

Sheri Fella: Putting yourself first is not about being selfish

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I always look forward to this time of year—when nature transforms around me and I begin to move into a more easy pace. Fall is the time of my birth month, and each year I carve out even more space for reflection and rejuvenation. This year, as I turn 51, I find myself with the gift of several multiple blocks of “off the grid” time through the end of the year.

This “off the grid” time was two years in the making, and it took me saying “no, thank you” to loved ones who invited me along on fantastic adventures and to clients who asked me to lead epic experiences. I said no because I needed this time to be there for me so I could be there for my loved ones and for my vocation next year.

Taking this time to slow myself down and take in all that is around me and to notice all that is inside of me will make me more present for myself and for everyone else over the long run. “Self first” is something I practice constantly and that I challenge my clients and those around me to invest in.

Self first means caring for you first—it is not selfish. Selfish as defined by Webster is “lacking consideration for others; concerned chiefly with one’s own personal profit or pleasure.” Self first has nothing to do with others—that is the whole point. This practice of putting yourself first is about you, and only you, because only you know what you need. It is not at the sacrifice of others; it is a choice not to sacrifice yourself, and in doing so, give yourself the most sustainable chance to be there for you and others year over year.

For many, self first feels like a paradox. They find themselves wondering if they really value family if they put themselves first. Maybe it means they don’t value work ethic if they take a break to walk at lunch. Maybe it means they don’t value honesty if they cannot really share the truth of what they want. Paradoxes are hard—and full of learning.

The autumn through winter months feel like the season of paradoxes to me. A time for looking back and looking ahead. A time for letting go and letting in. A time to disconnect and reconnect. A time for internal quiet and external creativity. Finding the right mix of each of these is always a challenge for me, and in the search for that right mix, I experience my deepest learning.

When I look back, I look back with curiosity, not judgment. I ask myself questions like: What worked for me? What might have worked better? When did I feel most energized? What drained my energy? Where and when did I feel most inspired? Where did I feel most impactful? What helped me live my values and what got in the way?

Sitting with these questions allows patterns to emerge that I typically don’t see in real time. This process helps me answer the questions about what to let in, what to let go of,

what kind of disconnection and reconnection I need. It creates internal quiet so I can trust what emerges, and that clarity inspires lots of creativity for looking ahead.

For me, looking ahead is all about possibility. How do I want to feel next year? What impact do I want to have? What will help me stay energized? What partners do I want to share experiences with next year? What do I want to learn? What do I need to live my values, my best life?

Looking back long enough to learn works for me. I don't hang on to the past like I used to before I learned how much it was draining me. Looking ahead helps me gain clarity about how I want to show up in the world. This part of the process isn't so much about setting goals as it is about setting intention. Self first is an intention of mine and living an intentional life gets me where I need to go. Where do you want to go?•

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