

**Chapter 1: WHAT IS HONESTY?**

“It is in believing one thing while intending to communicate another that every lie is born”

- Sam Harris, *Lying*.

I’m a liar.

I spent a vast majority of my life living a complete fiction. Most of what went on inside me, thoughts and emotions, was not accurately represented by the words I spoke. I did jobs I didn’t like for reasons that lacked integrity. I pursued interests I wasn’t interested in. I formed relationships with people who did not know me, and people who reduced my quality of life. I had everyone, including myself, completely fooled. Not only was most of my behaviour a strategically crafted performance, my view of myself and the dialog in my head was also an ongoing lie, designed to remove the guilt of my constantly manipulative performance. I called this performance “being a nice guy.”

Those of you familiar with my work should be sick of me talking about being a Nice Guy by now. In this book, what I want to emphasize is that being a Nice Guy falls under a larger category that *many* people can relate to: identities designed to seek approval. When it comes to speaking and living honestly, our biggest barrier is the identity we are trying to live up to, in the eyes of ourselves and others. As I continue with my story about being nice, I want you to start thinking about your motives for hiding who you truly are.

Essentially from a very early age nearly everything I did had the underlying motive of gaining some form of approval from other people. Even with hindsight it’s impossible for me to know for sure if *any* of my past behaviour was free from this motive. Even when I practiced guitar all by myself, or read books I enjoyed, I might have been doing so to build up skills and wisdom that I could use to impress others. I was so *infected* by my need for approval, validation and acceptance that it permeated every decision I made, every action I took. And yet I couldn’t see it; I was blinded by neediness to the point that I completely lacked all awareness of it.

Are you willing to lose everyone in your life to maintain your integrity? I certainly wasn’t, not even close. The idea of someone I loved or even complete strangers hating me filled me with anxiety. I would do whatever I could to ensure that as many people liked me as much as possible. For the longest time, it simply never occurred to me to link this with the concept of dishonesty. I genuinely didn’t think of myself as a dishonest person. How could I? I was successfully lying to myself to hide this fact.

From a certain perspective, you could say I was authentic. We all are being “ourselves” when we behave, there’s no-one else you can be. However, there was a lack of integrity in the way I lived. I could *feel* it, without even being able to identify what the feeling was. It’s like that strange sensation you get when you think someone is watching you. There is no physically measurable sensation, but you feel *something*.

Every time I pretended I was OK when I wasn’t, I felt it. Every time I prioritized someone else’s needs over my own, I felt it. Every time I missed an opportunity because I lacked the courage to take a risk, I felt it. Every time I had to justify my actions, the feeling was there. A lingering, guilty regret that would haunt the back of my mind and force me to drag out one story after another to explain my own behaviour to myself.

I labelled myself as The Nice Guy. I told myself that I had to do things because it was just the way the world worked. I convinced myself that other people would be hurt by me taking care of myself, so it

was too selfish to do it. I told myself that it was my duty. I pictured a world that fell apart when I revealed what I truly believed, thought, felt and wanted. All these stories and more kept me trapped in a dishonest system of living. Honesty just seemed too harmful to engage in consistently; there were too many exceptions.

Deep, deep down, somewhere in the basement of my subconscious, a voice was screaming at me in agony, demanding that I change what I was doing, that I stop all the constant deception. Unfortunately, for most of my life, that voice was drowned out by others. The fear of abandonment was much louder, more demanding, and firmly sat at the controls most of the time. It took a long time for me to realise there was another voice in the background asking to be heard.

Perhaps you're reading this book because, like me, the voice of your integrity has gotten louder. You've tried living the fake way for some time now and it isn't quite working out. It's not all it's cracked up to be, is it? It could be that you're starting to notice that you can make more money without increasing your satisfaction with life. You're seeing evidence that making people like you doesn't increase feelings of connection. Maybe you're finally starting to see that everything in your life is a direct result of your own behaviour and decisions, and it no longer makes sense to place responsibility for your contentment on anything external to yourself.

You will have already seen glimpses of your own integrity, for sure. There will be times you were proud of yourself for standing up for what you believed. There will be times when you impressed yourself by courageously taking a risk. There will be the time you got a surprising response going for what you really wanted. There will be the genuine connection you had without hiding your insecurities, or using any strategies of manipulation. There have been signs along the way, as there were for me, that there's this *other way to live*, which doesn't require a constant performance.

Accepting responsibility for my satisfaction was the most difficult and ultimately rewarding decision I've ever made. Allowing people to reject me in pursuit of genuine connections improved my quality of life tenfold and more. Choosing to do what I wanted rather than what others told me I *should* want eventually created a meaningful life that I would never think to trade with anyone else on the planet. And I want this for you, too.

But it's going to hurt.

Make no mistake, you choose dishonesty because it appears to hurt less, and in the short-term view you're right! You avoid confrontations because it feels better when everyone just gets along. You prioritise the needs of others because you don't want to feel guilty and would rather be a hero. You deny the truth because you don't want the burden of responsibility and acceptance that it demands of you.

Yet this comfort and familiarity comes at a terrible price. For you see, there's something that hurts a lot more than confrontations, risk-taking and disapproval. And that is *regret*. Regret for a life not lived, for lacking integrity, and for missing out on loving connections, adventure and having an impact on the world. You've been avoiding the pain of honesty without realising that you have traded your very soul for just a little comfort and easiness. The longer this goes for, the more you will suffer.

Thankfully, it's never too late to break this pattern. If you've left it for a long time, it will hurt to switch over to honest living. You will have to completely let go of controlling that which is external to you. But it will not be *unbearable*, I promise you. You will be able to handle it. We will take it slowly at first, and gradually build up your tolerance to the initial pain of truthfulness. As you begin to

experience the relief and rewards that come from honest living, your courage and stamina will increase, until living honestly becomes relatively painless.

### “Just be yourself?”

All throughout our lives we are given what appears to be a clear and simple instruction: *just be yourself*. Those three words give us the impression that being true to yourself, having integrity, being unique, uninhibited, confident and motivated, is a straightforward way to live, something that’s easy to implement.

Yet as we look around we can clearly see that the message has not been understood or implemented, as every day we are provided with clear evidence that people in general have not figured out how to “just be themselves.” Depression and anxiety disorders are rampant; criminal behavior continues and is increasing in harmful impact; obesity rates are at an all-time high; and most people would leave their crappy jobs if they had enough money.

There are only a few people demonstrating a peaceful, content and carefree state of being, an understanding of life that is bought about through true confidence. Very few people are even able to clearly articulate what it means to be authentic or confident. How these states of being are achieved remains a mystery to most. When you look at most people, you will see a needy, desperate striving to achieve, impress and win at all costs, without enjoyment of the process along the way.

We are told to “fake it ‘til you make it,” as if somehow being fake will lead to being authentic, like lying to find the truth. We are told to dress sharp to impress others, as a way of learning to stop caring what other people think. We are told to worship money like it’s a god, chasing it endlessly in order to relieve ourselves of financial insecurity. And worst of all, we are told to be insincere with others in order to build connections with them. The advice out there on what it means to be authentic and confident is clearly counterproductive and yet we keep falling for it.

As a child, you were encouraged to be authentic, yet simultaneously you received punishment when you followed this noble advice. A child’s natural impulses are to curiously test their surroundings to learn, yet as soon as they hurt themselves—a relevant and vital part of the learning process—they are quickly made to feel shame, and get wrapped up in cotton wool. When a child experiments with emotions that the adults in their life think are “bad,” they are reprimanded and encouraged to suppress these emotions. When a child speaks his or her mind, they are smacked on the bum for being “rude.”

The movies, storybooks and television programs you were exposed to in your youth constantly harped on about the concept of being yourself. Yet they gave you almost no practical guidance on how to implement this idea, and the plotlines of these stories often show the hero using deception to achieve their goals. Your teachers, parents and caregivers often recommended that you should not care what others think, while clearly rolemodelling the opposite: neediness and insecurity about their own social status. All of this implied that same message of *just be yourself* and yet no-one was able to show you *how* to do it, because none of them actually lived by it!

*Authenticity* is perhaps the most meaningful word to me and yet it is being ruined by vultures in the obsessed-with-profit arm of the self-development movement. These people and other perfectly reasonable humans, in their pointless and endless search for a simple linear narrative to live by, proclaim that authenticity is a *static* state that can be achieved. They say that all you must do is find the mystical authenticity once, and then you’ll simply have it forever. There is little thought given to the two main concepts of true authenticity:

- 1) Authenticity is an ever-changing state, constantly affected and influenced by the variables of life, continuously updated through experience, so it can never be the same thing for more than an instant in time, and because of this,

2) Authenticity requires ongoing maintenance and effort, and cannot simply be achieved the same as reaching the outcome of a goal or getting a result. There is no one way to be honest.

Feeling authentic and confident are the results of a complete lifestyle, a conscious way of living, with continuous efforts made all day, every day. Authenticity is not a state that can be achieved and then forgotten about, it is a continuously cyclical way of living. You do not take one breath and then are done with breathing forever; you must breathe continuously to survive. You do not exercise once and have the body you'll need for the rest of your life; you must continually encourage your body to enhance itself.

The same applies to confidence and authenticity – you must constantly learn new things, take action, and reflect on the effects of that action, forever and always, until the end of your life. This might sound like a hassle, but the good news is this is *easier* than being fake, getting stuck, or trying to remain comfortable. You just haven't been shown how yet.

Take a moment to think about the contradictory messaging you received as you grew up. While you were being told to *just be yourself*, you were also being pressured to:

- Be polite, even if it didn't come naturally to you
- Not rock the boat, even if you disagreed strongly
- Dress to impress, even if it felt fake
- Not say anything if you didn't have anything "nice" to say
- Be nice, even if you didn't feel like it
- Not be angry, sad, confused, scared, stressed, frustrated or guilty, even though these occurred without you being able to control them
- Do as you're told, regardless of your values
- Respect people just because of age, social status and wealth, even if they're nasty
- Follow your family's belief-systems, regardless of counter-evidence
- Study subjects in school that you weren't interested in

Slightly confusing messaging, no? So perhaps the people raising you didn't have a clue about what *just be yourself* actually meant. I have no doubt the authority figures in your life actively promoted dishonesty and deception, through hiding or outright lying about your truth, and yet you would still cling to the concept of just being yourself.

I want you to open your mind to the possibility that the beliefs around being yourself that you have been conditioned and programmed to accept are all a total load of shit. People have a tendency to give advice and attempt to teach the young without questioning whether they should. The adults and authority figures who raised you were probably delusional and driven by self-validation, otherwise you wouldn't even be reading this book.

Rather than harping on about how you should just be yourself, in this book we will focus our attention toward expressing yourself honestly, engaging in behaviour that aligns with your core values, and seeking to live as close your truth as humanly possible. I invite you to let go of "being yourself" and instead embrace the idea of being honest.

#### **KEEP IT SIMPLE SUMMARY:**

- You were taught to be dishonest by people who had never lived honestly
- Being yourself – authenticity – is a fluid concept that adapts to each new moment
- You'll need to challenge everything you currently believe about confidence and authenticity