

If you wanna hang together we (my parents, pups and me) will be tuning into One World: Together at Home on the television tonight at 8pm.

Second Blog PREFACE

To ease into writing I start with nonsense. Baby steps, I tell myself, to get the groove going. No thinking. Just writing. The hard part is going back and reading and trying to make some sense out of the nonsense. That's the most difficult part of writing for me, particularly when topics intimately pertain to myself, because I must go back into my brain and sort it out. And, I think – will someone actually care about this? I'll probably ease into the structure of my writing. If I expect too much from myself now, then I will not put it out there. If I think too much about if others care or what they might think of me saying these things, then I wouldn't do anything at all. It's a balance and as I'm somewhat procrastinating writing about the topic I really want to explore this week I just came up with the introduction to my second newsletter and a brief preface to my second featured blog...

(is this right? I'm asking you if this end up making sense as a preface 😊 - thanks)

Covid-19 Boot Camp: Learning to Put Myself First

Last week I had two calls that didn't make me feel great. One was a call with my grad school success advisor for the NYC area – kind of like a career counselor for alum. The other was with someone I feel very fortunate to be connected with. She's very smart, always a pleasure to speak with and works for a company I really admire.

The point of the calls was to keep networking, as opportunities present themselves, and remain proactive in my job search during this time. Honestly, I felt frustrated and exhausted after each. I wasn't at all disappointed by them, it was more the context of what's going on and being encouraged to do the same type of stuff I've been doing since mid-October. The conversations overwhelmed me, making me feel like I should maintain a killer drive in the job search process. To still be reaching out to 30+ people a week, to maybe hear back from 2 and set up calls because everyone is at home and has the time to do so. To keep applying to jobs and set up informational interviews as much as possible. To use this time to work on my "personal" branding, which I personally really hate (there's a reason why many authors, musicians, and others use Pseudonyms for their money-making activity). This process, this advice, hasn't gotten me anywhere. It doesn't work towards my strengths, rather it has left me exhausted and unsatisfied with my life and daily work.

In the end, I made the decision not to listen to them, at least not right now. This was a big decision for me, a step forward for myself. I don't know if I would have been able to make that decision, the choice to focus on myself and work towards my strengths rather than feeling down on myself because I'm exhausted from networking – because I feel I don't have the right personality for it, if the coronavirus pandemic didn't happen. Yes, the coronavirus is awful but it's also offering me a place of comfort and quiet for my personal boot camp in learning to put myself first. Something I wouldn't be able to do if I were still in NYC and life was normal, as we understand normal.

During this past month being in Kentucky, continuing therapy I started again in January, and upon finishing the book Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking by Susan Cain, I've come not only to realize important aspects about myself but also put them into practice. Honestly, it was a big step for me to say no to the advice of others AND feel confident in that decision. It can be so easy, I think, to listen to others, and omg the job process sucks so much. I feel like I don't have the right personality to be out there, maybe I don't have what it takes to succeed in a place like NYC – at least this is how I feel when I listen too much to others without considering myself – how I work, what I actually have to offer, remembering the fact that I need to take care of myself or nothing I do will be good. Because it won't feel good personally and I won't be able to offer my best.

I'm going to attempt to break down what I've learned about myself from the book quiet and how I'm using this time to put it into practice.

Introverts like to focus on a few subjects rather than stay on the surface of many. They get really excited about certain things and love to dive deep into them – it's hard to show excitement outside of that, especially when feeling drained. For me I think my passions have always been related to the environment, fighting climate change, to the outdoors and experiencing that. Science – I geek out over mushrooms and trees and plant science. As well as fashion, music and design that inspires me.

Because of this, it's hard for introverts to show false enthusiasm for subjects and activities they don't see *true* value in (when I say true, I mean true to themselves). I often wish I had the ability to talk, talk about anything at any time, and engage with others. What I realize now is that it depends on what the conversation is about, what the purpose of the conversation will lead to, how many people are involved, and who I am speaking with. One of these criteria must be met for me to be engaged and energized among others. Am I talking to my closest friends? Am I in a small group of three or are there 6+ people gathered around? Are we talking about mushroom leather, music, Yves Saint Laurent or skiing? Will this conversation lead to a fundraiser for a community garden or a job/connection with someone who produces mushroom leather? I can't bullshit my way into anything unless I see value in the purpose of doing so. Also, I'm not widely excited about things and my energy comes mostly from being alone. So, there's no way I'm showing excitement or care for things that are just on the surface level or not of interest to me. This is okay.

This knowledge I gathered from Quiet also gave me insight into how I work best and how I will be more satisfied with time spent. A couple years ago, and a year ago, I tried to do too much at once. In my head I had all these ideas about how I thought my life should be, especially what it would look like after finishing grad school. I often picture myself in a great relationship, able to go out and be free to express myself how I want, working all the time in a job relating to my master's degree – similar to how I was working while in grad school, with passion and commitment most of the time. Of course, I want these things. I want a good relationship and that perfect job where I feel like I'm doing what I went to school for. I want to be making a certain amount of money as well and able to sparingly purchase the well-designed clothes I love.

But, the only way I will be able to achieve these things honestly and well is if I am patient, focused on a few things at one time, work towards my strengths and interests, and remember to slow down. Otherwise, I'd just feel depressed and worthless about the life I'm living.

In grad school, particularly during my last year, I was working towards something I felt passionate about, but I wasn't emphasizing my strengths and let the "shoulds" in life cloud my vision. I had too much on my plate and I didn't slow down. In April 2018, I decided to add a second master's and I really just wanted to be finished with school. I wanted to hurry up and move on with my life to live that wonderful vision I had in my head. So, I managed to add just one extra quarter to my grad school experience when I added a second master's. Yes, I cut down some courses by changing one MFA to an MA – but to be realistic I should've added at least two quarters to maintain a normal schedule. I thought I could do it because I was very interested in both programs. I ended up just burning myself out and unable to give the thoughtful attention, and time for sleep, necessary for my work to be its best and for me to be satisfied with what I produced. I didn't learn from this experience right away. After graduating last May, I quickly moved to NYC and continued to live towards the "shoulds" of what I wanted my life to be – while not paying enough attention to myself and what I needed to be at my best and truly satisfied with my life.

Since, I have learned that I must play to my strengths, personality, and true interests. Give myself the space to be me and forgive myself when I don't have it in me to be social with many or perform for a job interview that I'm not that interested in. I can act extroverted, but I'm not going to do it well unless I'm using that energy towards something I actually enjoy or believe in. Learning how to put myself first though takes practice. Learning to choose to spend your time intentionally for yourself more often than letting those "shoulds" make your decisions, takes practice.

This time at home, not being able to be in NYC and go out with friends and visit museums and have all those other expectations, or distractions, to what I need to do for myself, is giving me the time to really slow down. Really reflect and practice, like boot camp level practice, putting myself first. The time to practice this so much to the point that it will (hopefully) intersect with my life once we get mostly back to normal, or, I get to the point where I'm working full time and spending time with friends and dating again. I feel I need to get that balance of life while putting myself first and working in a way that builds upon my strengths rather than personal or societal expectations.

I don't think I'm going to be able to have a life I'm satisfied with until I learn to do this well – and it's a process that will continue to evolve as life evolves. I'm not very good at putting myself first but now I'm getting the time and space to practice that, without distractions, in a way that will result in satisfying work. I definitely wish I could meet my friends for happy hour or go to the beach and swim and have a picnic with a group. But if those were still available to me right now, I wouldn't be deep diving into working on the stuff I need to improve for myself.

Eventually, as long as I keep working, and the important thing is to work in something I value, and not put too many expectations on myself, I think I'll be much more satisfied with who I am and life overall. I'll be happier when I'm with my friends, the friends and people I really value, not worrying about comparing myself.

So, I'm choosing not to be emailing 30 people a week and setting up calls so that at the end of this, when people start hiring again, I'll be in their mind. I don't see the point in that right now. Rather, I'm choosing to spend my energy on a few things I thoroughly enjoy and see value in. I'm choosing to focus my time on a part-time job, making some money, while gaining skills and experience in areas I've wanted to professionally for a while now. I'm volunteering for a non-profit working to promote sustainability in the fashion and textile industry. And I'm writing here. I'm taking the time to actually do

this which makes me feel really good. I'm choosing to focus my time on myself. I'm choosing to do things that *truly* add value to my life. And through that, because I'm working towards my strengths, it will guide me in the right direction, more than if I was working against myself to adhere to what I think I should be doing.