

LIVE LIFE INTENTIONALLY

# Celebrate Your Quirks



**“The only normal people are the ones you don’t know very well.”**

**T**HAT WAS SAID by Joe Ancis, himself not exactly normal. He’s credited with influencing Lenny Bruce, among others.

Normal is a cycle on your washing machine. It’s what your body temperature returns to after you’ve had the flu.

It’s many things. But is it a desirable personal characteristic?

Roget’s *New Millennium™* Thesaurus suggests these synonyms: usual, regular, ordinary, typical, commonplace, and run-of-the-mill.

I don’t know anyone who aspires to be any of that, or who uses those words on their resume – or, for that matter, who would hire anyone whose resume included them! And yet, how often have you heard a friend or colleague, or found yourself, wondering, “Am I weird for doing, thinking, saying, wanting...?”

## IT’S THE QUIRKS THAT MAKE YOU NOT JUST UNIQUE, BUT MEMORABLE

A few years ago I read Elizabeth Moon’s novel, *The Speed of Dark*. If you’re not familiar with it, it’s an incredibly thought-provoking book about an autistic man in his mid-thirties.

The core question Moon raises is applicable to every human being: What does it mean to be normal?

Her character Lou Arrendale is a bioinformatics specialist who enjoys his job, is professionally valued and appreciated for his gifts, and has interests and friends beyond work. His life is clipping along much as he expects, when out of the blue he’s offered the opportunity to try an experimental surgery to “cure” his autism.

So begins his search to understand who he is at his essence and how much of himself he’s willing to leave behind in order

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to be *normal*. In case you haven’t read the book, I won’t spoil the suspense by telling you what he decides!

In much less dramatic ways, we are *all* confronted with that dilemma.

## WHAT MAKES YOU, YOU?

My most explicit fling with trying to jettison part of myself – trying to make myself more normal – came when I moved to the east coast from southern California, where I’d lived most of my life.

I arrived in Washington, DC, and decided to be less intense.

Since no one there knew me, I figured it was the perfect time to change a part of me I'd never been crazy about. With total freedom from others' pre-conceived notions, I could be more light-hearted and fun-loving. This, or so I'd always imagined, would be a *much* better way to live.

For six weeks, I pulled it off with reasonable credibility, and I probably could have kept it going. My new co-workers had no idea I wasn't "myself," and in many ways I was enjoying the experiment. But much to my surprise I missed the intensity – and I was getting worn out trying to be someone I wasn't.

So, I returned to my *normal*, intense self, but with a difference. For the first time ever, I appreciated my trait of intensity. Can it get a little quirky? I'm sure it can; just ask the man I live with. But it's a part of what makes me ME, and when I'm intentional in how I channel that particular quality, it's a wonderful asset.

#### IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT WORKS FOR ANYONE ELSE; THEY AREN'T YOU!

Recently Barbara, one of my clients, began our conversation by declaring that she needed to work on self-discipline. Barbara is smart, successful, motivated, energetic, and extremely creative: not the typical profile of someone suffering from self-discipline issues.

"Why?" I asked her. (I always like to ask profound questions.)

"I look around at my peers and my boss, and they are all so much more disciplined. They come in, decide what they're going to do when, and then do it. I need to be more like that; it's just a more effective way to be."

Who hasn't fallen into the trap of thinking

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you'd be better off if you were more like the super-organized, easy-going, or charismatic person down the hall?

Don't get me wrong. I believe change and personal growth is critical to success and happiness, and it's a big part of the work I do with my clients. But change is good only when it's in service of being the best version of you. Otherwise, you become a square squeezing into a circle.

When Barbara actually started imagining imposing more structure on her day, she blurted out, "If I scheduled my time that tightly, it would wring the creativity right out of me. Now that I think about it, I *do* get done what needs to be done, and maybe it's okay that I do it differently."

In fact, it's more than okay; it's what helps her thrive.

I recently came upon this quote from author Alice Walker: "In nature, nothing is perfect and everything is perfect. Trees can be contorted, bent in weird ways, and they're still beautiful."

Not only are they still beautiful, they would not survive if you straightened them out to look more normal.

The same holds true for you. |

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