

Reflection Dashboard

Start doing:

Do more:

Stop doing:

Do less:

Resources

Bias: *The Value of Difference*, Binna Kandola; *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman; Harvard's Implicit Association Tests: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

Branding and BD: "The Power of Personal Branding for Career Success," Karen Wensley: <http://www.castore.ca/product/power-of-personal-branding-for-career-success/1508>; "Guide to Business Development for Women Lawyers," Law Society of Upper Canada: http://www.lsuc.on.ca/uploadedFiles/Equity_and_Diversity/Justicia/Business_Development_2013.pdf

Cultural Competence: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/country-profiles.html>; *Cultures and Organizations*, Geert Hofstede; Intercultural Development Inventory [This tool can only be accessed through a qualified administrator, so please be in touch with Ritu Bhasin directly]: <http://www.idiinventory.com/>

Diversity: *Moving Diversity Forward: How to Go from Well-Meaning to Well-Doing*, Verna Myers; *Deep Diversity: Overcoming Us vs. Them*, Shakil Choudhury

Emotional Intelligence: *Social Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman

Sponsorship: *Forget a Mentor, Find a Sponsor: The New Way to Fast-Track Your Career*, Sylvia Ann Hewlett

Women's Advancement: "The Confidence Gap," Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, *The Atlantic*, April 14, 2014

About bci

bhasin consulting inc. (bci) is a leading global people strategies firm. Founded in 2010 by Ritu Bhasin, LL.B MBA, bci has worked with dozens of world-renowned global organizations and hundreds of leaders across sectors in a range of people strategies areas. Our team of award-winning facilitators, consultants, and coaches works with a range of global clients, including law firms, corporations, banks, academic institutions, professional associations, and non-profit organizations to develop and deliver programming in a number of areas, including: Cultural Competence, Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI), Women's Advancement, Leadership Development, Talent Management, and Authentic Leadership.

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About Ritu Bhasin

Ritu Bhasin, LL.B. MBA, is the President of bci. Recognized globally for her diversity and leadership expertise, Ritu has received a number of awards and distinctions for her work. She has extensive experience in delivering programming, consulting, and coaching across a range of people management areas with a focus on leadership development, diversity and inclusion, and the advancement of women. Ritu works primarily with senior leadership teams, boards of directors, middle management, and emerging leader groups, including women and diverse professionals.

Ritu is known for her diversity and inclusion expertise in Cultural Competence and unconscious bias, and is certified to administer Cultural Competence assessment tools including the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) and the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory (ICS). Ritu is also certified in neuroscience coaching strategies for leadership growth. Ritu has coached hundreds of professionals, and now coaches C-Suite leaders and other executives on building their Cultural Competence to be more inclusive.

Ritu has won several awards and distinctions reflecting her passion and commitment to her work, including the City of Toronto's 2014 William P. Hubbard Award for Race Relations. Ritu is also the Co-Founder of Insayva, a platform for self-empowerment for those seeking personal and professional growth. She is a trained instructor in several yoga disciplines and, when she is not working, you will find her in a downward dog.

Authenticity: The Transformative Approach to Building Inclusive Environments

By Ritu Bhasin

Ritu Bhasin, LL.B. MBA is the President of bhasin consulting inc., a leading diversity and inclusion-focused consulting firm. This article was submitted on behalf of the NALP Diversity & Inclusion Section.

Neena, a woman of color, was a sought-after candidate when she joined her firm as a junior associate. The firm hired Neena because of her strong business acumen and academic record, and she joined the firm because of its excellent reputation. The firm also highlighted its commitment to diversity and inclusion (D&I)—“we encourage people to be themselves at the firm”—which appealed to her.

A few years later, Neena feels disconnected and discouraged: the volume and quality of her workload is inconsistent; she lacks sponsor support; and her behaviors in the workplace bear very little resemblance to the person she is on evenings and weekends. She self-censors about key aspects of her background, what she does during her time off; she acts in ways that are outside of her behavioral preferences, and she spends time learning about activities that don't interest her, to join social conversations and activities.

When she approaches Bill, a white male leader whom she trusts, about her struggles Bill empathizes with Neena because he too struggled early in his career to meet the behavioral expectations at the firm. He tells Neena that he too felt that he had to conform in order to advance, but that doing so led to his success.

Minimization is the Key Barrier to Inclusion

As inclusion professionals, we consistently hear the Neena-narrative from women and diverse professionals—that despite their organization's call to “be yourself,” they feel

that they must change or mask who they are (what I call *performing*) in order to advance. We also hear from leaders, like Bill, about their ongoing challenges with how to be inclusive given the pressure to perform in their workplace.

The hard truth is that most leaders and their organizations continue to be challenged in how to create a diverse and inclusive environment. As a result, they continue to struggle in retaining and advancing people like Neena—women, people from diverse communities, and others who don't “fit the mold.”

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In my work, I leverage an assessment tool called the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure inclusion and cultural competence within an organization. The results of both the IDI assessments and my research show that the fundamental systemic barrier to building an inclusive organization (and society) is what is called “minimization.” An organization that is assessed as failing in minimization verbalizes that it values differences and D&I, but the lived experience is that (a) differences are minimized and instead the focus is on

connecting across sameness, and (b) people are expected to conform behaviorally to the dominant normative within the organization.

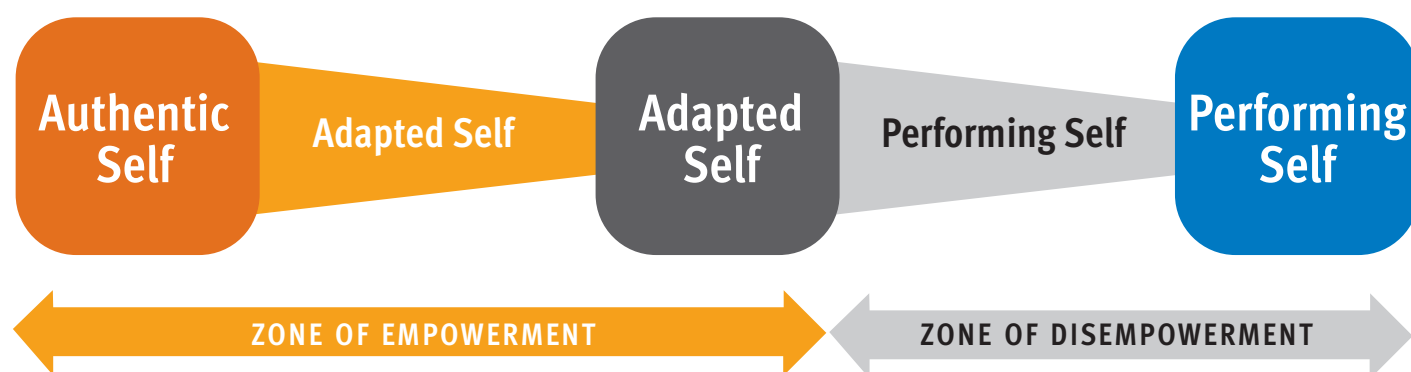
The pressure to avoid differences and to “be the same” in a minimization culture is relentless. It pushes us to perform in order to experience belonging and to advance. Much like Neena (and even Bill), it causes us to feel disempowered, unfulfilled, and excluded, striking at our spiritual, mental, and physical health. Most notably, it is in direct opposition to the message to “be yourself,” which is why organizations continue to spin their D&I wheels. As a leader then, how can you interrupt minimization and the exclusionary world it creates? By leveraging authenticity in how you live, lead, and work.

Authenticity is the Antidote to Exclusion

Leadership, well-being, and inclusion research all speak to the profound importance of authenticity in creating personal, relational, and professional joy. By authenticity, I'm referring to the consistent practice of choosing to know, embrace, and be who you are—especially what makes you different—as often as possible, so that you feel better about yourself, you bring this spirit to your interactions and, in so doing, you invite others to do the same.

We know that authenticity is critical for leadership, as research tells us that employees are more likely to develop trusting relationships with leaders who are authentic, experience higher levels of workplace well-being because

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of them, and are more likely to feel more engaged, satisfied, and empowered. (Of course, all of this grows profitability too.)

And here's the greatest insight from my work—authenticity is the antidote to exclusion. While exclusion is rooted in a discomfort with differences that pushes people to leave these differences at the door, inclusion is about inviting differences into the workplace. In inclusive environments, team members feel empowered by their leaders to leverage their differences and be more authentic in how they act, what they share, in their appearance, and how they build relationships. To make this happen, leaders must themselves be authentic, which requires learning how to embrace their own and others' differences.

A Framework for Living, Working & Leading More Authentically

I will be the first to admit that revealing your authentic self can be very challenging. The advice doesn't feel realistic or accessible when you are simultaneously receiving messaging to conform and mask who you are, especially when you're not from the dominant culture within your organization (again, think Neena).

To address this challenge, I've developed a framework called the Three Selves, which I explore in-depth in my new book, *The Authenticity Principle*—a practical approach for understanding when and how to bring more of who

we are into how we live, work, and lead, without compromising our ability to succeed. This framework is based on the idea that each of us has three selves:

- **The Authentic Self** – Who we would be if there were no negative consequences for our actions. Some of us spend only a bit of our time here.
- **The Adapted Self** – Who we are when we willingly choose to adapt aspects of our behavior in order to meet our own and others' needs. Some of us spend much of our time here.
- **The Performing Self** – Who we are when we feel we have no choice but to conform or mask who we are. Some of us spend a lot of our time here.

This framework emphasizes the importance and power of *choice* in being more authentic. The overall objective of living, working, and leading more authentically is to be in a place where the majority of our behavioral decisions reflect our Authentic Self or our Adapted Self and where we're pushing away from our Performing Self.

All day long, we make choices about how to behave—what words to employ when we speak, what body language to use, what to share—which reflect aspects of our Three Selves. The key to leveraging the Three Selves continuum is to better understand when we feel we have the ability to exercise choice in being authentic or

adaptive (both of which are empowering), versus feeling like we have no choice but to conform or mask who we are in order to get ahead (which is disempowering). As a leader, the key to leveraging the Three Selves continuum is to better understand the extent to which you're choosing to be authentic or adaptive in how you're showing up at work while encouraging others to do the same, and the extent to which you're pushing others to perform.

This takes me back to Neena. In order to thrive, Neena needs to feel like she can communicate, self-advocate, share, and dress more in alignment with her true self. She must be encouraged by Bill and the other firm leaders to make her own decisions about adapting her



behavior to meet her career development goals. If firm leaders believe that a change in Neena's behavior would help her to advance, they must first affirm the strengths of her preferred behaviors; explain clearly why a behavioral adaptation is important in this situation; encourage this adaptation only for limited moments and

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as required; and then allow her to make a choice on whether to do so. When encouraging Neena to adapt her behavior, it's imperative that the firm leaders communicate that this suggested behavioral adaptation isn't due to Neena's lack of ability; that her behavioral differences do not make her flawed; or that she is required to permanently change her behavior. Unfortunately, this rarely happens in most workplaces.

As you can imagine, it's more empowering for Neena to choose to be adaptive in limited, required moments than to act like someone she's not all of the time. If the firm leaders consistently push Neena to perform across the board in her behaviors, Neena will likely leave the firm, which is what we repeatedly see.

In order to disrupt the firm's culture of minimization and be more supportive of Neena, the two most important things that Bill and the firm leaders can do are to: (1) break the cycle of sameness by bringing their own behavioral differences into the work environment, and, (2) expand the range of behaviors they use to measure leadership potential. In other words, they must embrace and leverage authenticity.

A Transformative Shift to be More Inclusive

The bottom line is that authenticity is the key ingredient for creating more inclusive, empowered, and innovative environments. It takes courage, commitment, resilience, and self-awareness to be authentic as a person and as a leader—especially in a profession and society that pushes sameness. Leaders who want to lead more authentically consistently choose to make this happen, despite the potential of negative consequences. They understand that being authentic is a daily practice which requires self-reflection and action, and which may reveal uncomfortable truths about who they are, about their workplace, and about the society in which they live. But, they work to be more authentic regardless, because, at the end of the day, they feel incredible in their own skin. And they want others to feel the same.

Authenticity is transformative. ■

