A person with long hair

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Why We Sometimes

Hide Our Successes

November 14, 2021 Well hello Friends!

I hope you had an amazing week.

First, before we dive in, I just want to say that I’m so glad you joined today.

If you’re new to the podcast, welcome! And if you’re a regular, I want to thank you for being part of the conversation each week.

I appreciate each one of you and I invite you to follow us on your favorite platform and if you like the episode, be sure to give us a rating or a review. That helps us reach more people and we’d really appreciate it.

And if you want to keep the party going, head over to Instagram and follow me @thepurposefulcareer. I’m just building my community and I’d love you to be a part of it.

Most of all, thanks for being here. I appreciate each one of you.

So…in **last** week’s episode, we talked about visibility. Specifically, why it’s important and how to get more of it in your career. Because as we all know, if we want to get ahead, it’s not enough to just do great work. Other people need to recognize our contributions and our potential.

But today I want to talk about the **opposite** problem.

Which is…what happens when we **get** the visibility and recognition that we worked so hard for and **then** find **ourselves** intentionally shrinking back from it, either diminishing what we did or hiding that accomplishment altogether.

I mean, it’s not logical right?

Why would we nearly kill ourselves to achieve something, only to get it and then either make light of it or completely hide it?

Well, it may not make sense, but the truth is it happens all the time.

In fact, according to a study by the University of Chicago, 82% of respondents said they’ve hidden their accomplishments from someone else **at least once** in their lives.

82%? Wow.

But maybe that number shouldn’t have surprised me because **I’m** in the 82%. I’ve done it more times than I care to count. And if I’m being honest, it wasn’t even a conscious thing and it wasn’t even just with one person in particular. It was kind of most people in general. I’ve just kept lots of accomplishments to myself over the course of my life. And I never really stopped to think about what it was costing me until it came up for one of my clients this week.

My client took over his family’s business a few years ago. The business hadn’t been doing well when he stepped into the role, but he’s been working hard to turn it around and now, all those efforts are paying off.

He’s got a flood of new clients.

Revenue is up by like 3x in just a year.

And now, he’s won a few national awards.

He knows that’s important in attracting new clients, so he’s featured them in some of his advertising. But in our last session, he mentioned that he’d gotten several more and was planning to keep them a secret.

And because he seemed less than enthused about that, I asked how he felt about it. His answer was “embarrassed.”

When I asked why he felt embarrassed he responded, “It’s too much. What are people going to say?”

To which I responded, “What do **YOU** think people are going to say?”

And he responded, “People are going to think I’m arrogant and that I think everything is about me.”

As we talk about often on this podcast, the actions we take always come from what we’re feeling and what we’re feeling always comes from what we’re thinking.

So if we take my client’s answers, you can see he was:

Thinking = “People are going to think I’m arrogant and that I think everything is about me.”

Which made him feel = “Embarrassed”

Which made him = Not talk about or share awards

And what would that lead to? = Keeping his hard work, a secret so people don’t think he’s arrogant.

See how that works? The things we think eventually become the results that we get.

Not surprisingly, the University of Chicago study said basically the same thing. People keep their successes secret because they don’t want to seem boastful or make the other person feel bad.

And on the surface, when viewed through that lens, hiding the success almost seems noble, right? It seems like you’re looking out for the other person.

But the truth is, we pay a price for withholding our good fortune. And it’s two-fold. We pay a price in our relationships with others AND in our relationship with ourselves.

So, let’s look at what it costs us in our relationship. And let’s look at a specific example that I think each of us can probably relate to.

Let’s assume you just got a promotion along with a big increase in salary. It’s something you’ve worked for forever. And you **finally** got it.

Your colleagues at work found out that day and many reached out to congratulate you. So you’re feeling amazing and proud. But let’s say you had already made plans to meet a good friend for happy hour. A friend who just got laid off last month.

What would **you** do?

Would you share the information on your promotion, confident that your friend would be happy for you? Or would you steer clear of the subject altogether, to avoid the risk of them feeling bad or jealous or whatever?

On the surface it might seem like the kinder thing would be to avoid the subject. After all, you don’t want the person to feel bad. You don’t want to risk them being jealous of you. And potentially hurting your relationship.

But that action comes with risk. What happens when your friend eventually finds out from someone else? Or what happens when you tell them later and they maybe learned you kept it from them?

What happens is that it erodes trust and creates a space between you and your friend who will likely feel hurt that you didn’t tell them.

Sure, while they’re dealing with their own issue around needing to find their next job and while they very well MIGHT have felt jealous or whatever initially with your good news. They likely would have felt happy for you too. People can feel opposing emotions.

They can feel both excited for you and deeply yearn for something similar themselves.

We don’t want to assume that people can’t handle our good fortune. Or that if they do seem a little jealous at first that it’s all they feel. We are all human and we need to let others manage their complex emotions. We can’t take on the responsibility for deciding what they can handle and what they can’t.

After all, from their perspective, it probably feels a little patronizing. It’s not what most of us would be intending with this approach, but the person we’re keeping secrets from might very well feel that way.

But the thing you might not be connecting with is that keeping the secret also affects **you**.

Ironically, while you might be hiding your success to protect or shield the other person in an attempt to not rock the boat on your relationship, the truth is you’re unwittingly creating space between you. You’re going to feel less connected to someone you’re not truthful with.

And secondarily, when the hiding of your accomplishments becomes something that you do on the regular, it can really erode your belief in yourself.

After all, if you just skate over or dismiss the things you’ve worked so hard to achieve, you’re missing the opportunity to acknowledge your effort to yourself. And that’s important.

Because the truth is, believing in yourself is like opening a bank account.

You can Open the belief bank account anytime you choose by simply deciding to believe in yourself.

But, when you get great at acknowledge your achievements, when you allow yourself to FEEL that pride and to really own it, each achievement is like adding money to your belief account.

As your belief bank account gets bigger, you’ll have the self-belief to go after and do even more.

Back to the example of my client.

As we discussed it, he just kept getting stuck on what other people were going to think. And to him, that felt true.

But then I asked him a question that shifted it for him.

I asked, “What would you tell your son if his ball team brought home first place?”

And without hesitation, he answered, “I’d tell him to be proud of himself and his team.”

And then I asked, “So why would your answer be any different for you?”

He thought about it a long time and then said, “It’s not.”

What he came to understand is that by hiding his business’s accomplishments he was catering to the made up jealously of some unknown people. And in the process, he not only diminished himself and the things he worked so hard for. But he diminished the efforts of his team. **And** he kept potential clients from learning of his high-quality services that were now swimming in awards and recognition.

A few days later, I got an email that said he’d sent out client emails highlighting the award and included them in a new ad campaign. And he closed by saying, “This feeling rocks.”

The most important thing to remember here is that there’s nothing wrong with sharing your achievements with others. You don’t have to worry about appearing arrogant or like your chest beating. You can simply share and feel the pride of your accomplishment.

The other person can choose to either feel happy for you or jealous of you or both. But that is their choice. And they get to feel what they feel. And however someone chooses to handle our good news is irrelevant. It doesn’t diminish you or what you accomplished. And it doesn’t have to impact the relationship. We’re all human and we’re all imperfect. And you choose to give them the grace and the space to work through their emotions, knowing they’ll eventually be happy for you.

Trying to predict how others might respond to your news and to modify or adjust what you do based on that isn’t honoring yourself and it’s not honoring your relationship with that person. The only way to do that is to be open and honest and to fully own the good fortune that comes your way. Doing so shows respect to the other person and to yourself. And that’s only going to make both of you and your relationship, stronger.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.