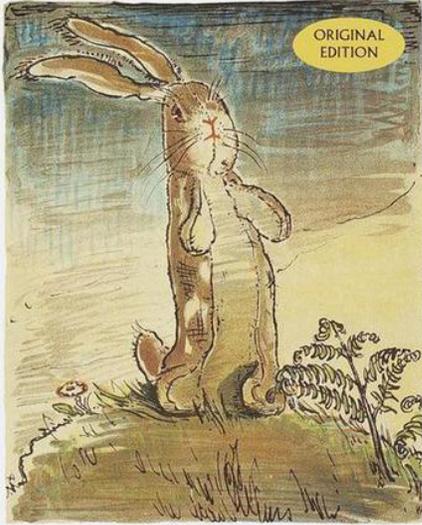


## *The* VELVETEEN RABBIT

*Original text by Margery Williams*



*Original art by William Nicholson*

## Becoming Real: The Velveteen Principles

This morning's Mindset was inspired by an excerpt from *The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real*, by Margery Williams:

“What is REAL?” asked the Velveteen Rabbit one day, when they were lying side by side near the nursery fender, before Nana came to tidy the room. “Does it mean having things that buzz inside you and a stick-out handle?”

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept.

“Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand... once you are Real you can't become unreal again. It lasts for always.”

In order to become real, we have to be willing to have the fur rubbed off of us, or become a little floppy in the joints, or have our rough edges softened... or all of the above.

There's so much wonderful wisdom in this classic children's book. This wisdom is explored with warmth and depth by psychotherapist and social worker Toni Raifen-D'Antonio in her book, *The Velveteen Principles: A Guide to Becoming Real*. In it, she translates the lessons learned by the Velveteen Rabbit into 12 principles that create a guide to becoming real.

She describes the difference between living in the land of *Objects* and being *Real*:

“Once we accept the pervasive messages of the *Object* culture, once we believe that we should be perfect, we start to feel shamefully inadequate. No one, after all, can ever attain the *Object* ideal. As a result, we tumble into a never-ending cycle of struggle, self-condemnation and flailing attempts to ease the pain through money, power, drugs, sex, food or purchases...Just think about the process of abandoning your *Real* self. You let go of a dream here, a feeling there. Elements of yourself fall away so quietly that you don't even notice. But something inside of you feels the losses.”

This description reminds me of the energy it takes to pretend to be someone, or something, that we're not, the energy it takes to make and keep up the mask. And what a relief it is when we take off the mask and allow ourselves to be *Real*.

Coaching tool: Standards of Integrity

*Who am I willing to be in order to produce  
an extraordinary result out of this interaction?*

Let's look at these 12 Principles:

### Principle #1: Real is Possible

The first principle reassures us that **Real is possible**. Just as the Velveteen Rabbit felt in his little bunny heart that he was *Real*, that he had the potential to be *Real*, and undertook developing those qualities that he needed to in order to live as *Real*.

### Principle #2: Real is a Process

Which leads to the second principle, **real is a process**. This is the wisdom of the Skin Horse? "It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or have to be carefully kept." We begin to become Real when you begin the process of discovering and defining yourself, and we become more and more Real as we grow and mature and refine what matters most to us.

### Coaching Tool: Life's Intentions

It's been said that we spend the first half of our lives learning and accumulating, and the second half unlearning and releasing. Or as Yoda taught Luke, "**You must unlearn what you have learned.**" The process of becoming real is about shedding the personal we've adopted to get by in the world, to fit in, to hide what we think is our "weirdness" but is actually our uniqueness.

Toni says it this way: "...the Skin Horse says Real is something you become over time. It is the process of discovering and defining yourself and then cultivating a life that fits those defining qualities. I believe you start to become Real as soon as this process begins and that you can become ever more Real as you grow and mature and keep refining what matters most to you." Real isn't something you learn or acquire, it's something you become.

**What can support this process? What can help us feel more real?**

- **Close relationships make us feel more *Real*.** Especially when we're in relationships with other people who are committed to being Real.
- **Work that matters makes us feel more Real.** Especially work where we feel that we're making a contribution and that our gifts and talents are being utilized.
- **Creativity and growth make us feel more Real.** Whenever we stretch out of our comfort zone, we feel more Real.
- **Teaching, nurturing and caring for other make us feel *Real*.** Whenever we give wholeheartedly we feel more Real.

### **Principle #3: Real is Emotional**

Principle 3 speaks to **the importance of being emotionally available and intelligent.** When we're *Real*, we honor our feelings and express them maturely and responsibly. We don't "stuff" our feelings or project them out on to others.

Real happens when we are taught to recognize, and allowed to express, our feelings, in healthy and helpful ways. As Jung brilliantly observed, 'What we deny, we project.' So those feelings come out, just not in a Real way.

We learn to recognize and process our emotions as signals - either warning signs or "this feels OK" - and has opportunities for self-inquiry and growth. Toni calls this ability to process our emotions quickly "self-empathy".

She says, "...if it seems self-indulgent to focus so intently on your own feelings, consider the end point: empathy for others. It happens every time. As people learn to recognize and respect their own feelings, they begin to do the same with others. Gradually they learn to respect and appreciate the feelings and idiosyncrasies of lovers, friends, children and others."

**This emotional intelligence, this self-empathy, leads to the fourth principle.**

### Principle #4: Real is Empathetic

The mechanical toys in the nursery had a very hard time relating to the feelings and needs of the other toys. Their constant need to be superior hid feelings of insecurity and shame. Their missing paint and broken parts - their lack of perfection - created an insecurity that was out pictured as judgment. In contrast, the Skin Horse is very comfortable in his own skin (pun intended :-). The Skin Horse is Real and not interested in being perfect.

Interestingly, empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is defined as “agreement”, meaning that when we sympathize with someone we join with them. Empathy doesn’t require joining. It just asks us to care, inquire and be willing to understand. **When we empathize, we’re able to separate someone’s *intention* from their *outcome*.** This allows us to interpret their actions and choices with generosity and in a positive way.

### Principle #5: Real is Courageous

Brene Brown wrote that, “Courage is telling who you are with your whole heart.” *Real* feels the fear and does it anyway. *Real* is willing to take risks. *Real* does the right thing, even when it’s not popular. *Real* isn’t afraid to fail, and sees every failure as a learning experience. Real knows that:

- **Failure leads to growth.** “Every Real person I have ever known or heard about defines failure as a learning experience, not a defeat.”

- **New beliefs are powerful.** And it takes courage to let go of our old ones. But when we do, a whole new world opens up for us!

### Coaching Tool: The Four Boxes

- **Courage comes with experience.** A student went to his master and asked, “Master, what is the secret to happiness?” And the master replied, “Good judgment.” Then the student asked, “Master, how does one obtain good judgment?” And the master replied, “Experience.” Then the student asked, “Master, how does one get this experience?” And the master replied, “Bad judgment.”

## Principle #6: Real is Honest

The only toy in the nursery who is honest, who tells the truth, is the Skin Horse. He likes who he is, so he doesn't need to posture or pretend to be something he isn't. He's not perfect and doesn't need or want to be. He understands that:

- **Perfect is arbitrary.** Think about how body image standards have changed over the years. What was considered beautiful 100 years ago is not what we consider beautiful today.
- **Perfection is boring.** Isn't it our flaws, our idiosyncrasies that make us interesting.
- **Human perfection is ultimately impossible.**

Brene Brown observes in *The Gifts of Imperfection*: "It is in the process of embracing our imperfections that we find our truest gifts: courage, compassion and connection."

"O God, help me to believe the truth about myself, no matter how beautiful it is."  
– Macrina Wiederkehr

When we're *Real*, we're comfortable in our own skin, just like the Skin Horse. (Here's your *Star Trek* reference for the day: In his late 70s, actor Leonard Nimoy said he was closer than ever to being as comfortable with himself as Spock appeared to be. Remember, *Real* is a process...) **We say what we mean, and mean what we say.** We walk our talk, and practice what we preach. No drama, no posturing, just being real.

Coaching Tool: Look, See, Tell the Truth

*Am I willing to be a demand for coaching?*

## Principle #7: Real is Generous

*Real* expresses a spirit of goodwill and encouragement, a **generosity of spirit**. *Real* supports others joyfully and is affirming. When we're *Real*, we understand that there's enough to go around, so we don't hold back our gifts.

We don't buy into the common misperceptions about competition, and someone needing to lose in order for us to win. ***Real* looks for win/win solutions.**

*Real* understands the Law of Giving and Receiving, that it is in giving that we receive.

*Real* knows that sharing our light doesn't diminish it, but allows it to grow ever brighter. *Real* understands that we are inherently connected, which makes generosity natural and even logical.

### **Principle #8: Real is Grateful**

Gratitude flows when we are able to focus on the positive instead of the negative. Developing an attitude of gratitude opens our eyes to the beauty around us, and to the infinite possibilities that surround us always.

***Real* associates gratitude with awareness and appreciation.** *Real* takes the time to be aware of our surroundings, to observe our lives, and those that share it, without judgment, to appreciate our journey and those that share it.

**Gratitude is the gateway to grace.** When we're willing to be in gratitude, we invite grace into our lives and experience unexpected blessings.

Gratitude is both a principle and a practice. How many times in a day do we find ourselves complaining or criticizing or judging, when we have so much to be grateful for? Remember *Real* is Courageous? Sometimes the most courageous thing we can do is to be willing to be grateful for whatever is showing up in our lives. Talk about a new belief system!

Success is doing what we said we would do, consistently,  
with clarity, focus, ease and grace.

## **Principle #9: Real can be Painful**

As the Skin Horse explained to the Velveteen Rabbit, sometimes becoming *Real* can hurt. The more we tell the truth about ourselves, the more open and vulnerable we are, the more risks we're willing to take, the more possible it becomes that we could be hurt. We might not like what we see. But being *Real* means we keep looking, that we're willing to accept ourselves, and others, warts and all. We start to care more about contributing, about being of service, than we do about the opinions of others.

“To be vulnerable is to allow the winds of life to blow freely across our soul.”

- Maria Nemeth

## **Principle #10: Real is Flexible**

*Real* is adaptable and able to adjust quickly to change. In the *Tao Te Ching*, Lao Tzu teaches us the power of flexibility:

The living are soft and yielding; the dead are rigid and stiff.

Living plants are flexible and tender; the dead are brittle and dry.

Those who are stiff and rigid are the disciple of death.

Those who are soft and yielding are the disciples of life.

The rigid and stiff will be broken.

The soft and yielding will overcome.

***Real* understands that:**

- Change does not equal disaster.
- Change is natural. The I Ching teaches that “life is change.”
- Change does not mean we failed.
- After a big change, we are not going to be the same. *Real* understands that change is necessary for growth.

When we're *Real*, we hold ourselves lightly, not taking things personally, or ourselves too seriously. *Real* goes with the flow.

*Am I willing to systematically dismantle my Structure of Knowing?*

## Principle #11: Real Love Endures

In his book of Toltec wisdom, *The Mastery of Love*, Don Miguel Ruiz teaches that,

“We can talk about love and write a thousand books about it, but love will be completely different for each of us because we have to *experience* love. Love is not about concepts; **love is about action**. Love in action can only produce happiness. Fear in action can only produce suffering.

The only way to master love is to practice love. You don't need to justify your love, you don't need to explain your love; you just need to practice your love. Practice creates the master.”

He continues...“The teachings that come from India, from the Toltecs, the Christians, the Greeks – from societies all over the world – come from the same truth... They talk about having your heart completely open and becoming wise. Can you imagine what kind of world this would be if all humans opened their hearts and found the love inside? Of course we can do it. Everyone can do it in their own way. It's not about following any imposed idea; **it's about finding yourself....**

When you love with no conditions.... **Life is nothing but a dream, and if you create your life with Love, your dream becomes a masterpiece of art.”**

When we become willing to be *Real*, and to focus on what our “realness” can create, we move into significance in our lives and our world.

*Am I willing to guarantee  
that whoever coaches me will be successful?*

## Principle #12: Real is Ethical

“The process of becoming Real eventually makes us calmly content with ourselves, which means we no longer feel overwhelmed by self-consciousness and self-doubt. We are so comfortable in our worth as human beings that we are able to act according to our highest values in a way that is practically automatic. Almost without trying, we begin to act in ways that are consistently ethical.”

*Real* understands that our actions have consequences, a ripple effect, and so we become exquisitely aware of our effect on others. We live the Golden Rule, not because it’s a “rule” but because it has become an extension of our *Realness*.

This principle reminds me of **one of my favorite quotes**:

“As one’s real power grows and their knowledge widens, ever the way they can follow grows narrower; until at last they choose nothing, but do only and wholly what they *must* do.” – Ursula Le Guin, *The Wizard of Earthsea*

**What are you noticing about these principles and:**

Building Trust and Relationship

Living on Our Cards

Keeping Our Promises

Setting the Arena

Crossing the Border with Ease

Getting Clear about Who We Are

Telling the Truth

## From the book:

After he became *Real*, the Velveteen Rabbit looked upon the world with the quiet wisdom we acquire when we have grown enough and learned enough to understand what *Really* fulfills and sustains us as unique individuals. To put it another way, we know what gives our lives true value and meaning. This is the ultimate goal we reach as we mature as *Real* people.

The hunger for a sense of meaning – for true value – is universal and as old as humanity itself. We all want to feel that we have a purpose and that our presence on this planet matters. Many times, this desire is dismissed as impractical and even frivolous. But when you are *Real*, the quest for meaning is central to your life. It leads you to nurture your own values, interests and passions and to connect with others in empathetic and positive relationships.

This doesn't happen without some effort. A *Real* life demands your active participation. It doesn't happen to you. You design it and then create it. *Real* doesn't mean you'll be perfect at anything. It means that you're willing to grow and learn through experience. And as a result, you know that you always did your best.

Besides saving us from regrets, a life conducted in this *Real* way creates a beautiful and unique story that becomes our legacy to the people we love and, perhaps, to people we never knew. This is the greatest reward of living as a *Real* person. It's not stuff or power or achievement, but rather a sense that you are using your time on Earth well, that you are connected to others and that your life matters.

Once you are *Real*, and you know that everything you say and do matters, you can also understand that we each leave a mark on the world that remains long after we're gone. Whether we recognize it or not, we all create a legacy.... If you become more *Real* in your own life and bring that to your relationships, you are practically guaranteed to leave behind an inspiring example for others. Your life's message will encourage everyone you touch to live with a sense of wonder, curiosity and openness, rather than cynicism and fear. It will say, "I was *Real*. And you can be *Real*, too."

- from *The Velveteen Principles*, by Toni Raiten-D'Antonio