

Valentine's Day is coming...

Does that create a feeling of excitement? Dread? Anger? Hope? It can be all of these things at the same time. For me, it's all of them in small emotional doses.

Often times, I get a little angry. It just seems like corporate manipulation intended to get all of us shopping. I hate to buy into it. But then again I don't want to miss out. Right? So, I buy in ... and get a little excited and hopeful.

I'm secretly hoping that perhaps my hubby will do something totally uncharacteristic and romantic.....maybe even remember the holiday. And then I dread it, because it's a barrel of confusing expectations. Let's break it down. He feels social pressure because he is SUPPOSED to do something for me. He then rebels over the social pressure. His rebellion shows up by not wanting to do anything; not because he doesn't love me, but because it was EXPECTED of him. He then ends up buying something; and I know it didn't come from his heart, but out of guilt and social pressure. So I feel bad. This is all underground emotion and no one really talks about it. I'll bet if you asked any married guy who doesn't own a Hallmark store, they'll tell you that they DREAD Valentine's Day. So the fact of it is...

I dread the whole emotional cycle of it too...if that makes any sense. So in the end, what was intended to be an effort to express love and stimulate the economy, ends up being an under lying emotional roller coaster. It's very subtle. But it is there eating away at my well being.

So, personally I really don't care for these Hallmark holidays. With all that said, I learned a valuable lesson centered on this dreaded commercialism. The other day my best friend Sarah and I were invited to an open house at a cute little store, in downtown Encinitas, called Dreamy. Yes, Dreamy sells perfect gifts for Valentine's Day but they did something I didn't expect. They treated me like a dog. Let me explain...

When we arrived at Dreamy we were instantly greeted by Sarah (employee Sarah) She had a huge smile on her face and acted like we were the only ones in the store. (It was packed! despite the rainy night). Sarah's smile stretched from ear to ear, her attention was totally focused on us and she was thrilled that we had come. I'm serious. She asked us questions, she brought us something to drink and genuinely made us feel like we were the center of the universe. And, for lack of a better word...we felt 'dreamy'. As far as I could tell, she did this for everybody.

As we mingled about the store, I noticed that the whole staff was infected with this attitude. What a great business model. Treat your customers like gold and over deliver. Heather the owner has definitely created some loyalty judging by the amount of people that showed up to support her. So where does this dog come in you ask? Well... this morning during my morning ritual of ingesting the newspaper and coffee, I got to thinking about my dog..... bear with me here..... I'm making a point.

I really do miss my dog. She had absolutely no expectation of me. She was just so happy to see me when I came through the door. Her whole body shouted, "Thank God you're home! I missed you!"

Her happiness and purpose revolved around the presence of me. (ok, to be fair...let's not forget her same reaction to food). She was totally content to lie at my feet and just be near me. She would listen to me ramble on without any judgment at all. She could pick up on my energy and provide empathy when I was sad, happy, or bored. You name - it she was there and PRESENT. Rather amazing when you think about it. She was the perfect role model and she didn't even know it.

Can we recreate that in each other? What if Valentine's Day was really about that? Looking at the people you have chosen to spend your life with and treating them.... well? Like a dog. Okay, not how you would treat a dog, but how a dog would treat you. Hmmm? What would that look like? Well for starters - being happy with the human you have. No expectations. Just BE...content.

You could ask yourself how that human feels when they walk in the door. How hard would it be to make them feel like they were missed? Loved?

How hard would it be to listen to them ramble on? This time, you could listen without interrupting, or judging, or pointing out faults, or being preoccupied? How hard would it be to really listen and hear something different this time? How about noticing what's important to them and asking them about it? What are they feeling?

How hard would it be to be a dog? It might be something to aim for this Valentine's Day. Or perhaps this lifetime. By the way.... my dog loved the neighbors and my parents, and our kids, too. She really had a heart that included everybody except the UPS man. Hey, nobody's perfect.