

Trying to be as 'authentic' as we can

by MARK PAVILONS

'A person who is truly authentic doesn't need to play a role in life, we think, but can simply be him- or herself.' Robert Greene

Merriam-Webster has chosen 'authentic' as the word of the year for 2023.

The popularity of the word is driven by online searches and people looking into artificial intelligence, along with culture and identity in a sea of fake social media.

While traditionally meaning 'not false or imitation,' people today see the word as meaning 'true to one's own personality, spirit or character.'

The dictionary also defines it as worthy of acceptance or belief as conforming to or based on fact; paints an authentic picture of our society; conforming to an original so as to reproduce essential features (an authentic reproduction of a colonial farmhouse) or made or done the same way as an original.

I tend to use in terms of hard goods or antiquities. I do collect some ancient artifacts and endeavour to check or verify that they are, in fact, authentic.

Is being authentic a trend? Elon Musk said people should be more authentic on social media.

You think?

I must admit my addiction to Facebook has ballooned in the last year. But my passion is for authentic bits and pieces of the world.

I enjoy following social media influencers who give back and engage in philanthropy. Many are doing great work with the homeless and underprivileged.

On the flip side, don't you hate simulated, bogus, reproduction, counterfeit, forged, fabricated, or phony things and people?

It's kinda weird that we humans only made this differentiation in the last 100 years or so.

To our ancestors and forefathers and mothers, very few things were fake or reproduced. Of course, given our nature, we humans always tried to outwit one another through bogus promises, get-rich-quick schemes and the like. Some of our ancestors even forged coins from the Roman Empire. So, while our brethren lied and cheated, society back then, with all of its ills, was as real as it got.

Survival, plain and simple. While some of today's 'reality' shows drop people in the middle of nowhere and watch them survive, it's nothing close to life and death.

Authentic? Nah, modern gizmos and a dash of entertainment always enter the mix.

Shakespeare advised us 'to thine own self be true ...' He also noted 'no legacy is so rich as honesty.'

And let's not forget the very authentic Mother Theresa: 'Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.'

Easier said than done?

Perhaps.

Humanistic psychologists say that by definition, authentic people possess a number of common characteristics that show they are psychologically mature and fully functioning as human beings.

They tend to have realistic perceptions of reality. They are accepting of themselves and of other people.

Genuine souls are thoughtful and have a "non-hostile" sense of humour. We are able to express our emotions freely and clearly.

Real people are open to learning from their mistakes.

Authenticity, first and foremost, is about knowing yourself.

I think deep down, we all have it and were born with it. Children are the most honest humans there are and will often speak their minds, plainly and bluntly. They have yet to grasp the concepts of self-importance, ego and any sort of defence mechanism.

And we embrace it, especially when we see it in others. We remark how genuine and nice these people are. We praise compassionate and thoughtful people and avoid pretentious and narrow-minded individuals.

In terms of humour, I would add that authentic people accept their shortcomings and can make fun of themselves.

I am constantly chuckling to and at myself, in the confines of my own head, while typing maniacally on my computer keyboard.

I utter self-effacing insults to myself under my own breath, hoping no one will hear.

I appreciate humour at face value and the beauty of crafting a witty tale.

Authenticity also involves getting a glimpse of all aspects of society and human nature.

I believe all creative types - writers, artists, entertainers - are exposing themselves for the world to see. To be honest is to be vulnerable. There is no ambiguity in this.

Authenticity is also sticking by your true values, core ethics and beliefs. This has always been hard for people, especially given society's brutal criticism of others.

Only now in our evolution are we mostly accepting of the LGBTQ community; religious beliefs and traditions, and fearless demonstrations thereof.

Canada's Drag Race may not be your cup of tea, but if you view it as entertainment, you may start to understand it.

I'm a news person, but I admit that watching the evening news is getting a little depressing. I'd rather watch reruns of The Big Bang Theory than hear horror stories from the Middle East conflict or inhumane crimes.

Yes, being authentic means standing there, in plain sight, ready and willing to suffer the slings and arrows of public opinion.

Knowing oneself is a bit of a process to be sure. I am only now grasping my mortality and inner struggles with depression. And I am always willing to be open and upfront about such things.

Ask me a question, and I will give you an honest answer.

They say, what you see is what you get, but that doesn't mean we can't all ?clean up nicely.?

Let's celebrate the unique authenticity of our fellow human beings.