A person with long hair

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Why We Sometimes

Hide Our Successes

November 21, 2021

Well hello Friends! I hope you had an amazing week!

This coming Thursday is Thanksgiving in the U.S. and it’s always been one of my favorite times of the year. I love everything about it.

The traditions.

The time with family and friends.

The food.

The football.

The Hallmark Christmas movies.

Who’s with me?!

But more than all of that, I love the reminder to be thankful. To just choose to be grateful for ALL OF IT.

Because with our busy lives and careers and families, it’s so easy to forget to do that. To either take for granted everything we have or maybe even failing to see how there’s ALWAYS something to be grateful for even when we’re in the middle of really dark times.

And that’s the part I wanted to talk about today. The importance of being grateful ON PURPOSE. Even when things in your life might not be going exactly as planned.

Because being grateful is a choice. It’s a decision we make.

It’s about deciding to view the circumstances of our lives through a lens that actively seeks out the good. And then allowing yourself *to really see it* and *appreciate it*.

Especially important after the past year.

I mean, come on. 2020? Hot mess express, right?

That’s probably a descriptor most of us would agree with, even in this divided culture we live in right now.

The great toilet paper shortage of 2020?

The endless months of isolation.

The not seeing family or friends.

The not going to restaurants of movies.

People getting sick.

Losing jobs.

All of it.

So today, I want to talk about gratitude as a choice.

I know it’s a little trite to talk gratitude in November. But I want to talk about gratitude as a daily practice. A tool that will help you see your life and the world that will serve you in ways you can’t even imagine right now.

I call it The Gratitude Game.

It’s a practice I started doing several years ago when I was going through a time in my career that I didn’t love.

I had a great job and I loved WHAT I did every day and many of the people I worked with, but I DIDN’T love or even like really, the culture of the company I worked for.

And on top of that, I had a super long commute – like one hour each way on a GOOD day – and I didn’t love that either. Sure, the podcasts helped (Thanks Brooke Castillo and Amy Porterfield) but many days it wasn’t enough to stop my mind from fixating on the dread of the day to come.

The nonstop politics.

The bad decisions.

The relentless news of more layoffs.

And so many other things that aren’t worth mentioning now but that I know many of you can relate to. We all have experienced times like this.

So, suffice it to say that when the alarm clock went off every morning at 5:30, it took everything I had to drag myself out of bed and get ready to face the day I knew I had ahead of me.

And when we’re in a time like that – and we all go through them at some point – it’s easy to get lost in that misery.

To be so focused on the things you HATE about something that you find it impossible to think of even one thing that you love.

Can you relate? Have you ever had a job that filled you with dread or anxiety or misery or maybe just massive boredom?

I’m guessing a lot of you out there can relate.

At least in the U.S. Because according to the labor reports, in September and October, we set records for the number of people quitting their jobs. And there are millions of job openings that companies are finding it impossible to fill.

The media is calling it The Great Resignation.

And it’s no big surprise really, as a Gallup Poll that’s tracked employee engagement and workforce wellbeing for the past two decades has hinted this day was coming for a long time. According to that poll, only 36% of U.S. employees are “engaged” in their work or workplace.

And globally, that number is even LOWER. Just 20%.

Even more, according to the survey nearly 75% of us are either actively looking for new employment or we’re regularly watching for openings that might be of interest.

So, three quarters of us are ready to move on. And for many of us, that’s a good thing. It might be long past time to move on. And I think change is a good thing. It’s good to experience and tackle new things.

But here’s the thing. We don’t want to leave the thing we have when we’re filled with hatred for it because we risk taking that same negative energy into the new environment.

If we’re going to leave for something new and next level, it’s important that we first adjust our thoughts and beliefs about the job we have. And gratitude is the best way to do that.

That’s why I invented The Gratitude Game.

Because one day when I was dragging myself into the car at the ungodly hour of 6:20, I just decided that I felt sick and tired of feeling sick and tired.

So, as I began the hour-long drive to work, I decided to play a game. The Gratitude Game.

For this, I turned on the memo feature on my iPhone, turned up the volume and I challenged myself to fill the entire commute to work by listing all the things I was grateful for about my job.

I wasn’t allowed to list things from my personal life or whatever. Just the job that I dreaded so much.

So, an hour is a reeeeeealllllly long time, right?

And it took about 5 minutes to run out of the obvious things like the paycheck, the fun work colleagues, the newly opened Bread Zeppelin restaurant right around the corner (which, by the way, is totally yummy).

So, I had to get creative.

And I had to turn over every stone to look for any small nugget of good that I could find, because I had an hour to fill. And I was determined to fill it.

This approach forced me to look at some of the things I hated the most and deliberately put a fresh lens of gratitude on them for what they were teaching me.

Or how much better prepared I would be the next time I faced something similar.

Or even how it had broadened my perspective.

Or taught me the things I would no longer tolerate or take for granted in my career.

I looked at everything.

The resentments.

The politics.

The oversights.

The failures.

The losses.

And you know what happened?

I filled the entire hour.

And I didn’t spend one minute of that time dreading the day to come. Because The Gratitude Game forced me to shift how I viewed the things happening at work. It made me look at those same things I usually viewed through the lens of how they might actually be serving me.

Granted, they still weren’t my favorite things.

I still was looking forward to the day when I could leave that environment and shift into something new.

But by taking on the challenge of filling my entire commute with that mental gratitude list, I had to get purposeful. I had to shift out of victimhood and resentment and irritation.

And instead, by viewing those same situations, people, and outcomes through the lens of how they were actually SERVING me, and as I spent the time making my brain answer that question, I realized something really important.

Those things that I despised or disliked so much actually WERE serving me.

They were forcing me to grow in ways that I never would have had I been in an environment that was easier or a more natural fit for me.

They were teaching me about my OWN shortcomings that were my response to that specific environment.

Impatience.

Blaming.

Gossip.

Judgement.

That realization is important. Because once you realize that the challenges you face aren’t the issue but that it’s your responses to them that ARE, that’s when you become truly empowered. That’s when you truly grow as a person.

But the value of gratitude goes beyond even that.

Psychologists say that by establishing a regular gratitude practice, we can boosts happiness and it leads to better physical and mental health.

Grateful people report having more frequent positive emotions, better relationships and are more likely to be optimistic about their circumstances. Even when things aren’t exactly going their way in the moment.

This is because a regular gratitude practice will help you shift your recurring thought patterns away from the negative thoughts that aren’t serving you and into more thankful ones.

And because we know that our thoughts cause our feelings, these more thankful or gratitude-based thoughts cause us to feel more positive, optimistic emotions.

So, we worry and ruminate less.

But when we’re in the middle of a super challenging time at work, when we feel like everything is unpredictable or toxic or messed up, it’s hard to shift into gratitude for that same job that we dislike so much.

That’s why when I do this exercise with my clients and when I did it myself, I didn’t allow myself to focus on what I was grateful for in my life. I deliberately made myself see and identify things about that job I disliked so much and to stay with it for the full hour.

I had to dig deep.

And some of the nuggets I pulled out were tiny or at first glance, they still seemed kind of negative. Like trying to be grateful for the experience of dealing with the nonstop politics.

At first glance, that one can seem like a tough one to be thankful for. But if you keep asking yourself “how could this be serving me”, your brain will eventually answer.

Because the truth is, the bad times serve us even more than the good times when it comes to personal growth.

And for me, it made me realize that while I couldn’t necessarily fix a lot of the things going on, I could make sure that I learned how the way I was showing up might be making it worse for myself. And when you realize that you have the power to change how you view that same situation (even if it never actually changes) and that in turn will change how you feel in the job every day, well, that’s when you really get to next level growth.

And that was my really big personal discovery and one that I think applies to so much of our career.

Things can be both good AND bad.

You can both HATE your job and choose to LOVE it too.

This is what psychologists call “dialectical behavior”.

An example of this might be, “I lost my job today and I’m scared I won’t find one as good. But I am also grateful to be out of that environment and to have more time to look for something that’s a better fit.

One circumstance. Opposing thoughts. And both things are true.

This is something important to know. And it’s something gratitude taught me.

Very few things are ALL good or ALL bad.

When we view them in that way, it’s kind of taking the easy way out. And we miss the opportunity to grow. To dig deep.

But when we find ourselves in challenging time and we choose to play The Gratitude Game, we open ourselves up to not only shifting how we think and feel but of learning the lessons that I think that challenge was meant to teach us.

If you’re in the middle of a really challenging time at work for whatever the reason, I invite you to play The Gratitude Game. Set the timer on your phone for 30 minutes or an hour and start going.

When you get past the easy things like the paycheck and your work peeps and the fun times, keep going.

And when your brain tells you there’s nothing else good, start listing the things you think of as bad and then ask yourself “how could this be serving me” or “how could this be good”.

Then let your brain answer.

And then explore it. It probably won’t make you love that job or the boss or the situation or whatever challenge you’re facing. But it’ll shift how you “see” that same thing.

And that will change everything about how you feel every day and the energy that you take in that new job when you DO find that next level opportunity.

The gratitude game. Give it a try.

Have a beautiful thanksgiving.

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

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.