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Putting excess on hold *What do we know about the meaning of the word 'enough'?*

By Jo Hawkins Donovan, for *Small Business Times*

A few years ago I became interested in the word “enough”. Perhaps it’s something that happens at a certain age. In my case it started with restaurants.

My husband and I enjoy the treat of dining out in fine restaurants occasionally. It is usually a part of any vacation time.

We both cook — although since he retired from business he does much more of the cooking than I do, and we both love to challenge ourselves with more complicated recipes. And we both enjoy recounting stories of meals at famous restaurants around the world. At some point though, with me, it began to feel like a never-ending quest to find the next best restaurant, the one that outdid all the others. About that time, I reflected on some of our favorite spots for dining out, and decided, hey — they’re good enough! The food, the service, the ambiance — all good enough for me! I resign from the hunt for something better, something more!

Today’s business antics, the most bizarre of which seem to be connected to a quest for “more”, and a denial of the concept of “enough”, remind me of that decision.

We’ve all had conversations about why Martha Stewart would risk her reputation on getting more money, when by anyone’s calculations it surely does seem like she has enough. The same question can be applied to the CEOs and board members that we’re all reading about who participated in high-flying deals with intricate layers of subterfuge. The pre-deal, pre-moral lapse condition of these folks seems pretty financially attractive to most of us. So we ponder, Why?

Dancing around with these words, “enough” and “more” I reflect back to raising kids and observing kids that other people are raising. Seems early on they learn to say “more!” I don’t remember mine — or anyone else’s — saying “enough!” Perhaps that’s something that supposed to come with maturity, the difference between those two concepts.

I’m sure it becomes clouded in our culture — which, by the way, I wouldn’t trade for any other culture in the world — where continually we’re encouraged to “Be all you can be!” If we chew up and swallow those words and are filled with a passion to honor all our unique gifts, to express those gifts into our environment, and blast through all the barriers to really making our unique mark on this planet, I cheer with delight. I’m afraid that for many of us, though, the go-for-it mentality gets digested as, “I am all I can be only if I wear a Rolex watch!”

Many of my clients — and here I have to admit there is a gender difference, as this comes up more with men than women — are uncomfortable, sometimes tormented, because their brothers are driving more expensive cars, live in bigger houses, seem to have more corporate clout.

Now the clients I’m talking about are living quite enviable lives. Many of them love their families, and love their work, and love their friends and leisure-time activities.

They get agitated when it comes time for a family gathering and they anticipate a barrage of unwanted advice from the family members who come to the reunion with a showy display of “stuff”. These coaching clients of mine, who are intelligent and grounded usually, start recoiling from the judgment they fear will come their way when they show up with the mid-size sedan and kids in clothes without fancy labels. Some have avoided communicating with their siblings at all because they know every phone call; every picnic includes all this sense of superiority from their sibs who have “more”.

And much as we would all like to point fingers at these big CEOs and Enron execs, if we dare to look in the mirror, we will be face-to-face with our own struggle between “enough” and “more”.

I’m guilty. I, unfortunately, have an indelible memory of a frantic phone call to my broker to buy a certain dot.com stock at \$99 per share. I had to use my cell phone because a window washer at our house was using our regular phone to call his broker for the same reason! I recently sold that stock for about \$9 per share. Few of us escaped that frenzy. And what was that about if not “more!”

We easily fell into the belief in magic, that you can spin straw into gold. Didn’t we?

So for the world of commerce in America, we need think of a mirror very large indeed, large enough to include us all. And this look in the mirror, painful as it may be temporarily, will be helpful in the long run. Perhaps we all can begin to ponder the meaning of “enough” and the price of “more”.



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