

LIFE IN A NUTSHELL

SECRETS TO ELIMINATING THE ROOT OF PROBLEMS

SUMMER 2011

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WHAT'S IN A SMILE?



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WHAT'S IN A SMILE?

It is morning. I am sitting on our deck—warm air soothing my skin, blue skies making way for the dappling of sunlight, and local songbirds leading the morning's concerto. I'm in my pj's, sipping coffee, plans only

to have no plans.

Every fiber of my being is smiling with contentment this Sunday morning. Immersed in comfort; nothing is pressing, nothing is tugging, and the elements surrounding me depict the epitome of my personal definition of magnificence.

I desire to be touched by it all: the sights, the sounds,

the smells, the tastes, the sensations. I breathe in every morsel, welcoming each to permeate my very being. My smile is an outward acknowledgment of my gratitude for being quenched with pleasure.

I was smiling from the inside out this glorious morning, but it hasn't always been this way.

MY SMILE IS AN OUTWARD ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF
MY GRATITUDE FOR BEING QUENCHED WITH PLEASURE.



WHAT'S IN A SMILE?

A genuine smile requires a willingness to be vulnerable. It reveals the pleasure that quenches our hearts and souls.

A genuine smile is not dependent on someone else's response; it is merely an acknowledgment of what is.

... **A smile dependent** on someone else's satisfaction will eventually wear us down and tear us apart.

A genuine smile indicates when we are at home with who we are and with what we do.

A genuine smile is our truest expression of contentment.

A smile exposes our individuality.

Our genuine smile will weed out anyone who is not supportive of us being our authentic selves.

I was never officially diagnosed as Type A, but twenty-five years ago—when I tore through life at an alarmingly overachieving pace—I guarantee you, I could not have found joy in this moment.

Yoga was too slow.

I grew vegetables because I couldn't see the value of a flower garden.

And I walked through life with more important things to do than immerse myself in my surroundings, or so I thought.

Health issues prompted me to disengage from that 60 mph approval-seeking hamster wheel where stress was clenched between my teeth, coursing through my veins and oozing out my sinuses. When my tightly wound Type A muscles began tweaking—cutting off nerves and sensation, much as I had cut myself off from what curls the corners of my mouth—life as I knew it came to a screeching halt. In hindsight, "Thank God!"

A GENUINE SMILE

A smile is the light in the window of your face that tells people you're at home. ~ Author Unknown

A genuine smile requires a willingness to be vulnerable. It reveals the pleasure that quenches our hearts and souls. A smile exposes our individuality. It is our truest expression of contentment—acknowledgment that our hunger has been satisfied.

What brings a smile to my face may not be what brings a smile to yours; but if you are comfortable with your smile, you will delight in mine. This is how smiles spread.

FEELING SAFE TO SHARE

I was not afraid to let Nature know how deeply She touched me that glorious Sunday morning, nor am I afraid to share it with you now, but it hasn't always been that way either. Those we feel free to genuinely smile around are those we feel safe to share our deepest selves with.

Sharing this sacred moment with you puts me at risk of your judgment, as does a genuine smile. If I were seeking your approval I would fear loss, but since I seek to inspire us both, I see only gain for both of us.

A genuine smile is not dependent on someone else's response; it is merely an acknowledgment of what is. If we allow ourselves to become attached to the opinions of others, then so too will our smiles become dependent on outside approval. Getting untangled from this form of codependency may require tweezers and a magnifying glass, but it is totally doable and worth the effort.

Our genuine smile will weed out anyone who is not supportive of us being our authentic selves, while the light it provides serves as a beacon for those who are. However, fear of this weeding can be the very reason many people withhold or even abandon their smiles.

THE APPROVAL SMILE

The reward for conformity is that everyone likes you but yourself.
~ Rita Mae Brown

I lost my smile and consequently myself, as many do, in my efforts to conform to religious beliefs, societal standards and family ideals that were well intended but negatively impactful. I had learned to be who others wanted me to be at the expense of being myself. This behavior is deceitful, exhausting and lacks integrity, but living on autopilot, I was unaware of its impact both internally and externally.

In my approval-seeking days, my smile was dependent on external praise. I tried to be who my friends wanted me to be in order to be accepted by them, who my kids wanted me to be in order to be loved by them, who my boss wanted me to be in order to be appreciated at work—I thought that was what love called for.





External praise has kind of a caffeine effect. It lifts us up temporarily but when the boost wears off it leaves us seeking our next boost. That is why the hamster wheel gets so crazy—it leaves us incessantly at the heels of a smile. As caffeine can be a temporary antidote for sleep deprivation, approval can be a temporary antidote for fulfillment deprivation. But in the end both leave us dependent on the antidote rather than smilingly satiated.

Those whose autopilot is approval, like mine used to be, often give 150% at work and/or in relationships in their attempts to fill the shoes of expectation laid out for them by others or by themselves. Super-efforts that leave us feeling drained, underappreciated and with a smile dependent on someone else's satisfaction will eventually wear us down and tear us apart.

Sometimes it takes physical, financial or relationship collapse to bring us back to our proverbial drawing boards—to what we were taught or how we interpreted it on a foundational level. When we live attached to the opinions of others we lose ourselves, and it can take tweezers and a magnifying glass to separate out where our generosity should end and their responsibility should begin.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES

Mistakes are part of the dues one pays for a full life. ~ Sophia Loren

Mistakes are part of giving life our best shot. Sometimes we don't know what needs fine-tuning, tweaking or changing completely in ourselves until our outer world collapses—taking our smile down with it—as a reflection of our inner discord.

CASE STUDY:

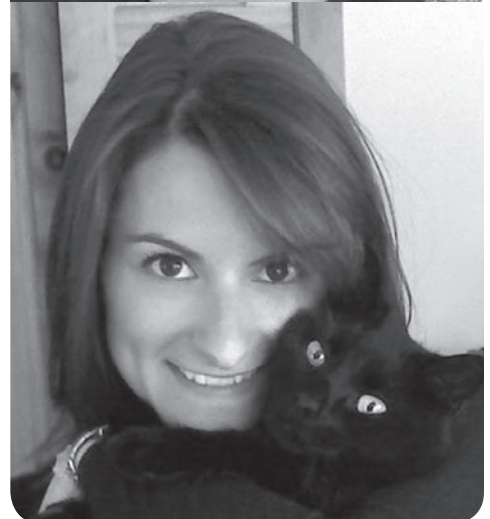
Bob came to me with financial struggles. He thought more money would bring a smile to his face but his business decisions kept coming up dry. In the end, admitting to his fear of confronting his wife's insistence on spending beyond their means was what steered him away from bankruptcy.

It wasn't about the money; resolution of the financial issue rested on revealing his inability to build anything deep and meaningful on the foundation of a spending disagreement. Bob had been taught to compromise to keep the peace and he had unwittingly compromised his own integrity. Following some soul searching, Bob and his wife came to an agreement they both felt good about (both smiling) and the money came flowing in.

Bob and I each had our own autopilots for smiling in agreement on the outside while frowning in disagreement on the inside. This is stressful behavior—codependent and born from a foundation of fear-of-loss rather than an insistence on love. Compromising who we are (being who someone else wants us to be) and/or abandoning what we believe with our whole hearts to be best, are acts lacking in integrity. We can't claim integrity as a virtue when we change who we are and what we believe every time we fear loss.

Might you have your own version of this autopilot?

IF WE ALLOW OURSELVES TO BECOME ATTACHED TO THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS, THEN SO TOO WILL OUR SMILES BECOME DEPENDENT ON OUTSIDE APPROVAL.



DON'T DO WHAT YOU DO TO PLEASE SOMEONE OR IN HOPES OF A PARTICULAR OUTCOME, DO IT BECAUSE IT MAKES YOU SMILE WITH CONTENTMENT FOR THE PERSON YOU ARE AT THE END OF THE DAY.



CONCLUSION

Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.

~ Thich Nhat Hanh

A genuine smile indicates when we are at home with who we are and with what we do. When immersed in surroundings where all the elements are pleasing to our senses and we feel safe letting it be known, is when we cast forth our greatest genuine smiles. Such heart and soul quenching activities are energizing, illuminating and rejuvenating. When an activity supports being at home with ourselves, and being at home with ourselves supports an activity, it's a good hamster wheel—filling us up instead of tearing us down.

Clients often find their way to my office when lack of return on their approval-seeking efforts reaches a collapse point such as Bob's. Collapses can appear on the surface as physical, relationship or financial in nature, but as you can see from Bob's and my situations, restoration includes a smile adjustment.

Approval is great as the frosting on the cake, but as the cake itself, it will eventually crumble, leaving us feeling like anything but smiling. Every now and then, I still experience my own collapses, have to get out my tweezers and magnifying glass, and make my way back to the drawing board to review my autopilots, just like everyone else. But it's not so intimidating now because I know how to use it all to better direct my energy toward creating autopilots that support more genuine smiling and consequently, their spread.

RECIPE FOR A LIFE FILLED WITH GENUINE SMILES:

Don't do what you do to please someone or in hopes of a particular outcome, do it because it makes you smile with contentment for the person you are at the end of the day.

Give life your best shot, keep fine-tuning, tweaking, changing and emerging with grander and grander smiles.



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