

## Taking Inventory of Your Awesomeness

It's not conceit—it's self-care

BY LAUREN GLICKMAN

**You feel good when** others acknowledge you ... but when was the last time you acknowledged yourself?

You feel good when others tell you you're doing a good job ... but when was the last time you gave yourself a pat on the back?

You take such good care of animals ... but are you taking good care of yourself?

Whether we've worked on a meticulously cleaned kennel, flawless adoption paperwork, or a beautiful new volunteer manual, we all like being told when we've done a great job. It feels good to be appreciated.

The trouble is that relying on external validation to feel good can be dangerous. Some of us are so dependent upon external validation that we put our self-worth into the hands of others, not allowing ourselves to feel good until we hear from someone else. If we rely on external validation, we can never fully be satisfied because nobody else can fully provide the validation we need. If we don't feel good about what we're doing, it won't matter what anyone else says.

Don't get me wrong: What others think about us does matter to most of us (and always will to some degree). And we should communicate our appreciation of others' work because it makes life better and helps to create good work relationships. Sharing these feelings is important—but I'm suggesting that one of the most important skills in an animal protector's toolbox is the ability to be aware of and acknowledge our own excellence. Not necessarily out loud, and not in comparison to those around us, but to ourselves.

This is not always easy. Have you noticed that we're rarely encouraged to ar-

ticulate what we like most about ourselves, or what we feel most proud of? We're told not to brag; we're told to be modest. It's one reason that most of us feel so awkward during job interviews, when we're suddenly expected to convey how much we rock. How can we summon that ability if we don't practice it?

The fact is that there are strengths you bring to your work. You already know this, otherwise you'd never put yourself in charge of a mission about which you care so deeply. Your ability to validate yourself even when nobody else seems to notice or acknowledge that you're working hard is one of the most important



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pieces of sustained resiliency in the field of animal welfare. (I'm all for trying to create organizational cultures where we acknowledge each other regularly, but this isn't always going to happen.)

Grab a few blank sheets of paper and a pen. On the first sheet, I want you to write a letter. This letter will be from what I call in my workshops "The Omnipotent Eye." The Omnipotent Eye sees everything you do, everything you think, and everything you are. It sees every good intention you have ever had and every tiny detail of your work that nobody else sees. This Eye watches you while you make the world a more humane place. This Eye sees all the ways you are a gift to the animals.

Take 10 minutes to write yourself a letter. This letter will be filled with detailed descriptions of the gifts you possess, the useful skills you have, the strengths you display, and all of your assets and beautiful intentions. Be as specific as you possibly can. For example, don't just write, "Dear Me, You are good at your job." Instead write, "Dear Me, You are great at working with timid dogs because you have an extraordinary amount of patience."

Go ahead. Before you read the rest of this, write your letter.

Most of you will notice that this is not an easy letter to write. Did you start writing about something you're good at, and then have the impulse to follow it up with a "But I could do better" statement? Did you find yourself wanting to make sure that nobody finds the letter, because they might judge you? Did you find that it was difficult to start, but that it got easier once you got going?

While we all have different experiences with this exercise, many of us find it uncomfortable. We need to practice, so that we become more comfortable with acknowledging our own excellence. In the field of animal protection, we work with other people who are passionate,

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dedicated, and extremely busy—they don't always take the time to stop and share words of appreciation. Think about it. When was the last time you went out of your way to show someone authentic, heartfelt, and specific appreciation?

Some of us are fans of New Year's resolutions, while others aren't. But as we bring 2013 to a close, it's worthwhile to think about the new and healthy habits we want to create. My hope is that practicing self-validation will be something that you begin to do regularly.

Years ago when I worked at the PAWS Wildlife Center, I experimented with self-validation. For three months I met once a week with a co-worker, and we shared thoughts about our own excellence. It was an amazing and interesting experiment. I recommend that you share this article with someone at work, and give it a try.

Take a minute and think about how your days are filled right now. Think

about how much or how little you attend to yourself and your needs. Do you make time for your fitness? Your spirituality? Your family? Your relaxation? Your hobbies? Your nutrition?

Time for that second sheet of paper. Give this some thought, and spend some time writing out your answers to the following questions.

1. What is one thing that I would like to prioritize in my life?
2. How would I start this process? What are the first few steps I need to take in order to begin prioritizing what is important to me?
3. What obstacles do I anticipate? What has stopped me in the past, and what might stop me in the future?
4. How will I overcome these obstacles?

Let's pause here; this last question is important. You might be reading this column and feeling as inspired as you've ever been. You're going to finally start doing something you've always wanted to do. You're going to start fresh! But then you wake up tomorrow morning and feel life getting in the way. How will you overcome the most predictable obstacles? Answer this question as specifically as you can.

Now pick a date for when you will achieve this new priority, and stick to it. This is crucial. You can take care of animals *and* take care of yourself. There is no reason why you can't have both. In fact, the animals need us to take good care of ourselves, so that we can take good care of them for the long haul. ■

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