

How to keep from living a life of insanity

I recently asked a colleague how her life is unfolding. Her short answer was, "It's terrible." I then asked, "Going forward, if this week were typical of next week, and the week after, and the next six weeks, the next year and five years after that, would it be OK?" She instinctively reacted: "NO!" - communicating her resentment, frustration, and muted rage. When I asked what she's doing about her life, she responded with a "Well, you play with the hand you're dealt" attitude - playing the victim - intimating she's too immersed in the thick of it all to stand back and gain a larger perspective, or actually do anything constructive about changing.

Julia (not her real name), a successful professional woman, spouse and mother is basically unhappy - stressed out by her work, by her relationship, by her children, by the uncertainty of the economy, by the state of her physical health, social life and the like. Nothing is "working," she said. When asked, "Why not?", she thought for a moment and said, "I don't know, I just don't have time to get my act together." That's when I asked the "Well if this week were typical..."

So, what about you? How are you showing up in your life - at work, at home, at play and in relationship?

"*Presenteeism*" is a term describing a form of "disengagement-with-life" - a "foggy" state in which folks show up at work. In reality, many folks exhibit presenteeism in just about every aspect of their life. They are physical, emotional and mental wrecks to some degree. Many folks are not doing justice to their work, their spouse, their children, their friends, or their own self because they're suffering from presenteeism.

Many folks act "the victim," reactively and begrudgingly living with the "hand they are dealt." They choose to not be proactive about changing their life or lifestyle. They experience stress, overwhelm, confusion and unhappiness, played out in self-destructive living habits - lack of sleep, terrible diet, workaholism, sickness, disease, lack of exercise, estrangement from family members (even while living in the same house), being abusive, argumentative, resistant and resentful. Moreover, they have often concocted "stories" to justify why they cannot forward the action of their lives. Thus their "insanity" continues - doing the same thing the same way, over and over again and expecting different results each time.

So, maybe this is a good time to explore your relationship with presenteeism, with your own "insane" way of dealing with life, with the "stories" you use to justify and rationalize why you are where you are.

The following considerations might support your journey forward so that the "next week" and the "next week" etc. might not be carbon copies of this week or last week.

Work life:

What is your relationship with your work like? Why do you do what you do? What attitudes do you bring to your workplace? Do your attitudes support your well-being? Do you find meaning in your work - even in the mundane (hint: it's possible)? Are you engaged at work, passionate, and challenged, or are you mostly unhappy, overwhelmed or unproductive? Would you do this work if you weren't paid to do it? What do you like about your work (place)? How do you justify doing work you don't like?

Family life:

What is your relationship with your family like? Is the value of family "being the most important thing in my life" borne out by the "reality" of your relationship to your family? Is there a disconnect? Are you satisfied with your relationship with your spouse or partner, with your children? Do real connection and intimacy exist? Is something missing? What about your relationship with your parents, sisters or brothers? How's that working? Is your relationship with your family "this week" exactly what you would like it to be in the weeks, months and years ahead? How do you rationalize and justify unhappy and unfulfilling

relationships that you allow to continue? Do you allow your job to keep you from your family (that "most important thing in my life")?

Your health:

How well do you take care of yourself? What rationalizations and justifications do you use for not taking care of yourself? How do you explain neglecting your health to your spouse/partner and children? If you became disabled tomorrow, how would that affect your family and others who care about you? Are you a good role model for others in the way you deal with your health? Do you urge your spouse/partner and children to follow your health patterns?

Social life:

Are you a friend to your friends? Are they more the friend, and you the recipient of their friendship? Do you take more than you give? Are friends important to you? How do they know? Do you subjugate friendship to a low priority, even though friendship is important? What rationalizations and justifications do you use for doing so? If you have no friends, are isolated, what is that about? Are your friendships consistently superficial or are they continually ripening and deepening? Do you have true and real friends at work?

Your happiness:

Are you happy? Do you experience joy in your life? And never mind the "it's all relative" or "compared to whom/what" responses. You know if you are; you know if you aren't. It's about the truth. Are you settling? Are you resigned? Are you OK with your level of happiness? Do you know how to achieve true and real happiness? What justifications and rationalizations do you use to explain your level of happiness? Is your level of happiness "this week" exactly what you would like it to be in the weeks, months and years ahead? Is happiness in the foreground or background for you? Why? What brings you joy?

So, this week is last week's "next week." If you decided last week, or some earlier week, to make changes in your life "next week" (the euphemistic phrasing for this is: "when it's the (so-called) right time"), how has this week been? Effected any changes yet? Waiting for another "right time?" Waiting until "next week"?

Remember, when nothing changes, nothing changes. Groundhog day, groundhog week, each wrapped in presenteeism. Is that what you are choosing?

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- If last week or this week were typical of next week, the week after and the week after that, and every week for the next six months, every week for the next two years, would that be OK with you? If not, why not?
- What one or two baby steps can you take this week to move in the direction of having "next week" be truly better/different than "this week"?
- What has to happen, or not happen, for you to take a first step towards change?
- What conversation(s) do you need to have in order to move forward?
- Resistance to change is based on fear - always. What are you afraid of? Be honest; tell the truth. Who or what can help you move through your fear, your procrastination or your stuckness? Who can you ask for support?

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