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Dear Reader,

January represents a beginning for many of us. For me a new year deserves a gentle, slow beginning, and I imagine many take time to reflect, dreaming about goals to pursue, and how to go after a vision of what will make this year unique and special in our life. I hope the fictional story chosen here might inspire you not in the "what" to achieve, but in the "how". And perhaps the real goal is not the end goal, but the journey.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy
Editor

Quote of the Month

"When I've been lost, is when I've best found myself"

(Uncle Wilbur)

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The Story of Steve¹ by Isabel Rimanoczy

Many colleagues from his past must have felt puzzled after reading the cover story of Newsweek that featured Steve as the successful entrepreneur, owner of the BU Tea Company. How can TEA become the new big idea? And how could it be STEVE who was behind it? While this may sound strange to those who knew him from before, Steve had always been a closet adventurer.

He had always had a natural curiosity and a drive to explore – characteristic of true adventurers, although they were not manifest in his daily life. Living in the suburbs of Dallas and employed in the claims processing department of a regional insurance company, he spent over two hours of his day commuting and eight hours analyzing complex claims and bewildering paper trails. He had developed a notable technical expertise for his job, so much so that he was frequently consulted by his colleagues. But beyond that, he didn't present a vivid figure to his colleagues. There was not much socializing in this office, no happy hours or birthday dinners. People shared simple pet or kids stories, but since he didn't have a pet or kids Steve didn't participate in those chats. However, he loved to travel. He was ingenious in his ability to combine internet offers, exotic destinations, national holidays and vacation days to make the most out of trips, and he made a point to never visit a place twice. While he didn't talk much about his trips either, his colleagues were aware that he made "strange trips" all the time.

It all began at the end of one of his trips, as he lay awake during a long overnight flight. He began to wonder what it was that he so much enjoyed about his trips. Was it the unfamiliar context? Different languages and customs? Different faces, foods? New landscapes or a new pace to life perhaps? The unaccustomed features of the people and their unfamiliar habits? He made a mental slideshow montage of his most enjoyable snapshots and came up with quite a collection.

He saw himself sitting on the ground at the entrance of the airport, enjoying the last rays of sun before flying back to winter. He relived a wonderful dinner visiting with a local man who didn't speak more than a handful of words in English – and himself not able to say a full phrase in Korean. He saw himself balancing on the steps of an overcrowded bus, grasping hold over someone's shoulder onto something to avoid falling off. He revisited the mornings when he set the alarm clock so as not to miss the sunrise on the sea, and the afternoons spent watching people walk by and exchanging smiles with them. What did all these moments have in common? He realized that it was not about the new contexts in which he was finding himself, but it was about him. About changes within him. He was doing unusual things, which would be unthinkable at home. For instance, he couldn't imagine himself sitting on the ground anywhere in his own city, nor approaching a stranger in a restaurant, and even less having a dinner conversation with someone when neither one spoke the other's language. He couldn't picture getting into an unsafe crowded public transportation, or getting up earlier than he had to just to experience a different sight. I wouldn't do that, he said to himself.

Yet he found himself holding on to these feelings of wonderment in such a way that he didn't want to go to sleep for fear of losing them.


Why is it that I am able to do "unthinkable things" when I'm away, he wondered. What is this delicious sensation of freedom, of being open to surprises? Is it because I am a stranger in other places? Maybe it's because I become a person no one knows and no one has any expectations about how I'm supposed to react, behave?

So he began to imagine how it would be if he could prolong those feelings, so that they lasted well into the first week back home. And he reasoned that if his enjoyment was not about the unfamiliar places, but about the changes they fostered in him, it would be possible to hold onto those feelings, since he was carrying himself around wherever he went!

The first glimpse came to him as he was sipping the tea served at his in-flight breakfast. He said to himself: What if this were a magic tea, a tea that could prolong my new state of mind for a few days more, a week perhaps? If it is indeed, all about me, let's imagine that drinking this tea will have the effect of extending my new insights beyond my return home. Or I could prepare this tea each time I'm about to forget my experiences, and thus ensure I retain that way of seeing, perceiving, thinking, and being.

The rest of the story is known. Steve began in a small way with some samples of a scented herbal tea he mixed himself, and shared his dream with some others who invested in a good marketing campaign. The BU Tea was initially launched in US airports, where travelers were invited to try this tea that would awaken their playful, curious, and upbeat aspects of themselves, and maximize their travel experience. The Traveler's Tea, as it was called, soon became popular, as people tried it and reported on its liberating effects. They found that sipping a cup before going on their trip had indeed altered their state of mind and attitude during the journey! They mentioned experiencing surprises at every turn, meeting special people, feeling a new lightness inside themselves. Steve and his colleagues put out the new product for sale, and their website launched the Traveler's Tea Community, a blog where everyone could post their experiences and stories. Hotel owners reported a significant decrease in guests' complaints, airlines provided unofficial statements about passengers dealing better with delays and lost baggage, and although no scientific research was conducted, people described a more relaxed and positive attitude among travelers – both themselves and others.

It actually was a blogger who asked why this tea was not available in stores outside airports, which resulted in the consumer explosion of the Traveler's Tea. The increased sales volume resulted in lowered prices, which made it even more attractive for those

who hadn't tried it yet. The FDA started an investigation to audit the chemical components of this infusion, only to find that it was a natural herbal product, with no additives. Steve smiled when asked about by journalists about the FDA intervention. He knew what was behind the magic. It was simple – BU. 

¹ Special thanks to Pablo Altieri who inspired this story

If you want more triggers for reflection, visit
<http://isabelrimanoczy.blogspot.com>.



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