

# Professional Reading Program

Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program



## The Art of Authenticity by Karissa Thacker

### Why Read The Art of Authenticity?

*“Being an authentic leader is not just about making the right ethical decision when the heat is on. It is primarily about doing the work every day to bring your best self forward into the world so that you are in shape when the heat is on and the pressure is high. Being authentic is just like being in shape physically. It is a daily decision and there is no substitute for doing the work.”*

*“Truly authentic leaders are people who know how to make sure the stuff that really matters gets done and raise the performance of thousands of people (including themselves) to a higher standard through their presence, impact, and well-chosen actions.”*

The Art of Authenticity is a guide to being more authentic in leadership. While the book is focused on the corporate business world, some leadership ideas and practices remain the same no matter the setting. Authentic leadership matters whether you're leading a hotshot crew, a squad of Marines, a fire station, or a department in a Fortune 500 company.

There are several videos on the book available online. Find some of them at the links below, or by using an internet search engine.

- **Karissa Thacker – Why Authenticity Matters. (15 minutes):**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqxcspGMnvU>
- **Karissa Thacker – Management Psychologist (3 minutes):**  
<https://vimeo.com/154620081>

For more leadership ideas and to dig deeper, check out the Wildland Fire Leadership Development Program (WFLDP) blog, Facebook page, Professional Reading Program, and more at the links below:

**Blog:** <http://wildlandfireleadership.blogspot.com/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/WFLDP>

**Professional Reading Program:** <https://www.nwcg.gov/wfldp/toolbox/prp>

**Main WFLDP page:** <https://www.fireleadership.gov>

# ***The Art of Authenticity Discussion Questions***

## **Chapter One: The Digital Era of Freedom and Fear**

Have you ever answered the 5 questions Drucker asked? The business world has changed a lot since 1999 – have there been changes in the fire world since then as well? What changes have you seen in your career?

## **Chapter Two: Signature Contributions and Conformity**

What do you think about the “George Bailey” questions in this chapter? What are your quirks? Do you celebrate them, or hide them? How might your quirks make you a better fire leader?

## **Chapter Three: Truth, Lies, and Authenticity**

What’s your “meaning making” system? Have you thought about how it functions, when it’s beneficial, and when it’s not? What did you get out of the performance feedback example?

## **Chapter Four: Followers Beware... of Charisma**

Have you ever worked for or with a charismatic leader who may not have been an “authentic” leader? How about “authentic” leaders who weren’t charismatic? Which did you prefer? In fire leadership, is there an ideal balance or mixture of authenticity and charisma? Why or why not? Are charisma and authenticity mutually exclusive?

## **Chapter Five: Self-Awareness, or is it Selves-Awareness?**

What do you think of self-awareness vs selves awareness as described in this chapter? What’s your leadership vision?

## **Chapter Six: Balanced Processing and Collaborative Decision Making**

How can you practice balanced processing? What’s the difference between a dilemma and a problem? In fire, do we ever treat dilemmas like problems? How can you recognize the difference, and act accordingly?

## **Chapter Seven: Relational Transparency**

Here’s a question straight from the book: When was the last time you had a thoughtful, intentional, honest conversation that you knew involved risk? How can you foster transparency, as a leader or follower, without “oversharing?”

## **Chapter Eight: Internalizing Moral Perspective / An Active, Unique GPS System**

What are some ways that your environment is influencing your behavior? What's your take on the "rider and elephant" examples in this chapter? What "guardrails" do you have in place, personally or professionally?

## **Chapter Nine: The Centrality of Conscious Choice**

What's the difference between "I am what I am" and "I am what I choose?" How can that apply in fire leadership? How can mindfulness and mindlessness be applied in fire leadership?

## **Chapter Ten: How to Read Culture Like an Anthropologist**

Why is it important to be aware of your organizational culture, at the larger agency level and at the smaller crew or unit level? Why is it important to explain that culture to new recruits or others looking to join the organization? How many cultures or subcultures are at play in your organization? Just what is culture according to the author?

## **Chapter Eleven: How to Make Peace with Paradox**

Why is it important to evaluate hard questions of identity? (think of the arrogant executive example in this chapter) What do you think about the "normal" state and the "leadership" state?

## **Chapter Twelve: How to Ferociously Seek the Truth (When Everyone Else is Framing and Spinning)**

What are your thoughts on the trust section of this chapter? In your mind, how do trust and authenticity relate? How can you foster trust in your crew or organization?