

Stop Being a Ghost!

Published on Mar 05, 2015 by Niko Canner



I've been grateful for the many comments I've received on the [Living Two Stories](#) post about the question of "what to do about not knowing what we want." One of the themes that has come up in conversations about the piece relates to authenticity: how to be authentic in the context of work one is ambivalent about, how to seek out a path of greater authenticity at work, and so on.

In her recent HBR piece ["The Authenticity Paradox"](#), Herminia Ibarra poses a thoughtful defense of the idea that preoccupation with authenticity can stand in the way of development as a leader. I suspect that there's a way of thinking about authenticity that encompasses both the truth in Ibarra's piece and a recognition of the difference authenticity can make to both the performance and happiness of leaders.

While in search for this way of thinking about authenticity, I found myself going back to one of the most striking poems I've read in recent months, a version by Stephen Berg of a poem in German by Ernst Stadler, selected by Edward Hirsch in his wonderful book *Poet's Choice*.

The Saying

In an old book
I stumbled across a saying.
It was like a stranger
punching me in the face,

it won't stop
gnawing at me.
When I walk around at night,
looking for a beautiful girl,

when a lie of a description
of life or somebody's fake

way of being with people
occurs instead of reality,

when I betray myself with
an easy explanation
as if what's dark is clear,
as if life doesn't have thousands

of locked, burning gates,
when I use words without really
having known their strict openness
and put my hands around things

that don't excite me,
when a dream hides my face with soft hands
and the day avoids me,
cut off from the world,

cut off from who I am deeply,
I freeze where I am
and see hanging in the air in front of me
STOP BEING A GHOST!

Image by Tiffany Franke - <http://tiffanyfranke.tumblr.com>