



From Average to
AWESOME
Lessons for Living an Extraordinary Life

Jim Smith, Jr.

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Alexandria, Virginia

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Treat Yourself as Special—Wow Yourself!

Jim Smith Jr.

Some of the things that really perk me up are the small things like a forecast promising a string of warm, sunny days; a great meal planned for the evening; or plans to see a dear friend. It doesn't have to be a large undertaking. I find great joy in the simple things in life.

—BARBARA RIVERA, JOHNSON CITY, NY

“To unwind or relax after a stressful day, I go back to being a child,” my friend Kim Reynolds recently told me when I asked her what she does to feel good. “I keep a stash of finger paints, coloring books, and crayons (the super big ones), and I just sit at the table and draw, color, and paint. I usually play some children’s music in the background. It’s so simple an activity that after an hour or so I’m refreshed. I then hang up one or two of my ‘masterpieces’ on my refrigerator as a reminder not to get stressed again. I sometimes will also put on one of my childhood videos like Willy Wonka.”

The Godfather of Soul, James Brown, wrote a song many moons ago called “I Feel Good.” Not a lot of variety or diversity in the lyrics, just a succession of “I feel goods.” Whenever it’s played today, people smile and start nodding their heads to the beat. Everyone wants to feel good.

What do you do to feel good? Let’s take it to another level. What do you do to “wow” yourself?

What? You don’t think there’s enough time in the day to make special time just for you? Consider the world we’re living in for a moment. We seemingly spend more time at work chasing the next promotion than we do at home (even though the average person only gets promoted six or seven times in his or her lifetime.) In addition to the work, there can be an exorbitant amount of travel involved (either driving back and forth to work, enduring the daily public transportation grind, or business travel). Consider the relocation merry-go-round one can get on, depending on his or her job. The accepted term for that is “paying your dues” or “paying the cost to be the boss.”

*Consider This: “The curve of a smile can
set a lot of things straight.”*

—Author unknown

We also have to contend with our co-workers’ attitudes, egos, personalities, mood shifts, mishaps, perceptions, and personal problems every day. Throw in the office mumbo jumbo, rumors, backstabbing, corporate politics, mergers, acquisitions, layoffs, forced retirements, downsizing, rightsizing, reorganizing, and workplace inequities, and I say you need to find a way to escape more often.

You’re probably thinking that you can always take a vacation. That’s not enough, considering that the average person usu-

ally only takes one vacation a year. You need to feel good more often.

My suggestion? Treat yourself right! Reward yourself. No, make that wow yourself!

As a former full-time professional, corporate trainer, I relish working with other trainers during train-the-trainer sessions. One of my favorite questions is to ask them what they do after their training sessions are over. They say the obvious first: Collect the evaluations. What else? Clean the room. What else? Review the evaluations. What else? Begin to prepare for the next session. What else? Turn off the computer and other audiovisual equipment. What else? Rest for a moment before either heading back to the office or home. What else? At that point they are usually ready to pop me upside the head. “What else is there, Jim?” they ask. “Why not reward yourself or wow yourself for all that you’ve just done?” I counter.

“Let’s see, you probably spent a considerable amount of time preparing your lesson,” I continue. “You arrived early to set up the room. Public speaking in itself is the number one fear for adults, and you do it for a living. You counted and distributed all the handouts and workbooks. You checked the roster and maybe even talked to some of your participants’ managers. You prepared your slides and flipcharts. You undoubtedly spent extra time in the bathroom mirror that morning getting ready. You might have stayed up late the night before to ensure that you knew your stuff. Then there was all of the practice, practice, practice you put in. In all likelihood, you had to deal with some member of the *Pain in the Neck Participant Posse*.

“In no particular order,” I begin, “members of this posse are *Prisoners*, people who don’t want to be there—management made their attendance mandatory; *Vacationers*, people who are not serious about the subject matter—they just attend to get away from the office pressures, kick back, eat whatever food you provide,

and have fun; *Party Poopers*, people who are there to ensure that no one has a good time; and *Know-It-Alls*, people who think they know everything about everything—they would rather teach the session. Just think, I did not even mention *Late Lenny*, *Leave Early Lee*, *Sandy the Sleeper*, *Danny the Demolitionist*, *Erica the Extrovert*, *Cedric the Complainer*, *Blake the Blackberry King*, *Pessimistic Peter*, *Damon the Debater*, *Diego the Day Dreamer*, *Brad the Big Baby*, *Selma the Cellphone Queen*, *Penny the Palm Pilot and Pager Princess*, and *Newspaper Ned*. After putting up with all of them, don't you think you deserve something special? Anything shy of a Nobel Prize is probably not enough." The participants laugh, but I'm serious.

It's a foregone conclusion that we could do a much better job of rewarding and taking care of ourselves, right? Right! We could enjoy a better diet. We could work out more and drink less. We could stop smoking. We could stop procrastinating. We could stop focusing on what we don't have rather than on what we do. We could stop putting ourselves down. We could get more rest. We could read more. We could laugh and smile more. We could stop taking everything so seriously. We could do more and talk less. We could stop meddling in everybody else's business. We could distance ourselves from toxic people and toxic work. We could watch less TV and listen to more music. Folks, these are the basics. What about rewarding or treating yourself to something special? Even more, what about the wow factor? When was the last time you wowed yourself, truly treating yourself to something spectacular?

What makes the wow meter? Depending on whom you talk to, it could be

- a full-body massage, from your nose to your toes, your eyes to your thighs
- an airplane seat in first class

- significant time with the person or people you love the most
- buying those shoes—you know the ones that I’m talking about (you’ve got to have them)
- a life-changing book, CD, or tape
- prayer and meditation
- breakfast, lunch, and dinner in bed, with someone feeding you
- relaxing on the deck of an oceanfront home
- add your favorite here _____.

Got it? Now go get it!

I prefer the simple things, too. I enjoy cooking on the grill with a cold glass of lemonade by my side, dining anywhere near water, and turning into a prune in a hot tub. I also love reading the comments participants write in my scrapbook as I fly back home after a session. The scrapbook was a gift from one of my client groups.

Why not be selfish once in a while? Hold up! Why does taking care of yourself or treating yourself to something incredibly rewarding have to be considered selfish?

I have to admit that before turning 40, the needle on my wow meter rested, moved, rested, rested, moved, rested, rested, and rested. As the 40th anniversary of my birth was approaching, I began having intermittent pity parties about getting “old.”

My colleague Keith and I made a sales call to one of our major clients. The opening small talk involved conversation about getting older. I mentioned to Diane Chew, one of the two clients at the meeting, that I was about to do the big four-oh and wasn’t looking forward to it. She laughed and said, “Jim, I just had this same conversation with my sister, who recently turned 40. I told her to list 40 reasons why it feels awesome to be 40. I told her not to edit her thoughts, just to write. When she finished her list,



AWESOME ADVICE

How do I wow myself? I get 100 on my spelling tests. I like buying new clothes. I like going to visit Grammy. I go to the Disney Store. I like watching my favorite movies, *Peter Pan*, *Shrek*, and *Corrina Corrina*, on DVD. I play with Max (my cat) and I like playing my piano in recitals. Going to school every day and being in Mrs. “J’s” class; playing with my friends Kylie, Korel, Sabria, and Heather; and spending time with my Mommy and Daddy makes me feel “wow.” I like going to Grandmom Tina’s house, too. Oh, one more thing: I like seeing Princess Jasmine, the Little Mermaid, and Tinker Bell at Disney World.

—Daecia Smith, West Berlin, NJ,
writing at age 7 (she’s now 12)

believe or not, she was a changed person. She started feeling great about herself again and decided that her next list was going to be 40 ways to treat herself right.” I took Diane’s advice, and the needle on my wow meter has been moving steadily ever since.

Now, after training sessions or keynote motivational addresses I’m on a wow mission. Sometimes when I wake up, I’m on a wow mission. I tell my friends about going on wow missions. Now I’m telling you!

Remember, this is a “wow-me” mission, not a “become totally self-absorbed with myself” trip. The big three “Ss” (self-serving, self-centered, and selfish) have no place in this discussion. This chapter is a reminder for you to stop neglecting your happiness: to make a concerted effort for *much* more fun, pampering, and relaxation—to provide more spectacular rewards for you!

Because we’ve been conditioned and socialized to work until we’re exhausted and to always wait for significant occasions to plan something special, we settle into a boring daily routine.

We should eat the dessert first sometimes.

Don’t wait for guests to come over to use your best china. What occasion are you waiting for to wear that special outfit? What are you saving for now? Don’t you deserve better? Don’t you deserve to be treated as awesome more often? Then don’t wait for others to do it. Once you begin wowing yourself more often, you’ll find it easier to wow others!

Moving from Average to Awesome

This chapter is not only about feeling good. It’s also about how you can consistently reward yourself, creating anticipation and appreciation for all that is you. The following exercise will help you move from an average mindset to a more positive and powerful awesome way of living.

First, consider which statement describes how you think about truly pampering yourself:

- **Average:** You work hard but seldom make time to relax and reward yourself for all your efforts and all you endure personally and professionally.
- **Awesome:** You treat yourself as special more often. You wow yourself with those things and people that bring the biggest smile to your face and your heart.

Second, take some time and consider the questions below. Respond to the questions and be sure to explain your answers. Finally, rate yourself on your progress. If you are currently average, say so (A). If you feel you deserve an awesome rating, indicate that as well (AW). If you are neither average nor awesome but working toward being awesome, just write W.

Getting to Awesome

Key questions	Your response and explanation	Rating
How often do you reward yourself?		
What do you let get in the way of making more time for yourself?		
What are some special things you've considered doing for yourself that you haven't made time for?		

Rate your progress: average (A), awesome (AW), or working toward awesome (W).