

Go Big for the Little Wins

You pop bubbly on holidays and toast at weddings, but what about throwing a bash after crushing a boot camp class or finishing a major project at work? We've got a blueprint for squeezing more joy out of every small victory.

By Kristin Canning

We tend to save parties and Facebook announcements for major moments: a new job, a first house, a 10-year anniversary. But micro feats and seemingly mundane moments deserve just as much love—if not more. “Taking time to celebrate minor accomplishments encourages mindfulness, gratitude, and self-reflection, creating a happier, fuller life and helping you reach your goals,” says Megan Bruneau, a therapist and executive coach in NYC. “You’re able to see real progress without getting caught up in some far-off perfectionist objective or relying on external validation to feel successful.”

Sounds great, so why aren’t we doing it already? “We’re socialized to become more stoic and less bubbly as we age, and to not appear overexcited because it will seem childish, overindulgent, or like gloating,” Bruneau explains. And while it makes sense that we grow out of the need for an extravagant birthday blowout every year, that self-consciousness trickles into our daily lives, leaving us to downplay small morsels of good news and glory days for no one’s real benefit.

The fix is simple: Commemorate these three overlooked occasions and you’ll start seeing opportunities for joie de vivre everywhere.



THE TYPICAL MILESTONE A Promotion

THE MINI MILESTONE A Positive Review

No one wants to be stuck on the corporate ladder, but focusing solely on outward achievements (read: a shiny new title) isn’t the best strategy for happiness. “Measuring progress and worth by big milestones alone can make us feel low if they don’t come through or happen how we imagine they will,” says Bruneau. And promotions don’t occur nearly as often as good feedback from your boss. Even better, focusing on qualities (like resilience or creativity) instead of accomplishments can provide more sustainable pride, says Bruneau, because those stick with you. Praise for your work ethic and optimism is worth remembering, not only to boost your confidence but to keep you motivated. Relive it over a bite with friends who’ll only add to the compliments.

THE TYPICAL MILESTONE A Race Finish Line

THE MINI MILESTONE Running Farther Than You Ever Have Before

When you’re striving to reach a big fitness or weight-loss goal, rewarding yourself for progress can feel counterintuitive (*If I let myself celebrate now, I won’t be motivated to keep going*). But research shows that giving yourself a pat on the back for tiny wins along the way actually fuels inspiration. “Many people get lost in their goal and are so focused on it that they lose sight of the steps to get there,” says performance psychologist Jonathan Fader, PhD, author of *Life as Sport*. In fact, if you focus only on extreme fitness feats or visual changes in your body, you can become discouraged when you don’t see progress as soon as you’d like, even though you’ve been working hard, says Bruneau. That’s why rewarding yourself for changes you



can control (like how often you work out or cook a healthy meal) is so powerful. Start a wellness journal and log your success in landing a new yoga pose, lifting your heaviest weight yet, meal-prepping for four weeks in a row, or surviving a long run you thought you'd never finish. Writing down these markers will show you how far you've really come. Celebrate your achievements with little treats that encourage you to keep going, like shopping with friends for new leggings or gifting yourself a massage, says Fader.

THE TYPICAL MILESTONE Your Partner's Epic 30th Birthday Bash

THE MINI MILESTONE Your Pet's Birthday

Hear us out: Honoring your pup's birth with an actual party complete with guests and cake might seem like a silly social media trend, but it has legit merit. Elevating a typically private event (perhaps in the past you just bought Rufus a new toy) to a public one promotes gratitude and excitement for life's mundane moments, Bruneau says. (And since our furry friends, sadly, have fewer years on earth than we do, an annual celebration can remind you of the preciousness of their life and what they add to yours: so much love!) What's more, hosting a party for your pet—versus for yourself or another person—gives you the opportunity to do something truly selfless, since they can't thank you by returning the favor, notes Bruneau. Any act of generosity is one of the fastest ways to boost happiness; couple it with the social bonds you foster with friends in a party setting and you have yourself quite the joyous occasion. Grab the mini party hats, candles, and pup-cakes!

These moments call for a true celebration—not just an Instagram post!

