



Be clear how your job serves you  
Find the right fit  
Set your thermostat  
Do  
Make  
Create a lily pad



Have a toad-le blast!  
Chill once in a while  
Handle the office jerks  
Hey,  
Be grateful and  
Perform a balancing act

**Sharon Hoyle Weber**

## SPECIAL REPORT: July 2009

### Don't Drink the Kool-Aid

When Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, was asked what he thought the key to success was, he answered,

*“The most powerful thing you can do to get ahead is well, be real. Think of authenticity as your foundation, your center. Don't let any company wring it out of you, subtly or otherwise, that happens.”*

I shared this with a group I was speaking to last week and asked what it meant to them. A woman piped up and said, “*Don't drink the Kool-aid!*” I knew what she meant, but I thought “*Wow, strong reference.*” She was referring to the Jonestown incident where over 900 followers of cult leader Jim Jones willingly commit suicide by drinking Kool-Aid laced with potassium cyanide. It has come to refer to giving over you own sense of self, thoughts, ideas, points of view, soul to another person or group.

We all know how working for a company can boil us one degree at a time. But, if a hardnosed icon like Jack Welch says the most powerful thing you can do to get ahead is to be real, than letting your authenticity get “wringed” out of you is a form of career suicide. Being you can be the best way to get noticed, get ahead and offer unique value that the company can not replace or want to go without.

Nobody willingly, consciously, gives over their self to a company, so how *does* it happen? Slowly, very slowly,

- Swallowing corporate propaganda because you don't want to cause a stir (especially in this economy!)
- Saying things you don't believe. . . a lot!
- Sacrificing your own personal life for saving face at work. . . a lot!
- Letting fear and desperation drive you instead of purpose and passion.
- Being phoney. . . a lot!

If abandoning your thoughts, ideas, points of view, sense of humor was the way to get ahead, I wouldn't be writing this report. I'd support it, hey you gotta do what you gotta do to pay the bills.

But, putting the you in what you do is a way to distinguish yourself, to bring a unique value to the company, industry, market. It will also guide you to your best fit where you can really bloom.

This is not to say there aren't corporate manners. Just like at the dinner table, you don't talk with your mouth open, slurp your coffee and wipe your mouth with your sleeve. Minding your manners does not mean becoming a corporate drone. Manners are a way to be sensitive and respectful of others so everyone enjoys the richness of each other's company. Same goes around the conference table. Here is the H. A. L. O Affect that will ensure you can offer your unique thinking to anyone in your company.

*Honor* the point of view of others. Show respect for their way of thinking by capturing your understanding of what they are saying in your own words. Just like a closed rose needs the sun to open up, people need to know they are heard before they can open up to what you are saying. The only way they **know** that is if you show them by being able to say it. You are familiar with this, it sounds like “*So, what I hear you saying is. . .*” or “*If I understand you correctly. . .*” or just put it in your words, for example, “*Of, course no one can predict the future, you're making the best decisions you can with the information you have now.*”

This is not agreeing, just honoring their way of thinking.

*Acknowledge* the big picture, the context of the situation. Look at it from a strategic standpoint, from the CEO's view. For example, “*Sure, I can see we need to reign in the overhead costs, they've been creeping in on the profit margin.*”

*Look* for common ground, where everyone can agree. For example, “*Well, we all agree we got where we are because we have made service our number one priority.*”

*Offer* your idea to be considered. Here's the key, not as the “right” way or the “only smart” way or “the” way, but a way to be considered. For example, “*I'm thinking we might want to use a surgeon's knife to cut costs to make sure we are sustaining the quality of service our customers come to us for.*”

By **Honoring** other's views, **Acknowledging** the big picture, **Looking** for common ground and **Offering** your ideas to be considered you create a tone of collaboration and respect. In this climate you can voice your opinions, ideas, and even challenge conventional thinking without risking your position or value, in fact, strengthening it.

Like Jack says, being real is the most powerful thing you can do to get ahead. So, take your temperature regularly and don't drink the Kool-Aid.

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## About Sharon:

Sharon Hoyle Weber began her career as a modern dancer and choreographer. Seeing how little money followed when she was doing what she loved, she started working with Forum Corporation, a training and management firm. She was initially a project manager, but soon became certified as a corporate training facilitator.



For fourteen years, she has been traveling around the country teaching skills that help people work most effectively together. Through her relationship with Forum and Results by Design, she has worked for many Fortune 1500 companies such as Deloitte, Liberty Mutual, Bank of America, and Hasbro Toys. Her experience with such a variety of organizations has taught her that the real self is at risk in the workplace.

She describes her own experience as if “my real self was dripping out of me every day.” Once her colleague described it as the “Boiled Frog Syndrome,” she could immediately relate to feeling boiled.

After meeting thousands of employees and interviewing thirty Thrivers, people who make a good living and maintain a sense of authenticity at work, she discovered the Twelve Secrets of Thrivers that contribute to reviving and sustaining the real self in the workplace.

Ms. Weber lives in Cohasset, Massachusetts with her husband, Steve.