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Coach's Corner: Let the Bells Ring

By Sharon Pahlka

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Yesterday was one of those days when everything seemed such an effort. I found myself complaining to a point where I was weary of my own complaining. Finally, I found myself saying, "OK, what am I supposed to do here?" Then, my doorbell rang. It turned out to be a close friend wanting to collect on a promise I had made to throw her a birthday dinner whenever she asked. "Hey," she said. "The party is at your house in 30 minutes and I am going to pick up a guest."

I love to entertain and had promised, but this was not the time I had expected, and I was not in the mood. But, I changed gears and said, "Tally Ho!" I had much to do in very little time. And guess what? I forgot my complaints! The focus was off me.

My friend's guest, Patty, was a delight. She lived alone, raising two teens and working as a bell-ringer for the Salvation Army. "Wow, what would that be like?" I wondered. If I had to earn my living at minimum wage ringing a bell for eight hours while huge amounts of people crossed my path, most rejecting me, would my bellyaching look different? (Not to deny the joys of those that give). Patty admitted that it was difficult, and she had to use strategies to keep herself smiling and ringing that bell. Sometimes, she would stop and get into her own purse and put money in the kettle to help her attitude. In her mind this seemed to make gifts come in more readily.

A few bells rang for me as I realized how rarely I stop to think of how a bell ringer, phone solicitor or even a homeless person felt when they ask for donations. I only thought of me and my choice of reactions: avert my eyes, walk around, talk, hang up or give. Then, I remembered a class I took long ago from the Union Gospel Mission, where they mentioned the importance of a smile or greeting even if you are not giving. Treating every person as important makes a difference both to the person ringing the bell and one person hearing it. If you can't give money, you can always give a smile. It's what ties the human race together.

After meeting Patty, I think I was given one answer to my question of "What am I supposed to do here?" Turn my focus from me to others, especially those I never consider. It was an eye-opening experience. I am so glad the bell ringer rang my bells at my friend's birthday party.

Let the bells ring ... you be listening.

Coaching Question: Are you listening to the bells?

Coaching Tip: Whenever a bell rings, ask yourself in what specific area or situation can you turn your focus/attention from yourself to someone else, maybe someone you have never given a second thought. What can you learn, and maybe more important, what better response can you give?

Quotes:

A man wrapped up in himself makes a very small bundle.

– Benjamin Franklin

You cannot always have happiness, but you can always give happiness.

– Anonymous

Sharon Pahlka is a life coach and speaker. In her coaching, she helps her clients live well and meaningfully, especially those with chronic health challenges. Sharon's column, Coach's Corner, offers helpful tips from her work.

Contact Sharon Pahlka via her Web site, www.lifeisagift.com.

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