

3. Invisibility: Enjoying Joy

Lauren wrote some time back, but I am just now getting around to responding to her email. Here is a portion of what she wrote about her joy exercises.

In terms of my joy sessions, I've been hitting around 2-3 joyful experiences a day. I realized that I often had to consciously create experiences because enjoying moments didn't really come naturally. I knew it was an issue, but it was just interesting to see how much effort it took to ensure I had the requisite number of experiences on a daily basis. Some days I had to backload my joy experiences at the end of the day because I would come home and realize that I hadn't experienced any joy until that point.

I was also surprised that I had to focus so much on letting joy in. There were times when I was doing something that I knew I generally liked, but it was as if my mind was running on autopilot. I knew I liked/preferred those things, but I couldn't really feel it (the exhilaration, happiness, etc.). I had to stop and mentally focus on what I liked and let the feeling in. Sometimes it would take a bit, but I consider it a positive work in progress.

One issue that I consistently encountered was enjoying the joy without rushing the moment. I frequently wrestled this nagging feeling in the back of my mind that I was taking too much time enjoying my joy. I felt like I had so many things to do on my task list that I felt guilty for savoring the moment for too long. So while one part of me wanted to be still and enjoy the joy, another part of me resisted it. Because of that internal struggle, there were many times when I felt like my whole person wasn't fully on board experiencing the joy.

I'll keep practicing this assignment, and I imagine that many of these issues may work themselves out with time.

First of all, Lauren, look at the issue of assets. You don't have a natural joy package yet. However, you learned from childhood to be diligent and to push through the emotional discomfort so you could perform according to a check list. This made you emotionally flat in a sense, because you were powering through. Now you are taking your strong skill of disciplined focus and are using it to build a good neurological and experiential treasure.

This is an excellent picture for everyone else watching your story line. Even in our junk, there are often treasures that we can use to achieve greater treasures. So well done! You are on track, using your liability as an asset to leverage greater assets in the future.



Second, I am glad you caught the fact that you struggled to let joy in. The issue here is “permission.” Part of the journey involves your giving yourself permission a lot of times to enjoy your joy. Now here is where we shift from brain to soul. Your brain experiences something that it likes and asks for permission to escalate the emotion.

We do this all the time. I was at an event last night and something funny happened. I felt the humor in it, but my soul grabbed a hold of my brain and choked it off, because it was not appropriate to laugh out loud in public over that issue at that time.

You are well familiar with the childhood constructs that demanded that you keep an even keel emotionally. Thousands of decisions to stifle all sorts of emotions has created a pretty strong control habit in your soul, so you have to wrestle with the past in order to release your soul into the present. For now, I don’t have any fancy tools to give you. I think that just fighting 100,000 little battles and winning 80,000 of them will get you where you need to be.

I think that this is a huge part of your mantle of invisibility. When someone is choking off a lot of who they are, other people feel a bit uneasy. That emotionally blank, dependable worker that you were asked to be in childhood helped you survive there, but in the marketplace, people actually will promote the more emotionally engaged individuals ahead of those who are competent but flatlined.

That said, why don’t you think about what it would look like for you to enjoy someone else’s joy at work. How is that done by others now?

I realize that your work place is a proper, stuffy, buttoned down, white collar bastion of propriety. I doubt anyone whoops with joy and offers a hard smacking high five when something goes right. But there has to be some level of celebration allowed somewhere. Can you celebrate a new hairdo for the receptionist? What happens when people get a raise or a promotion? Is there some form of peer praise that is allowed or not until they are in the bar after work?

I think that at the end of the day you can envision past or future celebrations and “see” yourself doing them. So “Fred” scored recently on the Jones project. What happened? How was it announced to the company that he concluded successfully? Who said what to compliment him? What could you have done to share his joy?

Then look forward. Judy is going on vacation. She will (we hope) come back all joyous. What is the corporate context for asking her to share her joy? What would it look like for you to enjoy her joy with her?

You need to figure out what works in that culture. I just don’t know how locked down they all are emotionally. You might have to ask Judy to go out to lunch with you to share the high points, or to send you some pictures of the most fun days. You figure out what is viable there, but basically take your game to the next level.



It is usually easier for someone with the mantle of invisibility to enjoy someone else's joy than to announce your own joy and have everyone yawn. Very humiliating when no one wants to enjoy your joy with you.

So that is an assignment you can move on immediately. Since you like metrics, I will suggest that twice a week you find some way of sharing the joy of someone in the office. Your first objective is to learn the skill set of inserting yourself into the conversation comfortably, and the second step is finding how comfortable you are in sharing other people's joy. At present, I am not raising the bar on intensity – just activity.

If the best you can do is say, "That's cool, Judy" then that is fine. If you can draw her out for three minutes or engage on Facebook or whatever else, then fine. Your call. So I don't care about skill. Let's just do something twice a week to start the process and let me know.

Third, on the issue of rushing joy, you can often beat this by multitasking. Can you allocate some time that is already "productive" to enjoying your joy? What about in the shower, or while driving, or while folding the laundry, etc. I know from other correspondence that you do motion well when you are thinking. Will the inner policemen chill out if the whole time you are being productive with folding laundry, you have permission to enjoy your joy on a single issue for the whole 15 minutes?

Let me know. If not, we will use some other tools to find a block of time where you have permission. It is hard to enjoy your joy when the Grinch is standing there looking at his watch every five seconds making horrible faces at you for being so naughty as to impinge on his emotional atmospheric responsibility.

So, sneak some time when the Grinch has a headache and celebrate #1. Work on #2 so you can report back and tell me what your starting point is, so I can coach you with more skills and techniques. And let me know whether #3 works or we need a better tool.

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From JFK, between flights

