

This Appreciative Moment[©]
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Nine Ways to Nourish Yourself

January always brings a flood of magazine articles telling us “how to succeed in the new year.” This year, the flood has been replaced by a *tsunami* of articles telling us how to prosper, thrive, or simply ride it out, cope, and survive in 2009. I find it helpful to think in terms of ways we can *nourish ourselves* this year. Nourishment comes in many forms, including but by no means limited to those perennial favorites, food and drink. In This Appreciative Moment, I’ll share nine sources of proper nourishment and, for each, pose some questions to stretch your thinking about them.

Food and Drink: This is the logical place to start. It’s where your physician and, more importantly, your mother would begin. They’d tell you to eat and drink moderately, and avoid the temptation to self-medicate and drown out your painful feelings and thoughts with food and drink. More positively, they’d tell you to eat a balanced diet: one that gives you energy and helps you to fight stress, perform well, and get a good night’s sleep. The occasional indulgence is permitted on this diet. So what if you can’t afford the yacht? That double-fudge brownie will suffice for now.

What foods give you energy and make you feel good? Make plans to incorporate them into your diet. See if you can practice Gresham’s Law in reverse, in which the good foods crowd out the bad. Same goes for drinking.

Exercise: When you’re overloaded and overtaxed, it’s easy to let your machine run down. Some form of daily exercise is essential for keeping fit, clearing out the mental cobwebs, and dispelling emotional distress. Many professionals have told me that staying with (or getting back to) their physical regimen has worked wonders for them in these distressing times. So it’s not only your doctor and your mother who are telling you to exercise; it’s the folks in your professional community, too!

What kinds of physical exercise do you actually enjoy (or, if not enjoy, can you tolerate and feel virtuous doing)? Make a plan to incorporate them into your week.

The Company You Keep: Spending time in the presence of people who are positive, affirming, and constructive is a vital form of nourishing yourself. Make it a practice to hang around people in whose company you feel whole, energized, optimistic, and more like you-at-your-best. (I know from whence I speak. I married one of those people.) The corollary: minimize or eliminate the time you spend around people who drain, deplete, and diminish you.

In whose company do you thrive? To the extent possible, incorporate time with them into your “diet.”. Conversely, whose company do you dread? Besides minimizing contact with these latter folks, can you find ways to bring out their best and neutralize their toxic effect on you, when you’re with them? It’s probably worth the effort.

The Conversations You Have: Even with our intimates, conversations can easily go south, despite everyone's best intentions. This year, nourish yourself (and others) by focusing more on the positive side of things. Research shows that in thriving marriages and profitable corporations, there's a preponderance of positive to negative talk and emotion (5:1 in marriages, and 3:1 or more in corporations). They're on to something. Look for ways to emphasize strengths, good intentions, opportunities, and aspirations. I'm confident that you'll find them. Recall that sunny optimist, Ronald Reagan, who liked to say "With all this horse manure, there's bound to be a pony in here somewhere." This year, look for the pony!

What kinds of conversations are your favorite "ponies"? Why not think of yourself as holding a set of reins in your conversations, and use them to steer the talk in directions that are nourishing and productive?

Kind Acts: It may seem strange to think of performing kind acts as a good way to nourish yourself, but it's true. You don't have to save the world; acts such as giving directions to a lost driver, escorting a youngster (or oldster) across a busy street, volunteering your time for your favorite charity, or performing other acts of generosity will leave you feeling better about yourself and the world. And the recipient of your selflessness is likely to "pay it forward" (or reciprocate directly to you). It's a big win all around.

What acts of kindness can you do today? If you're stuck, just begin with a couple of kind acts towards yourself, and build out from there. (As for me, I'm going after that double-fudge brownie.)

Quiet: This year, reserve some time each day for quiet reflection. Prayer, breath meditation, journaling about gratitude, and simply sitting quietly are but a few of many ways in which you can come home to yourself. All of us need a periodic oasis for self-replenishment. David Kundtz, author of *Stopping*, calls them "Stillpoints."

How many Stillpoints can you give yourself today? Why not give yourself one right now, before reading the rest of This Appreciative Moment?

Your "Beacon": Do you have a guiding aspiration for yourself for 2009, or perhaps for your entire lifetime? The lyric from *South Pacific* says it well: "You got to have a dream, If you don't have a dream, How you gonna have a dream come true?" Good question! Make sure you've created (or updated) your overarching purpose for the year or beyond: the Beacon which inspires, energizes, and guides you. Keeping your Beacon vividly in sight will help you to cut through the fog and steer away from the shoals.

What comes to mind when you ask yourself, "What's my guiding aspiration for 2009?" (Hint: if it's a double negative, e.g., to not overspend, rephrase it in the positive.)

Goals and Plans: A compelling Beacon should be accompanied by concrete goals and action steps. Select up to four areas in which you would like your Beacon to express itself this year, and state a concrete goal for each. (Work, home, engagement with community, finances, physical and mental health, and religious/spiritual life are some areas to consider.) For each goal, identify the first step – and then take it. Some of us like to write out all the steps in advance. Others like to take the first step and have the next one emerge from it. Either approach can work. Just be sure to take that first step!

Helen Keller said, “Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” What goals can you identify that are “stretch goals” for you? This year, stretch yourself. I dare you.

Information: The information we take in via television, radio, print, internet, intranet, and other channels can be a vital source of nourishment. It can also be a debilitating source of noise, negativity, and toxicity, if we let it. This year, be mindful about the kind and amount of information you allow in. Of course, you have a professional responsibility to stay informed about the economy, on behalf of your clients and your firm. However, you don’t need to stay glued to the news. Balance the scary stories and commentaries with more positive and uplifting ones. By keeping a balanced perspective, you will be a strong model for your staff members, clients, and family to emulate.

Weaning oneself from bad news takes discipline and resolve. It begins with awareness of when an information source is “going negative.” How can you practice cultivating that awareness? Try using the beginning of a commercial as a cue to ask yourself, “Do I really need to continue listening to this (or viewing or reading it)? What’s the highest and best use of my time, right now?”

Some Final Thoughts: Those are nine good sources of nourishment for 2009. Think of them as a menu from which you can sample, many times each day. And here’s the best news: you can take all you want. It’s an endless buffet. All it takes is paying attention to the various dishes, how they taste, and how nourished they make you feel. *Bon appetit!*

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