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MAKE IT, DON'T



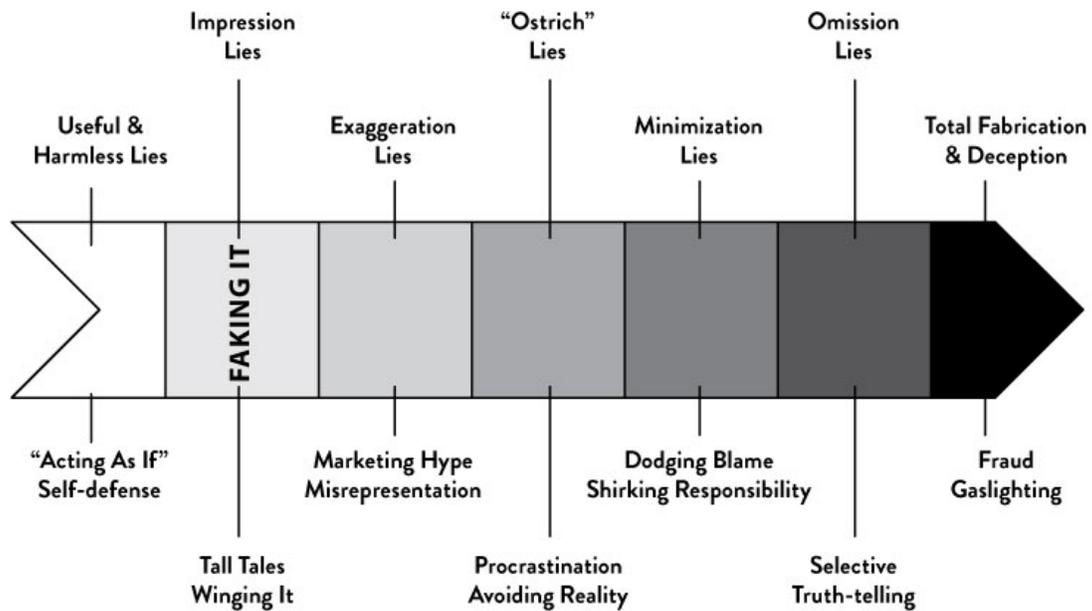
FAKE IT

**LEADING WITH AUTHENTICITY
FOR REAL BUSINESS SUCCESS**

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Driven to succeed, and under constant pressure, entrepreneurs and business leaders alike can be tempted to fake it, exaggerate their strengths, minimize weaknesses, look the other way, and spin the truth. But “fake it till you make it” just doesn’t work—at least, not long enough to build a sustainable business, because when the truth comes out, you’ll be exposed. Based on a quarter-century leading the national PR company I founded and advising thousands of clients, my book, *Make It, Don’t Fake It*, shows how the application of authentic leadership eliminates the need for the shortcuts that sabotage success. This discussion guide will help you manage the intellectual and emotional challenges of authentic leadership for long-term success. It will also aid you in communicating to your team the critical importance of reality-based truth telling as the only way to build and protect a successful brand. You can use this guide by following each chapter in the order shown or go to the specific chapters that you relate to most, now. The questions are meant to stimulate broader thinking and introspection, and can therefore be taken on the whole, or individually.

CHAPTER ONE: SOME REALLY BAD ADVICE



Where are you on the Fake-O-Meter? Most people have spent some time somewhere on the fakery spectrum. How did you fake it? When? Why? And what happened?

1. Have you ever experienced Imposter Syndrome? What were the circumstances—or triggers—that caused it? Write down how feeling like an imposter affected your performance.
2. Using Alfred Adler's familiar "acting as if" approach or other visualization and self-assessment techniques, how could you help yourself feel more confident? To whom could you turn to for help and reassurance?
3. Have you ever faked it for personal gain at someone else's expense? If you were exposed, explain the consequences. Did you have to scramble to clean up after yourself? Or did you tell a second lie to cover up the first? How did the whole experience make you feel?
4. Recall a situation or situations in which you or another leader made a mistake or were in crisis mode and felt overwhelmed. Write down any instances in which you failed to own up to your error, looked the other way, or stuck your head in the sand. What were the outcomes of those situations? How did you feel about them?
5. If could have a "do-over" in #4, how would you have handled the situation differently?
6. Take a second look at items 1-5. How would operating honestly have produced different outcomes?

CHAPTER TWO: SO, YOU WANT TO START A COMPANY ...

1. What is your core reason—your why, your passion—that moved you to start your company?
2. What is your value proposition and market opportunity?
3. What are the main risks inherent in your business? What are you afraid of? Are the answers to these two questions the same? What is the worst thing that could happen to you if this business were to fail?
4. How would you recover from failure?

5. Are you ready to be a founder and/or CEO or (insert title here)? What skills do you possess? What are the limits of your skillset?
6. What team do you need to build to complement and extend your skillset?
7. How will you manage your growth when there is too little business—and when there is too much?
8. What is your ideal customer? (Think in terms of product/service fit.)
9. What will be your role in your own company? Is it suited to your abilities and limitations?
10. What are your core values? What do you stand for as a person and as a company?

CHAPTER THREE: BECOMING A CEO

1. Identify where you are on your leadership journey: entrepreneur, founder, new CEO, moving up within the executive levels of your organization.
2. How can you anticipate the needs of your business and when (or whether) to transition from owner/boss to CEO?
3. Have a sit-down with yourself. If your company's core values are not defined, do it now.
4. Do you know what you don't know? Would others say your ego is sufficiently in check?
5. How do you handle the limbo of uncertainty?
6. Do you practice humility and empathy in your leadership style? How?
7. What do you do to acquire a bias for action and avoid procrastination?
8. How do you deal with gender bias, and what will you do to prevent/eliminate it?

CHAPTER FOUR: BECOMING AND STAYING AN AUTHENTIC BRAND

1. How involved are you with the creation and sustainability of your brand? How frequently do you talk with the people who help you build and protect it?
2. How important are your company values and culture in creating that brand?
3. Describe your company's culture. How does it reflect your core values? What works? What does not?
4. How are core values reflected in core business processes throughout your company (HR, manufacturing, customer service, quality, engineering, finance, etc.)?
5. How closely is your reputation and your personal brand tied to your company's brand?
6. How often do you recognize and honor employees for embodying your values and brand promise?
7. Outline how your core values might shift over the next few years, based on your current trajectory. Is the core aligned with how you see your value proposition and brand evolving?
8. What is your mission statement? What is your vision statement? Are they compelling? Meaningful?
9. Identify what would hurt your brand and what you can do to prevent that from happening.
10. With respect to their impact on your brand, how do you monitor processes, employee morale, customer feedback, industry trends, and your competition? As a leader, how can you better promote and protect your company's brand?

CHAPTER FIVE: GET USED TO LONELY

1. Identify your experiences with loneliness and isolation in your leadership position.
2. What have you done to help bridge divides between you and your employees, former work colleagues, leadership team members, family, and friends? What works? What does not?
3. In whom do you confide?
4. Who are your mentors, why did you choose them, how often do you consult with them?
5. How do you keep it together in crisis, when your team needs direction from you?
6. How often do you “walk the halls,” hang out with your employees, go to company social functions? At these events, with whom do you talk?
7. What is work/life balance for you? Do you find it?
8. How could you harness power and creativity out of the loneliness of your position?
9. What do you do for yourself?

CHAPTER SIX: AIRTIGHT

1. When developing your next plan, ask and answer, *Why are we doing this?*
2. Then ask and answer, *What does success look like?*
3. With the answers in hand, evaluate your strategies and tactics.
4. How can you manage the multiple problems in front of you while extending your vision far down the road in search of threats and opportunities?
5. In creating your plans, ask and answer, *What's missing from this picture?*
6. In creating your plans, ask and answer, *What could go wrong and how will we recover?*
7. How do you multitask? What is your process for prioritizing, compartmentalizing, processing, and creating action items?
8. Assess the alignment of your leadership team. When you evaluate differing opinions, how do you factor them in to your decision making?
9. How do you resolve active issues with your team, with key constituents?

CHAPTER SEVEN: LEADER AND LOSER BOTH BEGIN WITH THE LETTER L

1. How resilient are you? How do you bounce back from a loss?
2. When a failure is your fault, how do you typically handle it?
3. Replaying some of your losses, how could you use humility to convert humiliation from a weakness to a strength?
4. For you, what role do postmortems play in uncovering mistakes and finding a path forward? How do you use them to devise and institutionalize new processes?
5. After a major loss, how can you realign the team around core values, focus on your mission, and remind your team what you and they stand for?
6. Is your team honest in taking responsibility for failure? Or do they reflexively deflect blame?
7. How do you react when employees and customers expect you to have all the answers?
8. How often do you review complaints from employees and customers? What systems do you have in place to listen and to respond? Do you ask, “What can we do better?”

CHAPTER EIGHT: WAY OFF THE MENU

1. Imagine the unimaginable. Outline the categories of crises that could affect the continuity and survival of your business: economic (recession), natural (earthquake), internal (product failure, criminal activity), and other (cyber hack, pandemic).
2. Revisit or create your crisis plans before the next crisis occurs. What are your contingency (preparation for business disruptions), disaster recovery (restoration of vital support systems), and business continuity (survival after a crisis) plans?
3. What are your crisis communication protocols? Who is your designated spokesperson? Is this person a great communicator? Are you?
4. What does a successful recovery look like in the short-term and long term? What new business processes and safety nets do you need to create now?
5. How often will you, your leadership team, and your board review and act out your crisis plans? How often should they be updated?
6. How are you tracking everyday problems to prevent their developing into crises. How do you push the reset key?

CHAPTER NINE: THE FOUNDER'S CURSE

1. Do you have an employment agreement that outlines your responsibilities, evaluative metrics and timeframe, financial compensation and vesting, as well as possible career progression?
2. What is your longevity in your current role?
3. Do you have in place a succession plan for you and your leadership team?
4. How open are you to feedback? What's the worst feedback you ever got? Who gave it to you? How did you process it?
5. What is the time horizon for your business, per your business plan and investor expectations? How could your role evolve over time? What new managers will you need?
6. How can you keep yourself grounded through each projected phase of growth?
7. As a leader, how will you serve your business and market, your larger community, your industry, and the world?



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Sabrina Horn's new book, *Make It, Don't Fake It: Leading with Authenticity for Real Business Success* (published by Berrett Koehler, Spring 2021), will offer executives concrete advice on what to do when faced with both everyday challenges and big dilemmas. With straight talk, examples and tools, this book will help leaders make the right decisions and build durable businesses.

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