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Life: Are We There Yet?

“Are we there yet?” I asked. “Almost,” replied Grandpa.

Each minute felt like an hour. After all, it was our first time visiting Florida since my Grandma and Grandpa had moved to Tampa from Wisconsin, and Walt Disney World was a dream come true for an eight-year-old. The anticipation was killing me. Everything I didn’t know about Disney World was waiting for me to discover it.

In the daily events of our lives, *getting there* can mean a myriad of things. For our trip to Florida, it meant entering the gates of the Magic Kingdom. In other areas of our lives, there might be a new job, finding our soul mate, or buying our first house—it really depends on what we intend to accomplish and how we think we’ll feel once we do.

But in the meantime, how do we stay present and enjoy the moment?

In his compelling book, *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle writes, “The more you are focused on time—past and future—the more you miss the Now, the most precious thing there is.”

By using common logic and without getting too esoteric, we can already be *there* in many ways—in our minds—but the only place we can physically experience is *here*—the present moment. The Now. Our powerful thoughts and imagination can take us in many directions—into the past or future—but the present moment is where all our power is.

The moment we have right now is our moment of creation. Everything else is simply our imagination.

But our imagination is directly affected by our thoughts in the present moment, and our future is changed by the thoughts that we hold.

Think of your thoughts like a pebble. If a pebble is dropped into a pond, it will start a ripple effect. Thoughts do the same. The thoughts you’re thinking right now affect your future experiences. Thoughts have a ripple effect.

The challenge is one of anticipation—learning how to be happy in the present moment, even if what we are waiting for hasn’t happened yet. Then, *getting there* will simply become the next moment and not the only point of the happiness experience.

As we finally pulled into the parking lot at Walt Disney World, I couldn't sit still—I was so excited. We finally arrived. We were *there*. But I had also felt the excitement of the whole experience, and this made the day seem that much sweeter. What could have been just the pleasure of the park became the full memory of the before, during, and after.

By keeping that mindset and applying it to my life, I have learned how to maintain an appreciation of the journey, not just the destination.

Do These Skinny Jeans Make My Knees Look Fat?

That was the snippet I heard as I was passing by.

On the surface, the hot topic at work that morning seemed to be about skinny jeans. But it wasn't really about jeans—it was about fat knees.

Fat knees? Seriously?

So, I looked it up. And yes, a preoccupation over fat knees is, indeed, a thing. But what *isn't a thing* to somebody on the planet? And judging from a recent post about jeans with windows, the appearance of our knees is important—at least to some people.

Now I don't claim to have my finger on the newest fads or fashion trends, but I do have my eyes and ears tuned into topics on health and wellness. And the discussion that morning didn't sound like it was

coming from a healthy body image. It sounded more like body shaming.

Unhealthy obsessions over physical appearance are nothing new. And, unfortunately, the media reinforces these beliefs with advertisements that remind us of how much better off we'd be if only we were more attractive—or bought their products.

Even celebrities aren't immune. When Lady Gaga performed the Super Bowl halftime show, she was body shamed on social media for her exposed "natural" midriff. But Gaga didn't let the shaming stop her, responding: "I'm proud of my body and you should be proud of yours too...no matter who you are or what you do."

Whether it's knees, stomachs, legs, or whatever part of the body we obsess over, expectations of our youth-focused and beauty-conscious society will be forever unattainable. But that doesn't mean we need to play along with the dysfunction. Self-rejection feeds low self-esteem, which only makes it more difficult to remember that we're always worthy of love and support—especially from ourselves.

If it's self-love and self-acceptance we're looking for, then we need to learn ways to give ourselves that unconditional support, even in the light of conflicting social messages. We all seek validation, acceptance, and happiness. But happiness doesn't come from our outward appearance. *True happiness comes from within.* And this higher, unconditional

belief comes from paying attention to both our minds *and* bodies.

When we gain control over our thoughts, we reclaim our power to accept and care for our bodies.

And once we realize that our thoughts fuel our beliefs, we can stop creating our own fake news and start believing that our bodies can be acceptable.

Jillian Lampert, Chief Strategy Officer of The Emily Program—a foundation created to eliminate eating disorders—reminds us that many people think it is “normal” to feel bad about their body and to never feel good enough, thin enough, muscular enough, whatever. According to Lampert,

“Enough is enough. The time is now to love the body you are in and take care of it because it feels good, not because it’ll change how it looks. Why be the enemy of your body when it is your constant companion? Eat well, move well, cope well and sleep well and your body will be what it is designed to be—quintessentially you!”

Having a battle with your body? Here are a few ways to call a truce and find more peace:

We are who we are. And this is good. Each of us is unique and has a different body size, shape, and form. Even if we desire to be thinner, stronger,

larger, or smaller, we are still going to have a natural body size due to bone structure, muscle tissue, and genetic predisposition. When we learn to accept ourselves and recognize that our beauty is natural, other details—like appearance—become secondary.

The body and mind are connected. There are significant studies about the mind-body connection and how our thoughts directly influence our health and well-being. When we discover that our thoughts and perspectives about our bodies are directly related our health, we can learn to replace old negative thoughts with healthy ones. A healthy mind feeds a healthy body.

Different strokes for different folks. Contrary to what the media tells us, not everybody is attracted to the same type of person. We are drawn to distinct types of cars: some people like sedans; some like SUVs. Our bodies also come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and so do our tastes. Don't let society tell you what is attractive—keep your own opinions.

Eat for fuel, not for feelings. It is important to see food as fuel for our bodies. When we use food to supplement emotions, it can be difficult to maintain nutritional balance and nourish our systems properly. If you have difficulty managing your emotions and are using food for comfort, seek help through your doctor, a counselor, or organizations like The Emily Program. Learn to see food as a positive and healthy supplement to your individual health and well-being.

Comparison can be chronic. And it's also a losing game. Remember: We are supposed to be different. The more we compare ourselves to others, the more we may feel inferior to them. Resist the temptation to fall into the trap of comparison and remember that others are having their own body experience just like we are. Focus only on yourself.

Exercise for health, not vanity. This can be a difficult shift to make, especially for chronic “gym rats.” However, the reality is that exercise is meant to help us stay healthy, and a fit physique may be a wonderful result of a healthy lifestyle—but not necessarily the reason for sweating at the gym. All exercise not need involve joining a gym; it can be as simple as moving more intentionally throughout our day by using the stairs instead of the elevator or taking a walk during lunch. Be creative!

When in doubt, reach out. If you're having difficulties with body acceptance, don't be afraid to seek help. With a refreshed focus on health and wellness over the past few years, there are more resources for support than ever before from health providers, nutritionists, counselors, and fitness trainers. Check with your doctor about support within your health plan and reconnect with friends, family, or others in your community who are focused on body health and wellness. We were never meant to go through this life alone.

Does Your Phone Have Bellybutton Lint?

Admit it. You have a relationship with your phone. Seriously. You do. Don't believe me? Try going an entire day without it, or a half-day, or even just an hour (for some).

Believe me now?

Phones have become our companions. And as with any relationship, we will have good days and not-so-good days. When our technology runs great, everyone is happy. But on down days, not so much.

Technology has intertwined itself so completely into our lives that we might not even realize how much we rely on it. I even had to experiment with a trial separation from my phone to find better balance in our relationship—particularly while driving.

Even though I was able to navigate through the car conundrum, my phone and I were recently faced

with another situation: The charging cables were no longer doing their job. They kept popping out each time I went to plug them in.

I tried buying new charging cables but had the same result. My phone was not charging consistently or completely. I tried updating the phone's operating system. Nope. I tried using different outlets in different places. No-go. I even tried buying a new phone case. No change. I was out of ideas.

Feeling defeated, I finally decided it was time to visit my local Verizon store—the same store where I had purchased the phone. I'd always enjoyed a positive experience at that location: the staff is friendly, the wait is short, and the service is fast.

As I drove to the store, I tried to remain optimistic—but my doubts began to get the best of me. So, I examined my catastrophic assumptions:

- 1) Since I've dropped the phone several times, it must be dying and destined for the recycle bin.
- 2) The warranty has expired, so I will need to buy a new phone (\$700+).
- 3) I had recently used my laptop—instead of my main desktop—to back up my phone, so I will lose all my contacts, pictures, and other data if the back-up was unsuccessful.

Uff-da.

When I arrived at the store, I shared the details of my dilemma with Bobby, the sales rep. Based on previous visits, I assumed there would be an entire process of testing, diagnostics, calling Apple Customer Service, etc., so I resigned myself to be ready to practice patience. After all, this was my phone—my umbilical cord to the world. It felt like bringing my child into the ER.

“Let me take a look at it,” Bobby said with a smile.

So I handed him my phone. He looked at front and back, flipped it over, and then peered intently into the lightning connector socket on the bottom. Then he looked up at me.

“I think I know what’s wrong.”

He reached into his drawer, pulled out a paper clip that had been slightly opened, and began poking around in the socket hole.

“You’ve got lint that’s built-up over time. That’s why your power cord keeps popping out. Happens all the time. I’m just cleaning it out.”

Within ten seconds, he was done.

“There ya go,” he said with a smile as he handed me back my phone.

“That’s it?”

“Yep.”

Wow—from problem to solution in less than 90 seconds. Now, that's customer service.

On my way out the door, I thanked Bobby and told him he deserved a raise. He just chuckled and waved goodbye. My phone felt like brand new. All was well with the world again.

Because I'm always looking for the learning in the lesson, what did I learn?

If at first you don't succeed, ask someone else. My uber-technical confidence and impertinent hubris had me believing that I was the only person responsible for finding a solution to my problem, but that's never true. Don't have a buddy nearby? Just look to the web. If you've asked a question, another 150 people have asked the same question, and many have posted the solution online or created a YouTube video. In hindsight, I'm surprised I didn't just "Google it." When in doubt, reach out.

Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. Yet again, Mom was right. When we respond to a problem with panic and fear, we start ascending a mountain that doesn't exist. While there are always worst-case scenarios, they are rare. Usually, the answers to our most difficult questions aren't extremely complicated—we're just not on the wavelength of the solution when we're still focused on the problem. Soften your stance and the answers will come.

Assumptions are inevitable. So, about those assumptions:

- 1) My phone wasn't toast.
- 2) No repairs, so no warranty issues.
- 3) Nothing happened to my data.

In the wise words of Aunt Verna, "All is not what it seems." My assumptions had taken me down a long, unnecessary rabbit trail that could have been avoided had I considered the many possibilities that exist in any situation. Sometimes we just need to stay present and take one step at a time.

Trust the process. Often, we don't know what events or circumstances need to occur so that other variables may come into play. Even when we are doubtful or think we've got it all figured out, there will always be more to the story. If we keep an open mind, we may discover that things always work out for the best—even the tough stuff.

Are phone cords popping out for you, too? Then perhaps it's time to use that spare paper clip to do some bellybutton cleaning of your own. Oh, and I mean on your phone, not yourself.

We Create Our Own Fake News

Meeting with a client over lunch one day, I couldn't help but notice his frustrations about feeling stuck in his job search. As he fleshed out the details of his career exploration process, each story turned difficult, tedious, or impossible. As the conversation progressed, I could observe him slipping deeper and deeper into his own doubts and fears, fueled by his assumptions and limiting beliefs.

Although my client has lofty career goals—many of which are realistic considering his skills and experience—his assumptions about details such as degree requirements or applicable work experience had become barriers. As he explained support for his reasoning, several of his conclusions didn't match facts or come from credible sources but rather from personal beliefs based in his past experiences or what others had told him was true.

Our conversation reminded me of how we've been taught to follow what friends and family say—and

to believe what radios, magazines, newspapers, televisions, and online media tell us.

But that has changed.

The explosion of technology in our society has produced an avalanche of new media sources and the advent of “fake news.” The purpose of fake news is to cause confusion by making us question our beliefs using untrue information disguised as legitimate news. It’s been designed to manipulate us and distract us from trusting our own conclusions, thereby creating assumptions and false beliefs.

Yet herein lies the irony: We are also subject to biased judgments that come from our own tightly held assumptions and beliefs.

We create our own fake news.

Although it is human nature to believe that our own conclusions are correct since our beliefs come from our experience, beliefs are not static—they’re dynamic and change along with us as we grow. The more we learn, the more we sculpt our thoughts—the thoughts that create our beliefs. Clearly stated by Esther and Jerry Hicks in *The Law of Attraction: The Teachings of Abraham*, “A belief is only a thought we keep thinking.”

The thoughts and beliefs we hold are establishing our direction and momentum in every decision,

every day—and, in turn, create the foundations of our attitudes, actions, and words. Knowing that our thoughts have tremendous power and momentum, it may be wise for us to pay attention to our own broadcast.

What news are we telling others? And what are we telling ourselves?

Challenging our own thoughts and beliefs is part of the critical thinking process. We can either create barriers to our growth by holding onto beliefs that no longer serve us—or we can choose again.

Curious? Here are tips to gain clarity about our beliefs and avoid creating our own fake news:

Challenge assumptions. It's easy to assume anything we read or hear as truth. However, we also need to keep in mind that "truth" is relative to the context in which a proclamation is made. The fastest way to examine our assumptions is to start with the question, "Why?" Answering that question facilitates a proverbial peeling of the onion—the process of discovering intentions and gaining increased insight and clarity into our beliefs and how they either support us or lead us astray.

Seek to understand. In Steven Covey's book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey introduces his third habit: Seek First to Understand; Then to Be Understood. This concept provides us with a simple truth—it's not always about *us* first. In order for us to make genuine connections with

others, we must first soften our stance and learn to understand others.

That was then, this is now. The past—though it still feels real—is simply data and our personal history. It is already completed. How we interpret our past and use that knowledge to make decisions in the present is what determines our future. But ultimately, it's only data. The interpretation of data will constantly change as we do, and being aware of this constant change allows us to shift our perspective and keep learning from the same event or circumstances years later.

Do the work. If we are genuinely seeking to educate ourselves about our changing beliefs, we need to be willing to let go of past beliefs that aren't serving us and create new ones that do. Remember doing homework for school? Doing the work on ourselves is the much the same. The consequences of taking a test without studying can be disastrous. In life, our homework is to seek to understand, learn about ourselves, and accept the reality that we are constantly changing. The test comes through the results of our choices.

Be your own worst enemy or best ally. Depending on whether we are learning from our experiences or not will be the strongest indicator of how we are supporting ourselves. By reacting to challenges with the same mindset every time, we are destined to repeat the same mistakes—becoming our own worst enemy. Or, with the knowledge that we are always growing and changing, we can choose a more

mindful approach and respond deliberately, therefore creating more satisfying experiences and becoming our best ally.

In the end, my client was grateful that I challenged him on his assumptions, but I reminded him that *he is the only one responsible* for creating his experience. By opening his mind to new information and challenging his own assumptions, he could be less susceptible to what he's told by others and the media, including himself—and potentially his own fake news. This powerful lesson is true for us all.