

## No More Clark Kents

By Betty Adamou



It's obvious that people like other people with a little personality. They like speaking to people who are interesting and they like doing business with interesting people, too. But interesting doesn't necessarily mean perfect; it can also mean that your personality is a little bit weird, quirky or even, dare I say, unconventional...and that's okay. Some of my favorite people in the world are a little bit strange.

**T**oo often I meet people in market research who have a whole other life outside the office but are very apprehensive and extremely conscious of showing this other side of their personality. I see them, standing on stage,

delivering speeches at a conference, but then they tell me *"that's not really the REAL me, you know."* They admit their "work selves" (where they spend a huge proportion of their lives) are just a facade. How tiring for them, I think.

When I ask them what they mean, they tell me it's a mix of things: they don't "dress like that normally" or even that their passions lie so far away from market research, it sort of makes you wonder how they got into the field in the first place!

There have been times, especially in the early days of my research career, that I also wore camouflage to work. This is not to say that I, or the researchers I've met who have outside passions, are some kind of you-need-to-be-locked-up style deviants in real life. They're just normal people with interests outside their research job who feel like they can't show their real personality or interests at work.

But the interesting thing is that *most people* I meet in market research feel this way. Some researchers have hobbies like drawing, playing the guitar or singing (or in some cases, all three). Others take their hobby a whole level further, actually using their hobby to earn extra money and compete for titles. For example, an old colleague of mine still competes in horse races and dressage. Another researcher lives a double life as a ghost hunter. And others, perhaps more famously, play the ukulele and write for music publications. I really enjoy seeing the other side of all those people. It helps me to better understand how they're wired.

It's strange that some feel more comfortable than others bringing their "real selves" into work. In fact, one researcher I spoke to in the last couple of weeks opened up about his other life as a type of artist. I was shocked and struggled to imagine it until he was kind enough to send a photograph as evidence of his brilliant and fun work.

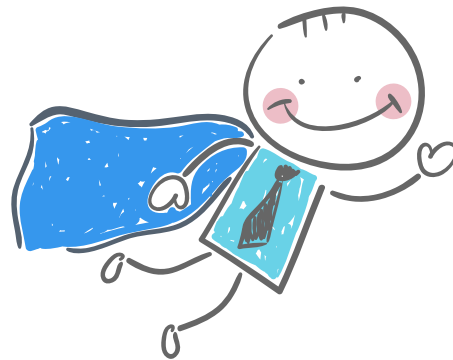
When I opened my email and marveled at the picture he sent, I smiled, but felt immediately a bit sad. After all, no one tells us to censor who we are, do they? Yet this multi-talented person felt he had to hide. He told me his "secret" like it was something bad, but something delicious to relish as well (he couldn't help but grin as he told me about his artistic work). I know he wouldn't have told me about his hobby unless he felt really comfortable. As he first started to tell his story, he was trepidatious, but then became more animated as the story continued, and he could see I was interested rather than, perhaps as he thought I might be, weirded out. I'm sure you have had some people open up to you like this too.

When I have personally felt like I had to rein myself in, I realized it was just that – a feeling. No one specifically told me to do so. And similarly, no one had told this artist/researcher that he should ever have to censor himself. As he and many others have told me their "real me" stories, their faces light up. Their personalities shine through. I think *"I want to talk to them again," "I'd love to work with them,"* and even *"I'd like*

*to be friends with that person and maybe visit them one day."* This happens before the researcher realizes (or believes) they've said too much and begins to withdraw once more.

Luckily, I reckon I'm pretty good at helping people feel comfortable in their own skin. So, I've been privileged to have peoples' lives and stories shared with me – not just their hobbies and "second lives," but that crazy thing their kid did today, or that their parents aren't well right now, or that they loved a particular place on the east coast of South America and I should go there one day.

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In turn, I feel more comfortable opening up, too; I got married a few months ago, I'm worried about my dad, and I wasn't bothered by the World Cup (shocker!).

Life is too short to go to work every day as Clark Kent. It's too exhausting, too cumbersome and sometimes, a bit boring. What's better than showing all your Superman or Superwoman *all the time*, if that's who you are inside? Your super "real side" is so much better than a separate "work me" or even a "fake me" you might have manufactured, a real side that you never unleash and instead always censor.

In my experience, those Clark Kent types who spent years censoring themselves always show their true selves in the end. And it's only in being our true selves that we can unleash our creativity and build better workplaces, relationships and businesses.

Some of the people I admire the most (in and outside of MR) are the most I-know-who-I-am-and-I'm-comfortable-in-my-own-skin people I've ever met. They might not be millionaires, but they work in environments where they are respected, where people know who they really are and what to expect from them.

So any Clark Kents reading this today – don't be afraid of sharing your passions and your hobbies and your true self. Even if what you're passionate about is completely unrelated to MR, you might be surprised how your interests can cross over with your day-to-day work and the kind of opportunities that can present themselves if you express your other interests. A quick case in point: A researcher I know loves to draw and is a self-taught graphic designer. The company she worked at then started to make more interesting graphical interfaces for surveys so she found herself making icons and other graphics for her work over weekends and evenings, and loved it.

The message is to open up a little more. You will be liked by those open-minded enough to know that even if you are a dog-trainer on the weekends, you can still do a brilliant job as a researcher from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. (or, more realistically, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.).

You might meet one or two people who don't "get you," but that's alright. You really don't want to work with people who judge you. If you open up about your outside passions and hobbies and stop censoring who you really are, you'll find others open up to you, too, which can only be a good thing. How amazing would it be if five people in the office ended up sharing their musical interests and found some way to incorporate that into their work? Or their artistic talents? Or, in my case, their love for games?

Metaphorically speaking, it would be great if more people could whip off their glasses and Clark Kent suits and let their Super-side fly. You are doing a disservice to other people and yourself when going to work in disguise. And if you are the person lucky enough to have someone open up to you, then listen, embrace and enjoy. ▀

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