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The Question You Must Always Ask

Written by Bill Perkins

The other week, my wife, Claire, and I were at the airport. As we walked toward our gate, I noticed someone familiar—he had a bald head, stood about my height, and wore a suit. At first I couldn't place him and only sensed recognition. But then I heard his voice and quickly made the connection.

It was Tom Colicchio from the television show, Top Chef.

Admittedly, I wasn't exactly star struck. Although I've watched portions of the last two seasons, I'm by no means a *big* fan of his show. But for Claire, it's a different story. Not only has she watched the show since it first began airing nine years ago, she also admires the art behind Chef Colicchio's work.

Here's the thing, though. I wasn't 100% sure about my judgment. Perhaps the man only resembled Tom Colicchio. There are plenty of average height, bald men out there. Despite my uncertainties, I pointed him out to Claire—if anyone could provide an accurate ID, it would be her.

Claire looked at the man and then back at me. "What?" she asked, clearly confused. "It's the Top Chef guy," I whispered. She laughed. "No it's not." I gave her a quizzical look. "Really? I'm pretty sure it's him." She shifted her eyes back onto him, studying his face as he interacted with a guy standing beside him.

A moment later, the two men walked past us. "Let's follow them," I said. "Maybe you need to see him from a different angle." Claire laughed again. "I'm pretty sure it's not Tom. His suit doesn't even fit." After shadowing from a distance, they stopped at a deli to purchase pre-made, pre-wrapped sandwiches. "See," Claire said, her voice indignant. "There's no way Tom Colicchio eats airport sandwiches." This time I laughed. "What, he only eats 5-course, gourmet meals?"

As they exchanged cash, I told Claire to stand guard while I used the restroom. She nodded, her eyes focused on the bald man in the suit. A minute later, I returned and asked if they'd walked back to the gate. "Yeah," she said. "And has your opinion changed?" I asked. "Maybe. But I'm not entirely sure yet—he looks shorter than on TV." "Everyone does," I said confidently. "Or, at least, that's what I've heard."

We returned to the gate and found a discreet position to watch the bald man. The longer I watched him, the more secure I grew of my initial assessment—his mannerisms, his smile, the shape of his head, the sound of his voice. It was *definitely* him. At least I thought so.

"Well," I finally said. "Are you going to introduce yourself?" Claire appeared to consider it. "But what if isn't him?" "Claire," I said. "I'm 99.9% sure it's him. And even if it's not, who cares?" She looked at me and then back at the man. "I don't know," she said. "I'm just not so sure."

Then I asked the question that did it—“Will you regret not talking to him?” Claire looked at me confidently. “Yeah . . . I will.” A moment later, she stepped forward and asked the man if he was, in fact, Tom Colicchio. With a low-key smile, he said, “Yeah.”

The Nudge We Ignore

What’s true of this scenario, I believe, is true more generally. I’m not simply talking about shaking hands with a celebrity, but normal, day to day life.

How many times have you felt a nudge to speak, but remained silent? How many times have you seen an opportunity, but let it go? How many times have you sensed something deep within, but refused to respond? How many times have you wanted to do something, but failed to act?

Perhaps you’ve wanted to encourage a friend, or stand up for a principle, or ask someone out, or take a job offer, or go on a trip, or accept an invitation, or pray for a coworker, or speak truth to a family member, or pursue a dream, or begin a creative project, or embrace a change, or introduce yourself to a stranger.

But you didn’t. And later you regretted that decision.

Taking the Wheel

Every day, it seems, I’m presented with similar opportunities. And throughout my life, I’ve more often than not failed to act. Invariably, I’ve regretted that decision. Every single time.

Recently, though, I began pushing against this tendency. The result has been nothing short of life-changing.

Not only do I now live with less regret, I also feel as though I’ve taken the wheel of my life. It’s with this attitude that I decided to date my wife, and propose to her, and get married, and do a hundred other things that I wouldn’t have otherwise done.

When you seize an opportunity, you take control of your life.

Just Email Me

After exchanging greetings with Tom, the guy standing beside him handed me his card. “Let me know if you’re ever in New York City. We would love to have you dine at Tom’s restaurant.” “Actually,” I said, “we’ll be there next month to celebrate Claire’s 30th birthday. I imagine it’s too late to get a reservation, though.” The guy smirked. “Just email me. I’ll make sure everything's taken care of.”

As we boarded our flight, we couldn’t stop talking about the encounter. “Was it worth it?” I asked. “Absolutely,” Claire said. “Without a doubt.”

Will You Regret Not Doing It?

We would all do well, I think, to more often ask ourselves this question: Will I regret not doing it? If the answer is yes, as I suspect it will be, we really don't have a choice—we *must* act.

Thomas Wells writes about living intentionally.