version of yourself you recognize.

So … Could This Be Me?

By now, you may be wondering … *Is this me?* The stories in this chapter may have felt familiar in ways you were not expecting. Maybe you recognized your own patterns in the examples, the ways you adapt to fit in, work harder to prove yourself, or keep parts of yourself hidden because they once felt too risky to show. And perhaps you are beginning to wonder whether the version of you that feels most familiar is also a version shaped by a mask you learned to wear.

Here are a few signals worth paying attention to:

- You've succeeded in a role but parts of it leave you drained in ways you cannot fully explain. You are not tired from hard work but tired from the effort of showing up as someone you have to think about being.
- Your personality test results have shifted significantly between jobs or life stages, as if a different version of you showed up to answer the questions each time.
- Someone who knows you well, such as a spouse, close friend, or longtime colleague, might glance at your personality results and chuckle because they see the gap between your self-perception and how you show up.
- You have a vague sense of inner conflict, as if parts of your personality are pulling in different directions.
- You feel restless or out of place, even when everything says you "should" be satisfied.
- You feel most like yourself in certain moments, usually unguarded ones, and then a shift occurs when the stakes go up or the audience changes.
- You feel like you are constantly "on," performing, managing, and adjusting, and you can't quite remember the last time you weren't.

- You have forgotten what lights you up outside of work, or you find it hard to answer when someone asks what you enjoy doing.
- You feel more like a role than a real person.

Whatever came up while you read that list—such as recognition, resistance, or even the urge to argue with it—is worth paying attention to. There are no wrong answers.

Which of these points felt closest to home?

If one did, ask yourself: Am I proud of the way I'm showing up, or am I just relieved I fit in?

You don't need to diagnose anything yet. What you need right now is simply a willingness to stay curious enough to keep reading.

The mask you didn't know you were wearing comes at a price, and at its root, that cost is self-deception—the kind that happens so gradually that you don't realize it's happening at all. What that costs you, and the people around you, is what we will cover in the next few chapters.

But here is what is also true. The person underneath the mask is still there, waiting. Finding that person changes everything for those who are willing to do the work. Next we'll explore where the mask came from in the first place.

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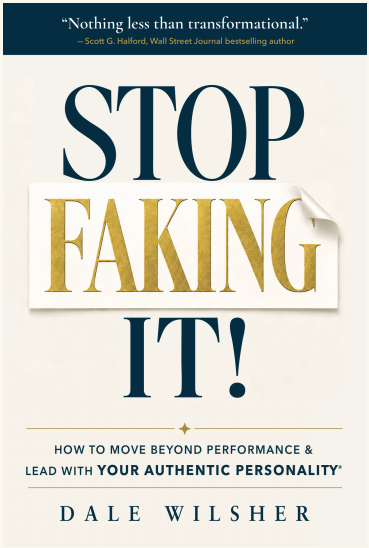
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