



# DON'T COMPARE YOURSELF TO OTHERS

TOM SHILLUE

Do you ever look at the lives of people around you and say, “Man, I wish that was me!”?

You know you do. Everybody does. But I bet you never compared yourself to me. Haven’t heard of me? I do have my own TV show...in the middle of the night.

When I started I wanted to be as big as Jerry Seinfeld. I’m not. And yet, I’m a pretty happy guy. Here’s why: I stopped comparing myself to other people. Seriously, that’s the whole trick.

Here’s what I mean.

If my happiness were based on being the biggest comedian in the business, I’d be mad at whoever was getting more Netflix specials than me. (I have zero.) If it were based on having the best TV ratings, I’d be mad at Jimmy Fallon. He beats me every night. And if it were based on being rich, I’d be mad at a lot of people. And even if I were rich – really rich, like #10 on the Forbes 400 rich – I’d be mad that there were nine other people richer than me. It never ends. Comparing yourself to others creates a totally unrealistic measure for what constitutes success. And I know, because the entertainment business is all about unrealistic expectations.

All through my career I’d meet with satisfied customers after my shows and they’d say, “Hey, you’re good! Maybe someday you’ll be successful like Jerry Seinfeld.” He’s the measure of success? The top guy?

When someone tells you they’re a doctor, you don’t say, “Well, maybe someday you’ll cure a disease and save millions of lives, just like Jonas Salk did for polio.”

Or a lawyer: “Oh, wow, so what’s your ultimate goal? The Supreme Court?”

Do you see how crazy that sounds?

Professional success is about making a living, pursuing excellence, and finding meaning in what you do.

When I first started doing standup, I was a nobody. It took more than a decade of playing in front of tuned-out crowds before it started paying the bills. Ten years is a lot of time to tell jokes for no money to people who aren’t laughing.

In those days, I spent a lot of time thinking about the comedians I admired. The guys at the top. I wanted those big, sold out houses I wasn’t playing. The big paydays I wasn’t making. The

TV specials I wasn't doing.

And not just their success; their talent. I'd look at comics like George Carlin, Robin Williams and Louis C.K. They were all able to turn their dark, personal struggles into brilliant comedy. I envy their talent, but I wouldn't want the dark personal struggles that went along with it.

If you don't factor in everything about whoever you're comparing yourself to, you're playing a sort of mix-and-match game that doesn't exist in the real world.

Here's one of life's little truths: everyone is a package deal. You can't view one element of someone else's life in isolation. That's cheating.

You can't say, "I want Louis C.K.'s money and fame, Jay Leno's car collection and Tom Shillue's wife and kids." That person doesn't exist! If he did, he'd be pretty cool. I would definitely want to hang with him.

Everyone has pain in their lives. Think of anybody who you know really well. You know the awful stuff they've had to deal with – the demons they battle. How many dead rock stars, movie stars and, yes, comedians does it take to convince us all that everyone's life is hard?

Face it.

You really don't want someone else's life. You want your own life – only better. But that's the thing. You can make your life better by not doing something – comparing yourself to other people.

Back when I was a nobody, I wanted to sell out the biggest venues and have a prime-time TV show with millions of viewers. Now I sell out small venues and I'm on in the middle of the night with half a million viewers. And I appreciate every one of them.

I guess when I compare myself now to myself then, I'm doing okay.

You should try it.

I'm Tom Shillue for Prager University.