



Becoming You: **Authenticity, Empowerment, Self-Expression and the Powerful Life**

I like to define my terms.

For me, becoming “myself” inevitably means that I have a successful life, one that works for me. But what does it truly mean to be “successful” in this way, for anyone? To have a life that “works”?

Since no one person’s life is really built to work for anyone else, it must be a matter of personal goals, and of pursuing and realizing those goals.

There’s money -  there’s love -  ... there are children



And there’s so much more. That “more” depends on what we personally want in our lives, and how we want it. Some things that we want are not as 100% external as our TV-life society acknowledges:

- Speaking one’s truth
- Allowing one’s self to be visible
- Feeling self-confidence
- Claiming one’s power
- Enjoying mental health
- Claiming one’s divine connection
- Defining and pursuing dreams
- Daring to live one’s highest beliefs
- Or actually actualizing one’s dreams!

To do any of these things requires that we be ourselves, as much as we are able, to the best of our ability at any given time in our lives. Without that ongoing journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance – without an understanding of what it means to actually *be one’s self* – one is left to flounder in the sea of ungrounded and often unrecognized emotional reactions, and in the behavioral norms in which we were all trained when we were too young to think or judge for ourselves.

But we are older now, and can make decisions for ourselves. We can leave the “norms” and become mighty forces in our own lives. The important questions that can determine our lives are: Who am I? Who do I want to be? And how do I become that?

If you think that who you are is your career or your personality or your emotional leanings, you are not giving yourself nearly enough credit. To say, “I am a teacher”, or “I am married and I have children,” is simply not enough information about who you truly are, and what you can truly do in this life with this life that you call your own. We too rarely *claim* these lives that we call “ours”; when we make decisions, how often do we base our decisions on safety or conformity or avoidance of fear?

Who are you really? Don’t tell anyone else, just be brave enough to tell yourself! What are you capable of? Do you know? How have you pushed yourself further? With aggression, or with curiosity? Have you dared to play? Have you dared to live by the ideals that you secretly believe but don’t feel you have the ability to really live? Have you dared to appreciate yourself, and to build on that appreciation? Or have you only pushed yourself, been mean to yourself, trying harder and harder without success and then blaming yourself even more?

What would happen if you suddenly had even just a little bit more courage to try a more compassionate way? What if you had a little bit more willingness to move out of a comfort zone? What about a little bit more authenticity? A little bit more openness?

If you consider those questions factually, and answer them literally, you will come to realize what Rev. Michael Beckwith calls your “growing edge”, which is that place beyond or through which you come to know that the one you call “you” is so very much more than you may have even scratched the surface of! And then comes the question that will call to you, if you are tired of being where you have been:

How badly do you wish to change your life? Are you willing to try something new?

Are you willing to believe that you could grow more with joy than with exquisite pain, if you are shown how?

Are you willing to walk to that growing edge and dance there, just a little bit, in the company of others, if you find assistance in doing so?

Are you willing to accept your own “secret” belief that you can change, if you could only see how?

It’s all about being *you*. About discovering who this miraculous being is. You have heard it said, I am sure, that there are no two people who are completely alike. Isn’t that an awe-provoking statement? Out of millions and millions of people, there is only one you. And yet don’t we live as though we are all alike? Many of us do! So many of us put our dreams on back burners or put them away entirely, in the name of security, and drudgery work done in cell-like cubicles.

Ask yourself: What is it that I might contribute/be/share/say/do that would make my life feel meaningful - that would bring color and light and passion to my weeks, instead of dreams of Saturdays and Sundays to every working weekday?

Once you have even a glimmer of a thought of what that meaningful pathway might be, there is one attitude that must be cultivated as the beginning, middle and end of your journey toward that contribution, that passionate action or lifestyle that you have just identified: you have to be willing to become you, more and more – to say “yes” to that journey.

That doesn’t mean that you have to take the entire journey by tomorrow morning! It means that you must simply have that knowing that there is more; a yearning to know what it is, and a willingness to try.

I began my journey of self-discovery through acting and singing, performing – learning of the deep information available in words, vocal delivery, physicality, sound, and emotions. Eager to know what makes communication work (or not!) – with self and others – I moved my investigation into sociolinguistics, and found that the deep study of power in language far outlived my brief graduate studies. Then, during a time when my emotions took me over to the degree that I couldn’t swim but could only sink, I spent years in therapy while simultaneously reading about and paying close attention to the levels of reality and exploration that therapy gives rise to: questions of identity, spirituality, beliefs, and relationship. I have always been a student, and always will be until the day I leave this body.

With each challenge – from walking out onto a stage, to learning how to say no when everyone else said yes – I shook, my heart pounded, and I wondered if I would survive. I wasn’t simply afraid, I was terrified. It must have been inevitable that I would be an actor because I am such a dramatic person. But drama notwithstanding, there is a fear or anxiety or resistance that can come up for all of us when we challenge ourselves. So why do it?

Because of the joy and personal freedom – like an escape window from a prison – that comes as one walks through those challenges!

So what do authenticity, empowerment and self-expression have to do with becoming ourselves? Each time we walk into our lives in the simplicity and truthfulness – that authenticity - of just being us, we carry less of the defense mechanisms that keep us from experiencing the joyous dance of our lives. Each time we dare to speak up and say, “No thank you,” or “Yes thank you” when that is how we feel, even though it would be more comfortable not to speak up, we immediately feel the increase in self-support – we know just that much more, sometimes a lot more, that we can trust ourselves to be there for ourselves. Each time we dare to let go of suffering our way into new understandings, we are weaned away from the trainings that were adhered to us like tape when we were too young to question – and we begin to see that we are more than we thought, that we can do more than we thought possible, that transformation is not scary – it is our nature to be transformational forces in our lives and the lives of those we touch.

We don’t have to spend years in therapy, if we don’t wish to. The pathways of creative and informational growth await, hands outstretched, to dance us into the life we dream of.

The empowerment comes when you stretch your hand out in return, ready to receive, and simply say, “Yes.”

