



## **Guide for Group Discussion**

### **“The Journey to Self-Acceptance”**

#### **Chapter One: Who is the Real You?**

Chapter One introduces the concepts of belonging and self-acceptance. In this chapter, I explain how not seeing anyone in the room who looks like you make you feel like you're an outsider. It describes how you get a pit in your stomach when everybody in the room seems like they belong except you. I also delve into reasons why people may decide to conceal parts of their identity and while hiding or “covering” your identity may have some short-term benefits, hiding ultimately leads to loneliness and unhappiness.

Ask the group to reflect on the following:

- Take a look at your workplace environment. Who do you see in leadership positions?
- With whom do you feel most comfortable interacting with at work? Is it a colleague who has a similar lived experience as you? Is it with the support or service staff? Or is it talking with a member of the leadership team? Just notice when you are most comfortable being your true self.
- If there is no setting at work where you feel comfortable, that is okay as well. At this point, it is just data about you and your work environment.

## **Chapter Two: A Desire to Belong**

Chapter Two focuses on the innate human desire to belong. It describes the lengths we may go to in order to get a sense of belonging and examines how external messages have contributed to the feeling of not belonging for many groups of people. I explore how messages from the outside world can negatively impact you and that when you hear messages that your authentic self is not valued, you feel like you need to alter who you are and how you behave. By way of example, I tell the story of how during a brief acting career in Hollywood I was asked to change my name from “Montalvo” to “McLain” in order to be perceived as more “American” and how that change negatively impacted the perception of myself as a young person. I also discuss how certain programs aimed at helping the underrepresented such as affirmative action can have unintended consequences on the groups they are trying to help.

Consider for a moment how external messages have impacted your own life. Think about the following:

- Take a moment to think about whether you have ever changed anything about yourself to fit in? Make a list and examine it.
- What did you change about yourself and how did it make you feel? Write down those feelings.
- Now, imagine what it would feel like if you didn’t change to adapt to your surroundings. What would happen if you just did what came comfortable to you and didn’t worry about how others reacted to you? How does that feel?

## **Chapter Three: Hiding in Plain Sight**

Chapter Three explains to the reader that hiding is not the solution. While you may feel like hiding is the only way to succeed, it is actually quite a costly choice. Hiding parts of your identity is emotionally exhausting and can lead to feelings of shame, guilt and loss. This chapter includes a personal story of when I tried to hide my identity as a mom in the workplace which resulted in my having to nurse my three-month old in the garage in secrecy.

We all have something about our lives that we are afraid to expose to the world. As you think about those things consider the following:

- What is unique about your life or lived experience that might be valuable in the workplace? Did you grow up in a different culture or religion? Did you come from an economically disadvantaged background? Did you or a family member struggle with a mental health condition? What valuable insight do you have as a result of that specific lived experience?
- Next time you find yourself in a meeting or conversation where you have a different point of view, consider voicing it. What would happen if you let go of the fear of people not agreeing with you?
- Do one small thing that communicates to the world what is different about you. Make a post about a holiday you are celebrating. Put up a picture at your desk of your same-sex partner. Wear a pink ribbon during Breast Cancer awareness month. Some small thing that may spark another to ask about it.

#### **Chapter Four: You Are Enough**

Chapter Four reassures the reader that despite everything they are hearing and experiencing, they are enough. It takes the reader through the realization that they have something of value to give to the world and that people are more interested in you than you realize. This chapter explains that people do in fact want to know you and hear your story. It encourages the reader to ignore all the negative self-talk and embrace their authentic self.

During this part of the journey, it is important that have strategies to quiet the negative inner voice. Here are some strategies to start with:

- **Acknowledge what is a “story” and what is a fact.** What I have noticed about negative self-talk is that we start creating stories or beliefs about what happened instead of simply trusting the facts. We start saying things to ourselves such as:

“I haven’t received a response back yet, they must not like what I submitted.”

“Nobody has told me they liked my presentation so they all must have hated it.”

The list goes on. The truth is that these are just stories we create when our mind is in fear. Fear of rejection. Fear of disapproval. Fear of loss. When this starts happening to me, I stop and start listing out all the facts.

“The facts are that they’ve said they would get back to me in two weeks and it has only been two days.”

“The facts are everybody clapped after my presentation.”

Let yourself trust the facts and not the stories you may have created when you see yourself going down the path of negative self-talk.

- **Make a list of your successes.** To combat negative self-talk when it shows up, start with making a list of your accomplishments. This list may start out small especially if you are just starting out in your career, but it will grow over time. When you put it all down on a list, you can truly see what you have achieved. For me, it doesn't feel real until I see it right in front of me.

### **Chapter Five: Belonging Begins with Self-Acceptance**

At this point, the reader will begin to believe that hiding is not the solution but is looking for a way out of their despair. Chapter Five starts this transformational process towards self-acceptance. The chapter asks the reader to discover and embrace their authentic self. In this chapter, I share a story of my own personal transformation of when I realized that I was enough and how scary but liberating that felt. I also provide the reader with several suggestions on how to remind themselves of their worth. I make it clear that there is no magic bullet towards getting to self-acceptance quickly and that it is a process and will take time.

Ask the group to reflect on the following:

- Take a moment to think about the real you. Have you had a Geo Metro moment?
- What masks would you remove and what parts of your identity would you reveal if you had nothing to lose?
- Who in your life supports you in removing your mask and being yourself?
- Who in your life is preventing you from removing your mask?

### **Chapter Six: What's In Your Toolbox?**

Chapter Six is more like a “how-to” chapter and gives the reader specific suggestions on what is needed to achieve self-acceptance. For starters, it reminds the reader that their struggle has created a resilience that they may be unaware of and their resilience is a superpower. I also talk about the importance of surrounding yourself with the

right people. I suggest that we all need personal champion, a true friend and a community. And finally, I talk about the importance of finding and mentor and sponsor along the way.

Now is the time to think about your own toolbox.

- Who are the people in your life that have supported you and lifted you up along the way? Do you have a personal champion? If you don't, what kind of person are looking for? List out the qualities out so that you can be intentional in fostering those types of relationships going forward.
- Examine your friendships. Are they friends that you can share the hard messy stuff with or only the picture-perfect stuff? Think about whether these friendships are really serving you and if not, consider making a change.
- What kind of organization would you enjoy being part of? Pick an organization and attend an event. See what you think. You may be surprised how comforting it is to be around people who have a shared interest or experience.

### **Chapter Seven: When to Choose Yourself**

Chapter Seven takes a step back to point out that this process of revealing your authentic self is hard. It gives the reader permission to take their time and to take action only when it feels right. I share a personal story of how I had to combat perfectionism which on the one hand brought me great success, but on the other hand, great anxiety. This chapter focuses on how choosing self-care is vital to one's mental health well-being. Many of us feel like we must always be "doing" but sometimes, giving yourself permission to put yourself first may be what is needed instead. This chapter encourages the reader to find a safe space to take the first step and to be intentional on how much they want to reveal and when. This chapter gives the reader permission to dictate the process on their own terms.

Here is a good time to pause and reflect on how you are taking care of yourself in your own life:

- Identify one small thing you can do to improve your day-to-day life such as adding a vegetable to your diet or taking a 10-minute walk. It should be a small change you can implement immediately, not an impossible thing.

- Make whatever preparations you need to support you in this one small change and give it a try. Then, do it again the next week, and the week after. Change doesn't come in big huge successes, but in small, repeatable actions. Once you are able to do that one small thing without much effort, add a second thing.

### **Chapter Eight: Hiding Only Serves You For So Long**

At some point you make the self-realization that hiding no longer serves you and you make that life-changing decision. Chapter Eight dives right into that moment when you decide that hiding your authentic self no longer works. It shows the reader how the benefits of hiding no longer outweigh the pain of keeping part of you hidden. I also remind the reader that you don't have to be accepted by everyone but instead look for the people or places that accept you exactly as you are.

Take a moment to reflect on the parts of you that you may be hiding.

- What part of your identity are you hiding?
- What things about yourself do you hide or downplay simply because you think you won't fit in or you think people will think lesser of you?
- Think about which version of the "you" that is showing up at work today. Write down what that version looks like. It's okay if you are still in hiding or starting at version 1.0. Don't judge it. Just study it so you know where your starting point is.
- Now, look ahead to the future and write down what your version 5.0 might look like. What are its physical characteristics? What are you wearing? What are you sharing about yourself? How comfortable are you with the new you? What communities are you part of? Create a vision of what version 5.0 of "you" might look like so you have something to aspire to.

### **Chapter Nine: The Power of Revealing Your Authentic Self**

Chapter Nine is the promised land. This chapter assures the reader that if they follow the path towards self-acceptance described in this book, they can achieve the sense of belonging they so desperately want. You know

when you are in a safe space when you are not worried about what others think of you. At this point, the reader begins to embrace how their difference adds value and how important it is to tell their story.

This is the part of the journey that we've all been waiting for. You are ready to take the first step to showing up as your authentic self.

- Think back to the exercise in Chapter 8 and list the one thing about yourself that you have not revealed to others. Why are you hiding that? What fear came up for you by the thought of revealing that particular thing?
- If you feel you are ready, consider slowing revealing what you've been hiding. For example, if you've been hiding behind the wrong gender identity, add your pronouns to your signature line. If you've been hiding behind your hairstyle, wear your natural locs on Zoom. If you've been hiding an invisible disability, mention it casually in a conversation. Whatever the thing is that you have kept quiet all these years and feel a sense of shame around, try revealing it slowly to someone that you trust or in a setting that feels safe. It can even be revealed to a total stranger where you will have no consequence for that reveal. Just say it or do it out loud and see how that feels.
- After you have revealed it, notice your emotions. How did it feel to say out loud the thing that you have never said out loud before? Notice how your body feels. Is there a sense of relief? Is there fear? Do you think you could maybe do it again? Remember small steps, repeated often.
- **It is time to tell your story (or part of your story).** To anybody. It does not have to be to a room full of people. You can start with a close friend. Your pastor or rabbi. The mail carrier. Just say it out loud and see how it feels.

### **Chapter Ten: You Are a Role Model**

Chapter Ten broadens the conversation challenging each of us to show up as our authentic self in the workplace in order to create a culture of belonging. In this chapter, I talk about the importance of role modeling authenticity so that others feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work. For example, when a man takes paternity leave it allows women the psychological safety to do the same. Finally, I share data and research that shows how employee morale goes up and organizations succeed when employees are able to be authentic at work.

It's time to think about how we can bring this work to our organizations.

- Who could potentially benefit from you showing up authentically at work? A manager, an employee or a customer? List them out and take a look at their names. Think about how much value you might bring to their understanding of you, the company or the industry if they could see things from your perspective.
- How much energy are you expending every day by not showing up authentically at work? What are you stuffing inside and what are you changing in order to fit in? Just notice how much effort that is and consider the possibility of letting it go. Feel how freeing that may feel.

To find out more about Tricia and her book, [\*Embrace the Power of You: Owning Your Identity at Work\*](#), go to [triciatimm.com](http://triciatimm.com). You can also contact her at [contact@triciatimm.com](mailto:contact@triciatimm.com) if you are interested in having her come speak at your organization.