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Celebrations

We had finished our certification exam after a day of writing, being nervous, and showing what we were made of as coaches. This day was the culmination of more than a year's worth of training and thousands of dollars. And now it was time to close the day as group, under the blue Bay Area skies, examiners and examinees gathered together in a circle. As an examinee, I would not get the results of my efforts for up to four weeks, long after I gotten on the airplane to return home to Colorado.

One of the examiners talked about taking the time to celebrate that evening, for having gotten to this point in our careers as coaches. He emphasized the need to notch it up—to go for the more expensive wine instead of the house wine, to go to the special occasion restaurant instead of the local neighborhood place. As we went around the circle, saying what we needed to say to be complete for the day, I was puzzled by the comments of two of my fellow examinees. Mary talked about how she could not celebrate until she knew the results of the exam, that it would not feel right until then. She was Scandinavian and recounted leading a workshop in her home country where she asked participants to name something they could celebrate about in their lives. She was met by blank stares. Perhaps her reluctance to celebrate was part of her own ethnic culture. Beth talked next and while she acknowledged the appropriateness of celebrating that evening, she wondered about whether it would be quite right to celebrate again when she got the exam results that she hoped for.

I found both of these viewpoints curious. I had planned for this day for months and picked out the perfect dress to celebrate in afterwards. A striking shade of deep pink, completely covered with delicate sequins, the dress sparkled both in the light of day and in the dim glow of evening. I had packed it, not knowing how I would do on the test, with no other nice dinner outfit in my wardrobe. I would be sparkly, no matter the course of the day's events. A friend had offered to take me out to dinner after the exam, a chance for us to see each other while I was in town. He would be arriving at the hotel, where the exam was held, to pick me up. When it was my turn to talk in the circle, I told about my evening plans and the pink sparkly dress. The enthusiasm in my voice was clear.

It occurred to me that all of this wasn't about celebrating a milestone of getting to the exam. It wasn't even about the effort put forth that day or what we had produced in terms of exam results. It was about celebrating life. Life doesn't need to be big or grand or right to celebrate. It doesn't even need to be good in that moment. The celebration is about fully engaging in life, in all its messiness, unpredictability, and quirkiness. Like love, life is unconditional. You get to be part of life, whether or not you can appreciate it, whether you've won or lost, and whether you've passed or failed. And like love, life shouldn't be measured and doled out. Celebrate today, tomorrow, and the next day. It's all appropriate.

There's one more thing that I learned about celebrating. When we give ourselves permission to celebrate, we give others permission as well. It's hard to resist the energy that comes out of fully embracing life. You can't help but smile and know in your gut that all of life is good.

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