

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Good Desire Runs Deep

Recently, I heard David Campbell's motivational quote: "Discipline is remembering what you want." At first, the driven part of me found it pretty compelling. I mean, if all it takes to have discipline is keeping in mind what you want, then all I would need to fix those nagging areas of lackluster self control would be a few more sticky notes or an engraved bracelet, right?

But then it dawned on me. Maybe the discipline here—the part that is difficult and requires the most effort—is not so much the "remembering" part as the "what you want" part. Depending on the situation we're in, the question "What do you want?" can be downright terrifying.

Desire: The Door to Disaster?

I mean, let's say you've been fighting with your spouse for 10 years. When your best friend asks you what you want, the first whispered thought that comes to mind is, "I want a divorce." Now if you let that thought move from the back of your mind to the forefront or even said it out loud, would that mean you would *have to* get a divorce? Would that mean you were a quitter? A bad person? A failure? Selfish? What would that do to your finances, your reputation, your emotions, your kids, your future? Would you still want that 5 years from now? The consequences and effort that might flow from simply allowing yourself to admit your desire for divorce could be enormous.

Or say you are a brilliant brain surgeon who has gone through five million years of school to do what you do. You are renowned by your colleagues, you make plenty of money, and you feel like your life must count for something if you are saving lives every day. When the interviewer from The Post asks you what you want, though, what flashes across your mind is, "To not be on call. To rest. To be free to make mistakes. To be average." If you admitted that, would that mean all those good things people say about you are not true? That you're soft? Unprofessional? Would that mean you'd *have to* quit? Or do even more school to find something you can do without burnout? Yikes! Better not to have wants at all!

Becoming Curious about Desire

Both of these examples illustrate the truth of the discipline quote: admitting a want is a call to action, a motivating force. Our tendency, though, is to tie a want to one particular action, often one that results in negative or unfamiliar consequences. Fearing what could result from that action, we quickly decide that it would be better not admit to ourselves or others what we want.

The problem with shutting down desire that *might* lead to an action we fear is that in doing so, we also diminish the energy we have available to accomplish things in life and to feel good. It takes energy to keep up the pretense that we don't have wants, and still more energy to continue to do things that we don't want to do. Then, to replenish all that energy, since we can't actually do what we want to, we often engage in behaviors that simply numb our discomfort:

keeping the radio on, drinking, always keeping someone around so we're not alone with our discomfort, working all the time, keeping new adventures coming so we never stop to think, etc.

But what if instead of numbing ourselves to hide our fear and exhaustion, we could go back to the want underneath and treat it with patience and curiosity, rather than fear and judgment? Instead of assuming that a want must be tied to one particular action or one horrid thing that must be true about us, what if we wondered about the *full range of actions or self descriptors* that might be tied to our want? Sitting with our wants in this curious way gives us time to look at deeper desires beneath our surface, circumstantial wants. Only then can we discover that our deep desires are almost always good, valid, and important.

Let's go back to the divorce scenario. But this time, instead of shutting off the desire for a divorce out of the fear of being a selfish quitter with a financially and emotionally unsound future, let's stay with the desire for a bit longer with a posture of curiosity. What is it about divorce that might make us want it? Maybe we want to be in a relationship in which we feel understood, where we don't have to fight "turf wars" over stupid issues because we are confident that the other person is fundamentally "for us." Maybe we want our interests to feel more valued. We want more of our time and money to go to trying out new things that we've always wanted to do that do not happen to interest our spouses.

Looking deeper, we find that it is not "divorce" we want as much as increased peace, companionship, support, and creativity—all good things. Fleshing out what we want, we can see that divorce might be one route for moving closer to these deeper wants, but it does not have to be the only one. Just because we admit our desire does not mean we have to get a divorce, nor that our wants are bad. We don't have to fear our *desire* because underneath it all, what we want is good. Admitting the goodness of our basic desires frees us to consider multiple possibilities for actions that move in that direction and other ways of viewing ourselves that were not open to us before.

The surgeon might try the same process and discover that what he wants is to be allowed to be human: to have more time, activities, and relationships in his life that do not require him to be "on the ball." This craving is good and normal, not soft or unprofessional. Quitting his job might be one road to what he wants, but it does not have to be the only one. He doesn't have to fear his good, deeper desire.

Drilling Your Desire

If you suspect that you have been dodging your wants, you may want to take some time to think through, journal about, or talk through these questions with a trusted person. If worry or the slowness of the process makes you want to stop, see if you can step back from worry and judgment and stay in curiosity a little longer to hear the full message your desire wants to tell you.

1. What would you do differently in your life if you had a magic wand that could prevent you or others from experiencing any unpleasant consequences?
2. Based on those differences, can you guess at what it is that you want?
3. If you described your wants in specific, circumstantial terms, see if you can translate them into several, more general phrases or adjectives that most appeal to you about your want. For example, "I want to quit my job and write novels" might become "I want

less multi-tasking, more creativity, more down time, more interaction with creative people, and to rebel against my controlling boss.”

4. If there are adjectives or elements about your desire that feel unacceptable to you, see if you can drill down further to what might be underneath them. For example “rebellious against my boss” might be a surface desire, where a deeper one might be “knowing I can stand up for myself when I need to.” Keep drilling the desires you wish you didn’t have until you find the good desire underneath those that felt unacceptable to you.
5. For each good component of your desire that you discovered, what would be 3 or 4 actions that you might take to fulfill those deeper, good desires?
6. If these actions are not achievable right now, what would be the very first small step that you could take in that direction?

If you or someone you know would like some help working through and understanding desire, call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.

Thanks for reading!

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