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YEAH, BABY, YOU ARE WORTH IT Celebration and Acknowledgement

*"I am what I am
I am my own special creation"*

– Gloria Gaynor, from the song, *"I Am What I Am"*

I can feel a lot of you cringing when I ask you to even consider celebrating and acknowledging yourselves. Most of us were taught that modesty and self-effacement are desirable qualities, and to boast or brag about one's accomplishments is, well, just not done. Some of you may think it is selfish, or unseemly to think about or talk about yourself. When was the last time you really acknowledged yourself, not for an event, or something you did but for who you are? When did you last say, "Hey, (insert your name here), you are a really terrific person." In order truly to achieve harmony from the inside out, we must learn to really recognize, own and celebrate what is inside.

If by chance you are one of those rare individuals who has no issues with accepting, acknowledging and regularly celebrating your brilliance, then you may want to skip right to the end of this chapter. (Oh, and by the way, congratulations! You are amazing!)

I facilitate a popular workshop for women called the "Celebrate Yourself Night" that begins with wine and chocolate and heads into a three-hour workshop of celebrating each person's individual fabulousness. It is common for everyone to start the evening with a lot of quiet hesitation, trepidation and embarrassment. Even the thought of talking about

themselves is difficult for many. By the end of the night the decibel level in the room has increased to an almost deafening level and the incredibly good feeling of being able to be completely real in their skins is liberating and makes them want to shout!

At the end of one workshop, a top CEO in a local corporation, when asked what she was taking away from the workshop, said, “Now I feel like I have worth.” Imagine that! She got an instant feeling of self-worth not from running a multi-million dollar corporation, but by an evening spent recognizing and acknowledging her own unique gifts in a trusting atmosphere.

Acknowledging and celebrating our own gifts simply makes us feel good. The entire harmony from the Inside Out approach is to work from our strengths to amplify and magnify what is already good and thereby make it great. The awareness of what those strengths are is critical to move forward. In a moment we can shift from scarcity thinking (what is wrong with us) to abundance thinking (what is right with us). As we saw in chapter one, by working from the appreciative approach we create unlimited possibilities for our lives and ourselves. If your duck is still yammering on about how selfish it is to think of oneself, consider this: the appreciative approach would indicate that, by acknowledging and working from our strengths, we can become the best we possibly can be, and by achieving our peak potential we can contribute even more to the world. It is really an unselfish act – playing small and/or downplaying our attributes serves absolutely no one. Playing to our strengths means we can give more.

Let’s get started!

First up – It’s time to take stock. You may not run around talking about your signature strengths, but are you even aware of what they are? Can you celebrate your own fabulousness? Take a moment to think about those personal qualities of which you are most proud. What do you love about you? How would you want to hear yourself described in a eulogy?

EXERCISE:
CELEBRATE YOURSELF – TWENTY in THREE!

Let your mind go. Now write down twenty things you love about yourself (in no particular order). Set the timer to three minutes. Go!

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. Did you finish your list of 20 things? If so, jump to # 3.
2. If you didn't finish your list, your homework is to finish it! Stuck? Ask a good friend what fabulous qualities they see in you that you have omitted.
3. Once you finish, grab a friend or partner and read your list out loud to them. How did that feel? Did you speed up or slow down? Were some things easier to say than others? Did you find yourself justifying your points? E.g., I am good-natured... (me justifying – well I think I am most days.)
4. Keep your list handy so you can read it often to remind yourself of your fabulousness.

THE FOOTBALL FIELD PRINCIPLE

I do a lot of coaching work with high-achievers, and have found that not only do they generally exhibit the inability to celebrate their own gifts, but they also have difficulty celebrating their accomplishments. This has led me to develop what I call “The Football Field Principle.”

The Football Field Principle was developed from something very profound that a wise job counselor I went to in the 90s said to me that ultimately has radically shaped my life. After listening to my history and doing a number of “assessments,” he looked me straight in the eye and said that I needed to understand that I am playing on a different length of football field. I waited until he explained. “Well,” he said, “a normal US football field is 100 yards long. For whatever reason, you have decided that you are playing on a 150-yard field. That means that when, by the actual rules of the game, you get a touchdown, you think you still have 50 yards to go!”

The upside to that: You are highly motivated to do even more.

The downside: You never ever celebrate the touchdowns you *do* achieve because you think you still have 50 yards to go!

The danger in playing on a longer than normal football field is that we spend our lives thinking that there is something else that we have to do, something else we have to achieve in order to “make it.” That has a direct impact on our peace and contentment and with just being where we are right here... and right now.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the length of your football field and how does that play out in your life?
2. Is there somewhere in your life where you are not giving yourself a break?
3. Is there somewhere in your life where you are not celebrating the touchdowns you have achieved?

CREATING YOUR LIFE TOUCHDOWN LIST

Along with celebrating your unique gifts and skills, it is also time to celebrate the incredible amount of things you have already achieved in your lifetime. A touchdown doesn't need to be of Nobel Prize winning magnitude. It can be a personal triumph like finishing a 10 km run or as simple (now I didn't say "easy") as getting the kids off to school with their lunches and homework intact, or perhaps your ongoing triumph as a teacher who inspires your students.

I challenge *you* to challenge your idea of what a touchdown is. Are you playing by a different set of rules? Are you okay with changing those rules?

Look at the following time periods of your life and write at least three "TOUCHDOWNS" for each period of your life.

EXERCISE: MY TOUCHDOWN LIST**Childhood:**

1.
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3.

Young Adult:

1.
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Adult:

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In the Past Year:

1.
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3.

In the Past Week:

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3.

EXERCISE: MY ONGOING TOUCHDOWN LIST

Start noting your touchdowns as they occur. Celebrate your own victories on an ongoing basis.

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THE POWER OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Now that we have learned some new skills in appreciating and acknowledging our achievements, and ourselves, it is time to look outward – outward from our inner skills and attributes – and open up to the world at large. Acknowledging and appreciating others is key to the creation of successful relationships. To give freely to others, making them feel appreciated and acknowledged, is one of the greatest keys to a happy and fulfilled life. By affirming and acknowledging what others are doing right, we will ensure that they do more of it. It's just that simple. Different from feedback, acknowledgement and appreciation are just pure, clean, simple and honest ways to say, "Hey, I noticed, I appreciate that and I want to acknowledge that." Thomas Leonard³⁸, founder of the International Coach Federation said, *"We need to remind people of who they are as well as just complimenting them on what they have done."*

Just to clear up any misconception: high-achievers and those working at a high degree of mastery need authentic and sincere acknowledgement too!

KEY POINTS TO GIVING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Frequency: Do it often. Once a year at a performance review will not cut it. The more you give acknowledgement, the more natural you will be in giving it. Give yourself a goal of once per day to start.

Be specific: "Good job," although friendly, won't be remembered. "Congratulations on the good job figuring out the details of the June account transfers. That was really complex and you really were incredibly accurate and thorough," will hit the mark.

Be sincere: If it sounds false to you, it will sound false to the receiver.

Make sure that it is heard: Receiving acknowledgement is uncomfortable for many. If you get brushed off, or if the person tries to downplay it, keep at it. Restate your acknowledgement until you are sure they have heard it. In my experience, it often takes three or more times until the person hears the acknowledgement. (See next page for an example of "layered acknowledgement.")

Frequency: Do it often! (Oh, did I say that already?) ☺

38 Thomas Leonard, Founder, CoachVille.com. For more information, visit www.BestofThomas.com

LAYERED ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Layering your acknowledgement is a wonderful strategy to utilize for those who are having difficulty “hearing” and receiving your acknowledgement. When you restate the acknowledgement after you are brushed off, add to it – in effect, if you think of it like a tiered cake, you are continuing to enhance the acknowledgement by adding tiers of words that add even more color to your statement.

Example:

ME: “Thank you for the great job you did on the organization of Cindy’s retirement party. Everyone had a great time.”

YOU: “Oh it was nothing. I enjoyed doing it for her.” (Common brush-off #1: I enjoyed doing it so do not deserve acknowledgement)

or

YOU: “Oh it was nothing – it didn’t take me any time at all.” (Common brush-off #2: because I didn’t find it difficult to do I do not deserve acknowledgement)

ME: (adding a second tier) “Still – I really appreciate your fine attention to detail – it was very important to me and the company to really acknowledge Cindy’s contribution in a classy and lasting way and you clearly put a lot of thought and effort into making it an evening Cindy will always remember, from the detail on the personalized décor to the incredible sculpture you picked out as a gift. We all really want to thank you for a stellar organizing job.”

YOU: “Well, I can’t believe I forgot to...” (Common brush-off #3: downplaying the achievement by pointing out the mistakes)

ME: “Oh, no one noticed that – they were having so much fun dancing. You know, you have a combination of a lot of unique qualities – your creativity and organizational skills really made the event a success – I can’t think of anyone else who could have done it as well. Thank you.”

YOU: “Thank you.” (Finally!)

RECEIVING ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Another key skill is the ability to receive acknowledgement. This skill of being able to receive acknowledgement is fundamental to the ability to give it meaningfully. When someone acknowledges you, listen and thank them. Acceptance of their acknowledgement validates the giver. Give them the gift of that feeling.

EXERCISE: RECIPROCAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This exercise is excellent because it combines self-acknowledgement with acknowledgement of others. Do this one with your family, with your workmates, with your chorus riser mates.

PERSON "A" tells PERSON "B" one thing that they are proud of that they bring to the family, the company workplace, to the chorus environment. PERSON "B" listens.

PERSON "B" acknowledges PERSON "A" for whatever that thing is. PERSON "B" can add more color, to even more deeply acknowledge PERSON "A's" contribution.

Example (Family):

WIFE says to husband: "I am really proud of the way I manage my multi-tasking so well; of juggling my work, of running the household and being a mom."

HUSBAND acknowledges: "I would like to acknowledge you for the incredible work you do. First of all, you get up first in the morning, and make all of the lunches before you rush off to your workplace that I know is hugely demanding, and then you pick up the kids and get them started on their homework and get dinner started before I even get home. My commute is so long and I am so tired, that to come home to a happy home with kids happy and a lovely smell of cooking in the air makes me really feel blessed. I really want to let you know how much that means to me and how much I appreciate that."

WIFE: "Thank you."

THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

DEVELOPING A GRRR-ATTITUDE!

Remember Tony the Tiger? You know: the advertising cartoon mascot for Kellogg's Frosted Flakes cereal with the deep bass voice who wasn't afraid to let us know that Frosted Flakes were "Grrr-eat!"

Science has now confirmed that gratitude is good for your health. A practice of gratitude changes our neural pathways establishing a neural groove that actually makes us feel better! Gratitude is a high vibrational energy. Being in appreciation means you have no resistance. You are allowing life in fully and are aligned with what is happening.

Imagine what could happen if we approached our lives like Tony the Tiger approached his bowl of Frosted Flakes. Gratitude is an attitude. Gratitude is a choice, and... gratitude can become a habit. Like Tony the Tiger would do, let's turn "gratitude" into GRRR-ATTITUDE!

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion into clarity... It turns problems into gifts, failures into success, the unexpected into perfect timing and mistakes into important events. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow."

– Melodie Beattie³⁹

Three ways Grrr-Attitude will change your life

1. You will find that **Grrr-Attitude** expands; the more gratitude you have, the more you have to be grateful for!
2. **Grrr-Attitude** positive-izes your focus. **Grrr-Attitude** instantly changes your thinking from a place of scarcity to a place of plenty.
3. **Grrr-Attitude** helps you slow down and enjoy life, which reduces stress and improves your relationships.

DEVELOPING YOUR GRRR-ATTITUDE:

1. Make a Grrr- Attitude List

I invite you to create an ongoing list of the things in your life for which you are grateful. Have some fun with this! Get a big poster board and have your entire family contribute.

An elementary school principal whom I coached, created a “Gratitude Wall” on one of the student bulletin boards at the school entrance. Students were encouraged to bring in photos, or add words or images of things they were grateful for in their lives. What started as a one-month project was so popular that they kept it up and kept adding to it for the entire school year.

2. Take part in a daily “Grrr-Attitude” challenge

Here’s the challenge – make a conscious effort to acknowledge and appreciate at least three people per day. Express your gratitude. Go public with your thoughts. I guarantee you will make someone’s day. Try to go even one step further than “Thank you.” E.g., when speaking to the Safeway cashier, “Wow! You are really busy. I am impressed that you keep your cool and are pleasant when you are under so much pressure. Thank you.”

3. Take part in a nightly “Grrr-Attitude” sign-off

Spend five minutes just before you fall asleep writing down what happened or what you noticed that day for which you are grateful. You will find that you will begin to be more aware of and thankful for the small things (the little girl next door who smiled at you), small victories (like getting the Christmas tree lights untangled), as well as the bigger things (I am grateful that I a roof over my head in this blizzard). You will go to sleep with positive thoughts and *Grrr-Attitude* rather than thoughts of worry and stress.

EXERCISE: MY GRRR-ATTITUDE LIST
What are you grateful for?

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CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF OTHERS

This may be the toughest section to swallow of this entire book and if you ever find yourself falling into the trap or mind-set of “comparison” with accompanying feelings of upset, insecurity and envy, then this also may be the biggest learning “edge” to shift your happiness quotient.

“Comparison is the thief of joy.”

– C.S. Lewis

Truer words were never spoken. As long as you view life as a competition – with one person’s victory meaning a “loss” for you, your joy and happiness will be seriously compromised. And, as we discussed in Chapter Two, you are creating mental interference that will affect you achieving your performance potential.

Remember, when you actually are in a competition setting – those feelings of jealousy and fear about a competitor’s achievements *are getting in the way* of your own success. In fact, the only thing you can control is your own performance and your own mental and emotional state. In a competitive environment (aka the world we live in), we cannot control what others do, or how well they do. To obsess about that is, in effect, obsessing over things that we cannot control, and that we cannot change.

Master Director, Jim Arns, of the Melodeers Chorus (five time International Chorus Champions), told Lions Gate Chorus at their final coaching session before the 2007 International Chorus Competition in Calgary, “If you sing like that and don’t make the Top Ten, then I want you to go up to every person in choruses who did make the Top Ten and shake their hands because they did really really well.”

He was in fact saying to us that we had the potential and the skills to achieve our Top Ten goal. The parts we were in control of were in place, but we had no control over what would happen with our competitors and should we sing the way we had just sung for him (i.e. at a Top Ten level of excellence) and not make the Top

Ten, that we should just congratulate our competitors who had raised the bar even further. It was a wonderful way to frame our achievement as a chorus and to put the competition scenario in an objective light.

Thematic throughout this book is the concept of looking for the good, working from the positive, finding joy and pleasure in what we have, and not focusing on what we don't have. If someone you know has a success that you do not – gets a great job, gets engaged, wins a competition – ask yourself how you could genuinely share in their success and be happy for them. Ask yourself how you would want them to feel if you were the one having the success. Create an affirmation of “blessing the competition.” You and your life will be happy you did.

“The people who have achieved more than you, in any area, are only a half step ahead of you in time. Bless them and praise their gifts, and bless and praise your own. The world would be less rich without their contributions, and it would be less rich without yours. There's more than room for everyone; in fact, there's a need for everyone.”⁴⁰

40 Marianne Williamson, *A Return to Love – Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles* (Harper Collins, New York, 1993) p. 222