

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Are You Good Enough?

I think it's time we tackle "enough." It's been allowed to creep through our minds, stealthily sowing stress and angst for way too long. Cozying up to everyday tasks and logistics, it spurts out questions that take up a big chunk of our thought life: *Did I do that task well enough? Was I a good enough mom today? Am I dressed well enough or do I need to change? Am I spending enough time with my significant other?* If we happen to get a break from the everyday grind, "enough" latches on to even bigger questions like: *Am I a good enough person? Am I doing enough for the world? Has my life been adventurous enough? Am I athletic enough? Attractive enough? Smart enough? Spiritual enough?* And the list goes on...

I'd wager that quite a few of us are missing the cell phone number for the Absolute Answer Hotline. So it's pretty hard to tell whether our every day or life long performance measures up to some universal standard. Often, instead, we look for answers to our "enough" questions in other people's reactions to us, our comparisons of others' lives to ours, and how we are feeling about ourselves at the moment.

The problem is that all three of these answer sources change. All the time. Say you ask yourself, "Did I do well enough on this presentation?" On Saturday, you presented to rested, interested folks who made good eye contact and asked good questions. You noticed that your colleague was not able to engage the audience as well. Plus, you felt great that day after your morning run. So the answer to the "enough" question on Saturday according to these sources would probably be that indeed, you did well enough. Next Monday, you gave the same presentation with the same preparation and energy, told the same jokes—all of it was the same from your end. Except the audience was tired from the party the night before and some of them fell asleep. Your colleague did better this time, walking through the audience to keep people engaged. And you did not sleep well the night before either. So did you do well enough? Now it feels like you didn't.

Do you see the problem here? When we get our "enough" questions answered by our feelings and other people, we allow our estimation of personal value to depend on circumstances like weather, PMS, our peers' moods, or our ability to determine how the people we are comparing ourselves to are *really* doing behind the masks they put up—always a tricky prospect.

Freedom through "For What?"

There's a bunch of ways to get less changeable, subjective answers to our "enough" questions. Today, though, I want to focus on one particular two-part defense: the "For what?" and the "What's important to me?" questions. The stress and hurt that get generated by "enough" questions often come from our failure to ask these follow up questions. If we don't ask what we are good/skilled enough *for*, there are so many possible answers to the question that some of them are bound to be bad and condemning.

For example, if I only ask, "Did I do well enough on that presentation?" I'll be left with a vague sense of maybe or maybe not measuring up until I get some praise or censure from

somewhere. By asking “for what,” I can narrow down the confusion and then have the power to decide what to do with the clearer answers: Did I do well enough *for people to understand the lesson?* (It seemed like it.) Enough *that I don’t need to prepare for next time?* (Not quite, I still want to prepare.) Enough *for the guy in the front row to ask for my phone number?* (Nope.) Enough *to not be fired on the spot?* (Yep.) Enough *to warrant a promotion?* (Not sure yet.) Enough *that I have proved myself irrevocably and profoundly lovable.* (Uh...I don’t think a presentation can decide that.)

After breaking down the answers by asking “for what,” the next question is, “What is important to me?” This question lets me stop thinking about the “enough” questions that don’t matter much right now and then focus instead on actions that address the ones that do. If my answer to what’s important right now is: “I really want the guy in the front row to like me,” and not “I want to be stellar for the sheer love of excellence,” then I can go make sure I cross the guy’s path at the conference this evening, rather than doing another hour of prep for tomorrow’s session. If my boss gets annoyed, but I score a date with the guy, I’m gonna feel “good enough” because I honed in on what felt important to me. If my priorities change tomorrow, I can do something different then.

While “for what” and “what’s important” are great for day to day things, their power is much greater with “enough” questions about identity. “Am I manly enough?” for example, could lead a guy 1) down no end of rabbit trails to figure out exactly what manliness consists of and then 2) to trying to get a bunch of other seemingly “manly” men and “attractive enough” women to behave around him in ways that confirm his manliness. Perhaps only then can he convince himself he meets that ever-wobbly, constantly-changing “manliness” standard. *Or*, he could ask: Am I manly enough *to take risks outdoors?* (Yes on four wheeling, no on climbing.) Enough *to attract a woman that I am attracted to?* (Depends on the date.) Enough *to make my kids feel protected?* (Yep, they come to me when they’re scared.) Enough *to get my dad to stop bossing me around?* (Nope, but he’d boss around Clint Eastwood.)

Following this with “what’s important to me” could then clarify: I’d like to overcome my fear of climbing because it’s something I could do with my friends, it sounds fun, and I’m ashamed that I haven’t taken the steps to get past that. Right now, though, I’m realizing it’s not that important to me to attract a woman because I am so busy with work that I wouldn’t have time to do anything about it. I could probably slack off of that worry right now.

A Limited Tool, but a Useful One

Of course I get that these two questions cannot answer existential or metaphysical questions like, “What, in the grand scheme of things, *should* be important to me?” Nor can they bridge the gap between those things we find to be deeply important even though they prove, time and again, to be beyond our efforts. Addressing those kinds of questions would take I’m not sure how many newsletters! But what these simple questions can do is break down swollen, unexamined fears of not being “enough” into smaller chunks that we *might* have a fighting chance of doing something about. And if they buy us even a bit more calm and self-efficacy, they’re probably still worth a shot.

So here’s what giving them a shot might look like:

1. Listen for the word or concept of “enough” within your daily or down-time worries.
2. Ask yourself *what* you were hoping to be enough *for*.

3. Try answering the range of “enough for” questions that come to mind (e.g. *Enough to make it through the day?* (Yes.) *Enough to be an awesome president?* (Maybe not.) etc.)
4. From the range of responses, figure out which specific “enough for” questions *feel really important to you*.
5. For each one, identify one small step that you could start today to convert worry into action.
6. When the other aspects of the “enough for” questions that are *not* important to you right now come to mind, see if you can practice telling yourself, “I’ve decided that’s not very important right now and I’m working on what’s important. If that becomes important, I’ll think about it then.”

If you or someone you know would like help navigating concerns about self evaluation or identity, feel free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com*.

Thanks for reading!

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