

I want to live a life of beauty and ease!

By Anda Klavina

One of the most common desires I hear from coaching clients and students in my positive psychology seminars is this: I want to live (work, be) with more ease! I want more joy in my life!

Often these are successful professionals, far into their careers, with substantial achievements and established positions, but also with heavy responsibilities and tightly planned schedules. Something—a change in family or career, or just getting older—has caused them to reevaluate their work style, and they're looking to shift from driven performance to a more inspired flow. "I want to continue to have the same results, but to get there with more ease. Is it even possible?" a client mused recently. Or, from another: "I've worked hard enough. Now I want to have more fun in my daily life."

I understand them completely. Ease is about light and lightness, about fun, flow, and inspiration, about enjoying the process for its own sake. Ease has always been my guiding principle. And the awareness I've gained recently about my top strengths has given me a new perspective on how to go about creating more of it.

Since Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence is my number-one strength, my focus is on seeing the beautiful aspects of any situation. Beauty is when elements come into an easy and spontaneous play with each other, creating a harmonious yet not fully explainable composition. In beauty, there is "purposiveness without a purpose," as the German philosopher Immanuel Kant put it. When observing beauty, our faculties of understanding and imagination engage spontaneously in an attempt to capture this ethereal purpose. To see the beauty of any situation is to detach oneself from the more pragmatic aspects of it and focus on the ones associated with play, light, and ease.

Focus on beauty allows me to imagine a beautiful result. I see the beauty of a conference, for example, well before the actual event—the elegant ads in the paper, how nice the logo looks on the opening slides, the well-groomed guests, the smiles of conference speakers, the smell of coffee during the break, the testimonials of satisfied clients on our website ... The beauty of all this is what prompts me to come up with the idea for an event in the first place!

It's not that every part of the process is simple and beautiful, however—it's that these guiding principles allow me to shift the focus from the hard parts to the pleasurable ones. "You made it look so easy," a former colleague, a dean of a prominent business school, told me after one such major event. "We know how much hard work is actually behind this."

Focusing on beauty allows me to be aware of the little things during the day and derive pleasure from noticing them. Not only do I focus on the subject matter of the meeting, I also take a moment to marvel at the beauty of the Art Nouveau building where it takes place, and to get inspired on my way there by snapping a photo of the sun rising among the pine trees by the railway station. I choose beautiful words when talking, and focus on the lighter, more hopeful aspects of each situation. I make the solution look easily reachable, applying my strengths of Humor and Hope as well.

A recent research overview published by the VIA Institute shows that, among all 24 character strengths, Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence is least associated with job satisfaction. It cannot be as easily translated into great work results as Perseverance or Self-Discipline. And that is a common complaint from my clients—that there are very few occupations in the business world in which their sense of beauty will be appreciated, let alone rewarded financially.

In fact, one disadvantage that comes with the ability to make things look beautiful and easy is that people around you might mistake it as luck, and undervalue the effort behind it. They don't recognize that it takes meticulous work to make something look easy. How many years of study and practice does it take for an artist to come to the point where the touch of their brush seems so free, even accidental? It's a long journey towards excellence! A friend confessed to me, "Only at your event, with all these hundreds of people, did I realize what a mighty work you have done. You never talked about the challenges you overcame."

My recommendation to people seeking ease in their life and career: You won't get away from the hard and heavy parts, but you can choose what you focus on—so focus on ease and fun, and your life and work will follow suit.

I want to close mentioning Sara and Gerald Murphies – an American aesthetes to whom it is attributed that they 'invented the French Riviera' back in XX 20s. By living a life of grand party in the South of France and Paris they gathered around them and inspired incredible number of artists – from Picasso and Fernand Leger to Ernst Hemingway and S.F. Fitzgerald. They created

an aura of wealth, ease, magic that above mentioned artists immortalized in their work. They were also surrounded by misjudgment, envy and betrayal as people attributed their style to their privileged origins. Only decades later it was revealed by their biographers that Murphies were nowhere near as rich and mighty as S.F. Fitzgerald portrayed them and definitely not dispersed from life's miseries in a form of child's death and emotional estrangement. It had been their choice throughout to live a life of ease and beauty. And they didn't renounce it even in a very trying times. "I know... that what you said in "Tender is the Night" is true," Gerald Murphy wrote Fitzgerald in 1935. "Only the invented part of our life - the unreal part - has had any scheme and beauty."