

Enjoying Our Achievements

Dawn Brown

Recently a friend shared with me the pain she felt upon learning about her cousin's big promotion. Until then she had been feeling very good about her life and the direction her company was going. She had worked so hard to build up her business and now it was doing well, poised to take off in a big way. And then disaster struck in the form of her cousin's promotion. All of a sudden she felt like an underachiever. It seemed that her cousin had achieved in a few short years the pinnacle of success that had taken her twice the time – and she was nowhere near that pinnacle!

I could understand her feelings. My memory of feeling that way goes right back to childhood when the joy I experienced at the huge scoop of ice cream I was given evaporated when I realized the my friend's scoop was much larger. We've all experienced similar feelings where our desire to rejoice in the success of others is mixed with our criticism of our own progress. We're then left feeling less than; inadequate and that robs us of our personal happiness and appreciation for what we've accomplished in life.

Sociologists call that way of thinking *reference anxiety*. It refers to our tendency to judge our possessions, what we have, in comparison with others'. It's apparently hard to be happy with your carport when your neighbours or friends have garages. The situation worsens considerably if they have two car garages! In my friend's case, she wasn't asking herself whether she had accomplished her goals and created a life for herself and her family. Instead she was asking herself if her accomplishments were better than her cousin's. When she judged that her cousin's accomplishments were greater, she slumped into a pool of negativity and depression. While many people are spurred on to work even harder to achieve more so they can come up ahead of the "competition", my friend showed that the opposite can also happen. We are robbed of our desire to progress and lose faith in ourselves. Regardless of whether we work harder or slump, the results are the same: we're not taking the time to celebrate what we have in our lives and as a result happiness eludes us.

I'm reminded of the words in that beautiful poem by Max Ehrmann, *Desiderata*: "*If you compare yourself with others, you may become vain or bitter, for always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself. Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans.*"

Sometimes we set goals, make plans and we don't reach them but along the way we find treasures, make friends and achieve successes we hadn't envisioned. We also learn valuable lessons that will help us the next time around. And sometimes we achieve exactly what we set out to do. And again, there are the lessons. There is no time like the present for us to pause, take stock of our achievements, and express appreciation for the blessings in our lives.

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