Preaching the "Good News" on a Bad Day

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I am profoundly fascinated by professionals who have to be "on" every work day. As a matter of completing their responsibilities they have to exude positive energy without seeming regard for their own emotional state. I'm talking about elementary school teachers, broadcast journalists, performers of film and stage, my dental hygienist, and even the ubiquitous Wal-Mart® greeters. They have to have bad days—even "I don't want to get out of bed days"—and yet the good ones perform without flinching.

Case in point: I recall hearing the story of Joan Lunden, formerly a co-host on ABC's *Good Morning America*, being called aside by the director after a show where she was "on edge." Seems she finalized her divorce the day before and was understandably having a bad day. Joan, I get it. I so would have called in sick.

This brings me to the topic de jour. How do you "turn it on" when all you want to do is go to the back room and mindlessly file papers for eight hours and be completely left alone? We've all had those days when the dog chewed your good shoes, you're sicker than a dog, or you're just dog-tired.

How do you get up in front of a group of eager genealogists and inspire them in ways unimagined, when you feel like, well, crap?

I promise you I don't have the silver bullet-type answer, but I am happy to share with you the guiding and sometimes shoving hands that have gotten me through moments like this.

1. **Trust the Message**. I typically really enjoy the subjects I speak about. I naturally find them interesting and enjoy any type of discussion about them. If I can stop and take a moment to remind myself of the good stuff I have to share, that may help lighten my mood and get me started. I always review the content before a presentation and in doing so I might see a great reference and think, "oh, they'll like this." Or I'll remember a good story, and think, "this will be fun to tell." If I can just get started, the message can carry me forward.
2. **Bank on Adrenaline.** Like many of us, I suspect, I have a day job, which may mean going into a presentation a wee bit exhausted on occasion. In circumstances like these, I tend to lean on adrenaline to at least get me started. Once I see a group gathering or have a chance to chat with someone, I naturally get excited about the prospect of spreading the "good news." And with that, I'm off to the races! However, I do offer this suggestion with a caveat: it is really, really easy to end up emotionally pushing or coming off trying too hard if adrenaline is your sole source of energy. I quickly realize I'm gasping for breath, talking to fast, and/or missing points, and I can soon be out of control. Bank on adrenaline to a point.
3. **Remember It's Your Role, not Your Identity.** As much as I very strongly believe in being real, authentic, and present with my audiences and giving them no less than the best of what I have to offer, I still need to keep in mind that this is just a role that I'm performing. It's not me in the most intimate form that I am exposing. It's a slice of my talents and personality that is visible, which means that the hurting, exhausted, soft-underside *can be* tucked under the radar—just for the next sixty minutes. The audience doesn't need to know how I'm feeling as that part of who I am isn't part of the professional role I'm playing on stage. They need to know every bit of the knowledge and passion I feel for the subject, and that's the part of me on display. Focus on the compartmentalized role in the moment.
4. **Treats.** My all-time favorite author, Martha Beck, in *The Joy Diet* mandates that everyone deserves a minimum of two treats per day. No excuses. And who am I to argue? Treats work wonders to turn

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around a bad day or perk up a lackluster energy level, and the good news is that they can be low-cal! Feel free to buy a genealogy magazine, spend extra time at the library or an hour more on the computer, or indulge in just looking at old pictures without the need to do anything with them. Then again, an occasional Dairy Queen Oreo Blizzard never hurt anyone. My point is that whether before an event as a kick start or after a presentation as a reward, a treat can get you through what may seem to be a daunting presentation on a bad day.

I offer these as just a few suggestions to consider the next time you're faced with the dilemma of how to put the show on when the spirit just isn't willing. There's nothing magic here. The truth is, as Glenda the Good Witch in the *Wizard of Oz* says, "you have had the power all along." The real magic is tapping into your own power—maybe with the few tricks mentioned above—to perform consistently and professionally every time.

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