

Don't Let Everyone Else Have All the Fun: The Power of Positive Envy

Envy sucks as an emotion. It typically makes us miserable, and it can also make us want to make others miserable. But envy can also be used for good, particularly if we struggle to make changes, to face fears, or to take up new things.

Not athletic? Just spend 5 or 6 years watching everyone else play soccer, compete in track meets, do martial arts, and win football games. Let that feeling simmer.

Afraid of dancing? Spend time after time sitting awkwardly while everyone else has a great time on the dancefloor. Miss out on those opportunities to dance with pretty girls. Feel fear while everyone else feels joy.

Fearing your next steps in the business world? Watch while all your peers and friends leave you in your unsatisfying job.

You'll feel the same feeling in all these cases: deep paralyzing fear mixed with deep regret and deep envy of the people who feel neither. You don't have to hold on to either. All those people are having fun without you – not because they dislike you, but because you're too afraid to join in. If positive incentive alone isn't enough, you can use your envy as fuel to act.

Many of my own transformations in the past years have come from a basic desire to not be left out of the fun. And, as far as envy goes, that has served me without many side effects. I've become an athlete, a speaker, a writer, a dancer, a karaoke singer, etc. – not the best, but at least good enough to participate.

The “positive envy” that drove this change is not the exclusionary kind of envy – others can still enjoy themselves while I enjoy myself. It's not the domination kind of envy – not a desire to be better than others. It's a desire to join in on the fun.

If you ever want to discover where you've been not brave enough, think to the things you see everyone else (but you) enjoying.