Fame Is a Sideshow and It Can Distract You from Either Direction

Written by T.K. Coleman.

The pursuit of popularity has two extremes:

1. Some people bend over backwards to have it.
2. Some people bend over backwards to avoid it.

Both courses of action miss the point.

"But I want to have lots of fans who adore me and validate my message…"

When you bend over backwards in order to have fame, you risk compromising the integrity of your message. Substance and self-authenticity take the backseat to sensationalism.

If this is your temptation, it might be useful to remember that having a big crowd doesn't necessarily mean having a big impact. As Dorothy Day wrote, "It is people who are important, not the masses."

In the long run, you'll be much happier and more effective if you build a brand that's fun to maintain than if you're constantly revising your modus operandi just to sell tickets. Being widely known doesn't equal being deeply loved nor does it equal being easily fulfilled.

The blessings of fame are brilliant at concealing the burdens that accompany them. Fame is like fire. It's a powerful tool that can empower you to do what others only dream of, but it will burn you to ashes if you're not careful.

"But I don't want to be like those cult-leaders or cheesy celebrities who have tons of weird followers…"

Is your message so unimportant to you that you're willing to abandon it just because thousands of annoying people might like it? Do you believe in your message enough to stand by it even if it means having to put up with being adored by a few irrational or overly enthusiastic loyalists? Do you detest being called a "celebrity" so much that you're okay with watering down your convictions and suppressing what you have to say?

It's a good thing if you don't want to become a cult-leader. It's a bad thing if you believe the solution is to look at followers and fans as wicked little demons that need to be repelled at all costs. It's a good thing if you don't crave fame. It's a bad thing if you treat all publicity and praise as if it's a germ that can infect your integrity.

When you bend over backwards to avoid fame, you're still guilty of prioritizing numbers over the integrity of your message. Assuming that you're a winner for having a small following is just as superficial as assuming that you're a loser for not having a big following.

Some leaders go out of their way to distinguish themselves from superficial celebrities and they just end up becoming a mirror image of the very people they despise. "I never want to be like those goofy people on TV", they say while running like the wind from every invitation to share their gifts with new audiences.

Being obsessed with staying small is not automatically superior to being obsessed with going big. Being afraid of mass exposure is no more virtuous than being intoxicated by it.

If you can't handle the crowd that comes and goes with your message, then you can't handle the message.

Fame is a sideshow and it can distract you from either direction.

Fame is neither inherently good nor inherently bad.

When you idolize fame, you make it a god. When you fear fame, you make it a devil. Either way, you lose because that attitude causes you to give power to something other than yourself.

Your personal power isn't determined by the number of people who know your name. It's determined by what you do with whatever degree of influence you happen to have.

You can't always control who will be drawn to you. Sometimes you'll be liked when you'd rather be left alone. Sometimes you'll be left alone when you'd rather be liked.

What matters, in the end, is your commitment to something that can't be measured in terms of masses and minuses. Character, not crowds, is what makes the world go round.

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