



# SOPHIA ASSOCIATES

*Awakening Leadership Within*

## ***The Hero's Journey: Authentic Leadership***

*What do you care enough about to bring it into being?*

When was the last time you asked yourself the reason you do what you do? Are you very successful by our culture's standards but feeling empty nevertheless. Do you find it difficult to inspire yourself and others? Outwardly you make the right decisions, you create profit for your company, and you seem to do everything "right" yet you feel incomplete. You are just beginning to notice a discomfort or uneasiness but you cannot define it. You have forgotten why it is you do what you do and you have just realized that you no longer have an answer to this question.

You may have been on a path, more like a treadmill, for so long without reflecting on what you really want. Without knowing this, you no longer know who you are. What you may not realize is this is the beginning of a transition. This is what Joseph Campbell calls The Hero's Journey. It is an archetypal journey where the Hero or Heroine is called upon to take some bold action. They may well be reluctant yet they are guided by something powerful to take the journey. This journey is one to reclaim one's authentic self. To do so the Hero/ine must venture into the dark underworld where he/she must learn something or obtain something of great value. Here they experience trials and meet with demons and allies that help reveal to them gifts that they may not have acknowledged or embraced. At one point they are confronted with an ordeal that dissolves their identity, a virtual death that leads to an expanded consciousness of who they are. This wisdom gained allows them to return to the world with new knowledge about themselves and how they can serve their community.

When you define yourself by the beliefs that have been created by others you lose touch with the strength that authenticity provides. Leadership is as much a way of being as a way of doing. To access this authentic leader in yourself, you will eventually take the Hero's Journey. You may not do this willingly. Your organization may provide a challenge or something in your personal life will be the catalyst for this call to re-evaluate. What do you care enough about to bring it into being? What matters enough for you to take this risk?

The transition to authenticity inevitably includes dissolution of old ways of being, of old attachments and of an old identity to which we no longer belong. Wisdom comes through an inner dialogue with the true self. It takes

1834 George Avenue • Annapolis, MD 21401  
Tel: 443-433-0586 • Fax: 443-433-0587  
Email: [alicia@sophia-associates.com](mailto:alicia@sophia-associates.com)  
[www.sophia-associates.com](http://www.sophia-associates.com)



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self-awareness and courage to engage in this dialogue. It changes who we believe we are and in that moment of letting go of an old identity, we experience what feels like death. If I let go of my identity as a successful "X" and all the attachments associated with being "X", then who am I? If I define myself by my success or my competency or my power or whatever and I am no longer successful/competent/powerful then who am I? This is the knowledge that you will discover in the Hero's Journey. You are more than your title, more than your work. Authentic leaders know who they are essentially, are aware of and acknowledge their shadow side and leverage their gifts and talents in service of others. Aligning with their true selves they are poised to create value and meaning for people, organizations and communities. People recognize this authenticity and are drawn to it.

At the Center for Authentic Leadership in Atlanta they believe that "the measure of a man or woman is more than the sum of one's words or deeds. It is the impact of who we are being as we speak and act that leaves the greatest imprint on others...Much of how we learned to think and act was shaped from our childhood experiences." To be an authentic leader is to sift through a lifetime of beliefs about who we are or should be that may have been passed to us by our culture, our parents, our profession or in numerous other ways. The Hero's Journey makes conscious the unconscious beliefs and thinking that drive our behaviors. Until we realize the beliefs and thinking that drive our behaviors we cannot sustainably change and be authentic. We have come to believe these as the truth about who we are when indeed they may be far from the truth. And in releasing our attachments to these beliefs we die and are reborn more secure, confident and joyful.

What matters enough to you to risk releasing the ways of being that keep you tied to an inauthentic life? There is boldness in that! Create that! This is where you will find meaning and personal fulfillment beyond the cultural definitions of what it means to succeed. This is how you will impact the world.

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FOR INFORMATION, visit the website <http://www.sophia-associates.com> or call 443-433-0586 or e-mail [Alicia@sophia-associates.com](mailto:Alicia@sophia-associates.com)

1834 George Avenue • Annapolis, MD 21401  
Tel: 443-433-0586 • Fax: 443-433-0587  
Email: [alicia@sophia-associates.com](mailto:alicia@sophia-associates.com)  
[www.sophia-associates.com](http://www.sophia-associates.com)