

EVERYTHING IN MODERATION

I don't know when I first heard that piece of advice, but I grabbed onto it as if it were the Word of God, and I passed it on to my children. If you want to be happy, and live a life with a minimum of disappointment, I kept telling them, make sure you do everything in moderation. Everything! Eat, drink, sleep, work. Whatever it is you do, do it in moderation.

The other piece of advice I shared with them was about food. Some vegetables are to be eaten raw, some vegetables are to be eaten cooked, and a few vegetables may be eaten raw or cooked. Then, there are vegetables, like peppers, that shouldn't be eaten at all, raw or cooked. I am afraid my kids never took that advice. They eat all kinds of weird stuff.

Back to moderation: I really was sure that was the way to live one's life. If you concentrated on one thing, you would miss out on other things. Also, as part of moderation, you should be well rounded. You like music? Listen to all kinds of music: Classical, jazz, popular, folk, international etc. You like sports? Familiarize yourself with all kinds of sports: baseball, football, basketball, hockey, soccer, boxing, wrestling etc. Again, in moderation. But the true application of moderation relates to not overdoing. You like food? Don't eat too much. You don't like food? Don't eat too little. Whatever it is you do, don't overdo, and don't underdo. Just do.

Another aspect of moderation (which was what got me to thinking about this) relates to gambling. I am not a gambler, nor, as far as I know, are any of my children. However, if I am near a casino, or am walking past a store selling scratch tickets, I am tempted to try my luck. And I have even gone to the track a few times. There are lots of stories of compulsive gamblers. That is not me. In a casino, I will set a limit, usually \$20, and see how long it will last. If there is a cheap blackjack table, I will try that, along with the slot machines. If I am still playing after an hour, I feel as if I had my money's worth of entertainment. I won a few pots, which made me feel good. On the rare occasion that I came out ahead, I felt great, but that was rarely the case. But I never go overboard. I never exceed my limit, though I am sometimes tempted, especially hearing all those jackpot bells.

I am aware that if you do "everything in moderation" you will never get that ecstatic, over the top feeling that comes with winning the jackpot, or triumphing at anything. When I worked for the laundry workers union, I knew a worker who would go to his neighborhood bar on Friday night and blow his entire paycheck. He drank, and bought drinks for his friends, and felt like a king, and everybody loved him, and at the end of the evening he was dead drunk and had no money left. But for a while, he was sitting on top of the world. I suspect those of us who do everything in moderation will never feel a high like that. Nor will we ever feel as low the day after, with a hangover, or as broke.

Then I thought about those people who excel at whatever it is they do: Sports, art, music, writing. If they approached those activities with moderation, they would never excel. They would be moderately good athletes, artists, musicians, writers. If you want to be the best at whatever it is you do, you have to devote everything you have into achieving. The same would apply to business or science. Someone said that success consists of 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. One doesn't perspire in moderation. You don't become an Andrew Carnegie or Thomas Edison or Bill Gates by doing everything in moderation. But neither do you end up bankrupt.

A final piece of advice I have given my children: If you are ever asked, "Would you rather be sick and rich, or healthy and poor," respond, "I would rather be healthy and rich." And here you can forget about moderation. Go for very healthy and very rich.

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