



Feeling like a fraud: who am I at the core?

Bruce E. Roselle, PhD

In this fifth of a six-part Leadersynth series, we focus on how reconnecting to your core can help you move past feelings of inadequacy and move toward authenticity. These installments come directly from my new book, **The Fraud Factor**, to be available on Amazon later this month. The one remaining installment in this series is: Feeling like a fraud: getting real again!

So, what is your core? It is the essence of who you are as a person, your fundamental nucleus of unique characteristics that are sustained, consistent, and enduring over time. In my 30 years of coaching experience, I have never seen a set of circumstances where the best solution to a poor job fit was to attempt to change who the individual was at the core. Let me say that again, for emphasis, in a slightly different way. Changing who you are at the core is never the best way to handle a set of circumstances or personalities in your work.

The best strategy is almost always to figure out who you are as a person, and then lead confidently from that genuine foundation. We will take a deep-dive look at your core attributes in the sixth and final installment in this Leadersynth series.

The right fit. At some point, figuring out who you are at the core might lead you to a decision to find a better fit, but this is not a conclusion you should jump to right away. In situations where individuals are viewed as a poor fit in a particular position, management usually considers terminating or demoting them. If this has been an unaddressed problem for a number of years, then taking him or her out of the role might be the best solution.

Because terminating an individual for poor fit is an expensive conclusion that involves paying severance and conducting a search for another person to fill the vacated role, it should not be reached lightly. However, the emotional and financial costs of keeping someone in a role in which he or she cannot succeed are even more painful.

As we introduced earlier in this series of articles, in order to create new growth, you must experience situations, perspectives, and circumstances that challenge you, rattle your core, and perhaps require a bit of reorganization of your internal beliefs and approaches. Often, your growth as a person requires you to seek out new experiences, take on new responsibilities, get involved in cross-functional task forces, or learn new information and perspective.

Early on in these kinds of assignments that stretch you, it may not seem like the right fit at all. You might even convince yourself that you can never be successful in the existing circumstances, and that your only choice is to quit. Though you might feel this way, the best outcome in such a situation can sometimes be to stay and make it the right fit through your own growth and development.

These kinds of situations force you to adapt your approach to one that is more effective. However, to sustain such growth and make sure that the roots of your new perspective go deep, the internal brain 'reorganization' you experience must remain consistent with the essence/core of who you are. If the new growth and perspective is overwhelming, undermining your confidence in your fundamental attributes, the resulting destabilization you feel can unleash a long-term version of the fraud factor.

The right fit, then, is one that is consistent with your core attributes, but also forces you to stretch a bit. For most people, heading off to freshman year in college creates a degree of destabilization. Students often discover in the first several weeks that what they thought were good study habits in high school, what they assumed were beliefs and values that most people held, and how they approached making friends, are perspectives not adhered to by everyone on their dorm floor.

Other major life events like marriage, death of a loved one, or the birth of children can force people to accommodate internally in order to take into account dramatically different circumstances. The similarity across these types of events is that our internal cognitive framework cannot incorporate the new circumstances, and we must restructure our beliefs and thinking to fit. Often, these types of situations can seem overwhelming at first, and the stress we feel can undermine our effectiveness.

The answer, however, is not to seek out situations where you never experience any level of stress or arousal. Situations where you are disinterested or detached might feel relaxing on some level for some length of time, but you usually cannot generate enough energy to be highly effective in what you are doing. The key, as in the story of the three bears and Goldilocks, is to have a level of emotional arousal that is "just right."

The sweet spot. Most people would agree that there is a level of alertness that leads to their best performance, whether in sports, artistic endeavors, public speaking, or facilitating a team discussion. If you experience a low level of attentiveness or preparedness, you might come across as rather flat in your energy level. On the other hand, if you experience an enormous level of vigilance and tension before a particular situation, your performance will suffer. Somewhere in between is your "sweet spot".

Psychologists would call this sweet spot the *optimal level of arousal*. This is your apex of alertness, the place where you function with the utmost confidence and competence. Here, you are the most motivated and alert, and the fraud factor has very little effect on your successful achievement of desired outcomes. Because you function most effectively and comfortably in this sweet spot, you have a tendency to want to remain there and tap its full potential. Usually, that is a good thing and it feels like the right fit.

However, the right fit can evolve into the wrong fit over time. Sometimes you hunker down too long in this sweet spot of confidence and competence. You become complacent and stop stretching and growing. Because you experience your greatest feelings of success in your sweet spot, you tend to want to stay within these comfortable walls.

Please weigh in on our blog with your experiences with this phenomenon of feeling like a fraud: <http://roselleadership.com/stay-informed/leadersynth-articles>