

If you only have a minute: Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. How much more can you find true connection when you authentically accept yourself and encourage others to do the same?

To Be Authentic Accept Yourself

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

Cees Buisman is a person who gets very real very fast. His realness may be his greatest strength. What he learned from a course on authentic leadership was that he was the most authentic person there, even more than the trainers. “Some people are afraid of me because I am incredibly direct,” he admits. At some point he had to explain to people that this was not because of who they were but who he is. People eventually came to embrace his directness.

Currently, Cees is a Member of the Executive Board for Wetsus, the European Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Water, and a Professor at Wageningen University.

When Cees was a kid in the Netherlands, he had his own garden where he grew vegetables and dreamed of being a farmer. In school, he scored poorly in reading, and his future prospects appeared to be limited. But when his father started teaching him to read at home, and a fantastic teacher fired up his self-confidence, he soon rose to the top of his class. From there his intuition drew him away from farming and toward environmental engineering.

At a Dutch company in Friesland, Cees invented a technology for biological gas desulphurization. Sulfides in gas have a rotten egg smell and are extremely dangerous – in fact, several people die from sulfides every year in the Netherlands. Cees discovered that bacteria can effectively and safely convert sulfides into elemental sulfur using a biological process instead of the traditional chemical one. It worked very well in the lab on a pilot scale, but he had to prove that it could be built and optimized to scale. Biological technology, he knew, was so much simpler and safer than chemical technologies and had no side streams.

“The more you accept yourself, the more authentic you can be.” – Cees Buisman

At that point, he signed a cooperation agreement with Shell to test the technology in a natural gas plant in Canada. Now the process is used all over the world and has distinguished Cees as an innovator.

Without acquiring formal leadership training, Cees suddenly found himself managing 30-50 lab researchers, all studying their own technologies. “If you want to be a leader, you cannot support independent researchers from a content point of view. That’s impossible. You have to support their personal growth and the non-technical aspects of their job. And you have to work on your own personal growth because if you don’t, you cannot coach others. Next to innovation, personal growth has always been the second guideline in my life,” he says.

When he started Wetsus, it was clear to him that personal growth would be one of the company's pillars. “A company can only grow if the people grow,” he realized.

Cees developed a unique way of identifying the inclinations of others. According to his model, 30% of people are good, and he calls them “suns.” 60% are able to be influenced, and he calls them “moons.” Only 10% are bad – he calls them “black holes.” He goes on to explain, “As a sun and a leader, you must

“kiss awake” other suns, shine brightly on the moons, and control the black holes. It’s not so much the black holes that we worry about, it’s that the suns don’t shine. Suns need to radiate more. If I want to be a good leader, I have to radiate.”

“If you want to be somebody you are not, then you have a shadow. The shadow disappears if you truly accept who you are.” – Cees Buisman