

Looking Forward To Looking Back

- Year End Reflections

That title is actually a line from a Carly Simon song, and it sums up how I feel at each year's end. Others may be doing the usual "stress about the holidays" song and dance, others may believe in making New Year's Resolutions. I prefer to take a glance backward over a year gone by and think about everything that happened in my life. I especially like to review my year in terms of accomplishments. I don't need to share with you the specific details of any given year, because I'm not trying to sound too much like those "newsletter of our year" mailings that some people include with their holiday seasonal cards. I would rather share with you that each year's overall successes for me far outweigh any setbacks that come my way. Any time I'm able to say that at the end of a year, well, that's the good stuff. I think about the year in terms of feelings too. So much of the work I do is about encouraging, supporting, validating, celebrating others, with the hoped-for result of feeling happy. So when the year's end comes, I tally up my feelings inventory.

How can someone go about making sure to acknowledge the achievements, accomplishments, the successes and emotions of the year gone by? The most important thing is the making sure part. I can't imagine that anyone would look back at the end of a year and not be able to remember at least one or two moments of joy, happiness, a goal realized, a word of positive praise that came their way. But we don't always remember to take the time to do this. So many people are often too quick to run themselves down, to not accept compliments graciously (if at all), to be self-deprecating rather than self-celebrating. I say let's change all that! There's the old saying that if you don't toot your own horn, nobody else will. Of course, someone might answer back that to toot one's own horn is seen as cocky, arrogant, self-promoting, grandstanding, whatever phrase you choose to use. But that's not the point of staying positive about oneself. There are plenty of ways to do this without going to the cocky and arrogant side of it. It's a simple "thank you" when a compliment is paid for a job well done or a talent acknowledged. It's a projection of confidence when entering a room, or meeting people for the first time, or speaking before a group.

Since confidence comes from within, it shows itself in more than just the outward appearance. It's the inward "voice" that we learn to keep on the positive self-talk track. People often say it's easier to believe a negative about oneself. I disagree. Believing the negative about oneself is a huge energy drain. Why not celebrate ourselves? Why not start with ourselves and own the skills and talents that each of us possesses? Why not indeed! I frequently find myself talking about coming to any situation from a place of strength and independence rather than a place of weakness and being needy. So to re-train that internal voice, it's about learning to say things like "I will," instead of "I can't." It's learning to say yes to our feelings, whatever they might be. It's owning our successes, and understanding that the definition of success comes in many shapes and sizes and is entirely personal vs. the societal "traditional" parameters defining success.

Every year brings hard work, and not just in my professional life. When I look at the positive rewards gained from the hard work, I know it was worth the effort, as it always is. In all aspects of my life, there are highs and lows, as I'm sure there are with everyone. Thankfully, the highs far outnumber the lows, and I'm grateful for that. Did I achieve goals? Yes. Have new ones been set? Again, yes. Am I taking the time to make sure my inward "voice" is sending me positive affirmations? As often as possible, on my way to always!

Taking the time to look behind before moving ahead is helpful. Seeing where we have been can define where we want to go next as we journey forward. We can identify the positive gains resulting from the risks we took to win them. We can catalogue the "no need to go there again" moments as a way of sidestepping future "land mines." We can go back over the year in our mental "photo albums" and organize the categories, thereby setting the stage for the year to come. If we're thinking with confidence and coming from a place of strength, then we can see each new year as full of possibilities and positive challenges.