



## Leading from the inside out, by Alison Pothier, founder of The Corporate Intuitive

When I graduated from university, if someone had told me that I would spend the next fifteen years in investment banking learning what it means to become my “authentic self”, I would have laughed in irony at the mere suggestion. However, that’s exactly what happened.

My last position in the City was as a Managing Director, Chief Operating Officer, and Member of the Global Management Team in the Futures and Options business at UBS. At 30 years old I was the Global Head of Electronic Trading for JPMorgan’s Futures & Options Business. A strategic manager, with a track record of success and achievement, I was a young, female Managing Director, and, as far as the industry was concerned, a rare commodity, valuable asset and role model in the city. To all intents and purposes I was a ‘success’ as it was defined, measured and compensated for in our Performance and Peer Reviews.

Yet, somehow, over the years, despite all the investment made in “me”, I had a growing lack of a sense of “me” or that “I” existed at all. All the titles in the world couldn’t create a sense of true identity for me and I wondered “who” I was, showing up every day. What was I embodying when I did show up, and, as a ‘role model’, what exactly was I modelling? At the best of times, I was ‘achieving to please’ and mastered all that is valued around me without ever having to integrate or even understand how it reflected what I valued within.

I am a humanitarian at heart and spent most of my time in investment banking trying to reconcile the ‘me I knew’ with ‘what I do’. This caused me to leave the city twice. The first time, I left in pursuit of a childhood dream to build retreat centres dedicated to wellness, personal development, and transformational leadership through individuality and authenticity. Like a child set free to play, I indulged in the creative endeavours I always wanted to explore but ‘never had the time to’ while working.

That said, my idealistic “leap” into the dream didn’t quite unfold to my plan. Rather quite the opposite, as one synchronistic meeting after another pointed me back to the City. After much deliberation I accepted an interview to return to Investment Banking and during the recruitment process, was asked why I had left the first time. I shared:

“We are taught in school to do the best we can, to get the best grades we can, to get the best job we can, to make as much money as we can, so our kids get the best chance they can to do it all again. Until one inevitable morning, when we wake a little lost, a little empty, unable to recognise the ‘who’ we really knew we were once inside. In that moment for me, when I didn’t recognise the person I knew myself to be inside, I discovered I had somehow in all my achieving, really only mastered mediocrity. I hadn’t necessarily mastered me. When that morning came, I left the city with a promise to be the best I could be for me.

“After everything I set out to achieve was achieved, I discovered a void that seemed never to be filled by any sense of achieving. I realised then that to achieve is not necessarily to be fulfilled, but to be fulfilled is certainly an achievement. I started to focus on investing in what fulfilled me, even if I could only do it 5 minutes a day, that 5 minutes returned me to my life.” When the interviewer, who was now curious as to why I would ever return asked me to explain, I shared that “though I enjoyed every ounce of rekindling my sense of creativity and passion during my time out, I learned too that to be the best I can be for me, I need the whole of me to be present and part of me had been lost in the pursuit of a different happiness. I found the creative side of me but I had lost the businesswoman in me and I still strained to fully recognise the person staring back at me in the mirror. If, the real goal is to cleverly

integrate all facets of my life, the creative humanitarian and the businesswoman, then I welcome the opportunity to return and make that happen.”

I felt inspired to contribute and lead from that place, a bit more true to myself, a bit more authentically me, and I didn't want to feel obliged any longer to trade off the financial stability I needed to build towards my dreams nor my dreams for the financial stability. The interviewer asked me to return to banking to bring in a new approach for others. We agreed up front to the challenge of trying to find a path that helped myself and others to be able to 'stand still' and without abandoning the job for the sense of self, or the sense of self for the job, to work toward creating a sense of self while in the job.

On the day I accepted the role to return to the city and rise to the challenge of my own authenticity, I was approached to buy a small holistic centre in Richmond-Upon-Thames. I began to invest in my dreams, launching Inside Out Retreats in parallel to my 'day job'. The financial backing of my role in the city together with the support of the management and teams that I worked with in both worlds, made the entrepreneurial learning curve sustainable and contributed back to the larger organisation insights that could only be gained from the microcosm of the small organisation. Though certainly not a walk in the park, the two worlds began to take on a new shape in parallel to each other, and so too did I begin to reveal more aspects of myself to both worlds.

Returning to the city and leading 'fully disclosed' to the world around me in both my personal aspirations and my career, I was motivated and inspired by all that I was doing because I found a sense of myself in everything I was being. I learned too that the courage to just 'show up' in the vulnerability of that self-disclosure, granted permission to others to do the same. In January 2008, I arrived ready to transition into full time self-employment, and when I did, I had the continued support of my colleagues who had paid witness to and made possible the aspirations within me. Reconciled with the city and the businesswoman in me, and also with my passions, I returned again, this time self-employed, as an entrepreneur, coach, counsellor, intuitive and trainer in personal development and transformational leadership. I share my personal experience and story today as "The Corporate Intuitive" offering training and coaching in authentic and intuitive leadership to help organisations and leaders put the "I" back into the organisation - returning to "the spirit" of the organisation by investing in the spirit of those that make up the organisation.

Harness the spirit of 'you' to grow and succeed in your own right and to nourish and create change in the lives of others. This is your mission within the corporate mission. If you cannot find inspiration around you, you must find it in you and become all that inspires yourself and others to dance.

This is authentic leadership. I call it, leading 'from the inside out',

Alison