



EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN'S COACHING

Our Experience of Community

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This fall I found myself feeling burdened by my community. I let my family, friends, and loved ones turn into "action items" or "obligations." The older I get, the bigger and more complex my communities become. With this I have added the responsibilities to my plate of "making sure they know I care," "following up," and "scheduling time." I don't think this is altogether negative, because the result is an ever-expanding circle of people I respect, admire, support, lean on, and love. What doesn't work is when I forget that any connection with another human being is a gift and a single, passing connection can fulfill a purpose in and of itself without micromanaging the trajectory of the relationship. What also doesn't work is when I lose sight of what I want in the relationships I have and make it all about "not disappointing others."

In November I had a month full of several circumstances that left me feeling low, including the fact that my lovely, sweet, furry companion of 15 years, Abby The Dog, passed away. It was time for her to die and time for me to move through life without her faithful shepherding. Even though it was expected, it was still an emotional and practical loss. What was unexpected was the considerate reaching out and support of my community in a way that was present and spacious, cautious and thoughtful, expressive and simple. Being a single, no-kids-or-husband entrepreneur in a coaching business, it sometimes feels like I'm always giving to others and need nothing myself. In the weeks that followed Abby's death, not only did I receive the phone calls, emails, and condolences specific to that loss, I also received a profound sense of being connected, understood, known, and loved both in sadness and in joy. It was Abby's last gift to me, the remembering that I'm not alone, never alone, and that I continuously receive as much as I give from my network of loved ones. Part of this process was a trip home for ThanxMas (my family's holiday mashup that takes place on Thanksgiving and the day after). It was extremely cathartic to wallow and revel in the familiar rhythms of family, and I left the weekend completely restored.

I returned home and to December feeling buoyed by community instead of burdened. I felt immense gratitude for the depth and quality of my community. I returned committed to continuing to choose to prioritize my relationships on all levels. Not because of obligation or even to be a good person, but because it's being connected -- in whatever way works for that relationship -- that truly brings a sense of peace.

During the holidays it's often a time when we feel either alone, irritated, judgmental, frustrated, or burdened by our communities. We often forget that we have choices, not only about what we do, who we see, or how we spend our time. We forget we simply have choice about how to perceive community. In my example, I shifted from feeling weighed down by community to feeling uplifted by community.

What about for you? In your life, what's your current feeling about community? And how could you shift that perception? If you feel alone during this season, is that feeling the truth or an illusion? Where are you connected? How can you focus on where you have community instead of where it's missing?