

PUBLICATION

Finding Joy

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About a year ago, a friend asked me what in my life brought me joy, and I answered that I felt joyful watching my daughter dance and listening to my son tell me about every animal at the zoo. "No, no, no," she said, "What do you do for yourself that brings you joy?" I was stumped. I couldn't list one thing that I did purely for myself that brought me joy. My family was happy, but in the busyness of striving to be a partner at a law firm and striving to be the perfect mom and striving to have a thriving social life, I had lost my joy.

So, in a typically Type-A way, I now systematically work at finding joy – the same way that I work to bring in a new client, work to organize the school's Small-Tall Ball, or work to organize a girls' night out. I started by cultivating more joyful activities into my schedule. I made a list of activities that brought me joy in the past: Pilates, roller blading, reading fiction, dancing, skiing, and community service. Then, I incorporated these activities in my life. I signed up for a Pilates class. I started reading a fiction book for 15 minutes before bed. I started dancing along with my kids when "Can't Stop the Feeling" came on the radio. Simultaneously, I began devouring podcasts, articles, and books on how to develop a more joyful attitude. Here's what I've learned:

- **I'm not owed anything.** When I feel stressed, it is most likely because I didn't get something that I thought I deserved. A perfect example is traffic. I commute seven miles every day, and it often takes me more than 45 minutes. I used to arrive home a disgruntled mess because I didn't think it should take me so long. Now, (most days) I have accepted that it will always take me at least 45 minutes to get home so that I'm grateful when it only takes me 40 minutes.
- **Gratitude.** Sometimes I feel stressed or resentful because I can't afford to do something that I really want to do or because I get passed over for something I thought I really deserved. When that happens, I now ask myself, "Do I need that to live a happy life?" The answer is almost always "No." Do I need to get that big promotion to live a happy life? Do I need to travel to Cancun for Spring Break to live a happy life? Do I need a Chanel handbag to live a happy life? No, no, no. I have everything I need to live a happy life already. As Aurelius said, "Very little is needed to make a happy life; it is all within yourself, in your way of thinking."
- **Be Present.** Lasting joy is not found in the mountain top moments. Mountain top moments are those fleeting periods of euphoria when the world seems perfect. I was spending my life chasing mountain top moments, creating the perfect memories, living a "Facebook-worthy" life. But, joy is found in being fully present in the everyday experiences – feeling the sun on your face as you finish a grueling run, enjoying a stunning sunrise on your way to work, or picking flowers on the way home from the bus stop with your kids. Find magic in the every day.
- **Celebrate EVERYTHING.** I punctuate my life with quiet celebrations (most commonly of Starbucks and a Marshmallow Dream bar) with a friend – when a client sends me a "job well done" email, when my child had a good doctor visit, when I got my first deal after seven years of pure litigation. My "work wives" and I witness and celebrate each other's small accomplishments, adding a great deal of joy to my daily life. At home, our family celebrates every little thing – good report cards, great client results, new friendships, and personal triumphs – over family dinner with a toast and a high five. And, my husband and I celebrate the big stuff – birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays – with dinners out, parties, and trips. Moments of celebration make us pause and be mindful, boosting our well-being.

Any celebration, big or small, is really about taking a beat to notice the good stuff in your life. It can also be a reminder of our talents and abilities, skills and persistence.

I have realized that Annie Dillard was right when she said, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing" with our lives. So, no matter how small, sowing joyful seeds and attitudes into my days is how I am building a more joyful life.