

MATTMCWILLIAMS

Live with Passion. Lead with Purpose. Leave a Legacy.

5 Reasons the World Needs More Leslie Knope

The world just lost a great person. Not really. This person was only a fictional character on the series Parks and Recreation, but the character Leslie Knope embodied what it meant to live with passion, lead with purpose, and leaving a legacy.

One of the few shows my wife and I watch is Parks and Recreation. If you aren't familiar with the show, it's based on a motley crew of small-town government workers in the fictional town of Pawnee, Indiana (which might just be the second best known town in the state).

One character stands out above them all: Leslie Knope. Not because of her words or any particular character trait, but because of her actions. Below are five reasons the world needs more Leslie Knope.

My hope is that you'll take a page or two out of her playbook and begin living a life filled with more of the passion she had, lead with purpose, and leave a legacy she did.

1. She celebrated the smallest things

Every memory deserves to be chronicled! Even the saggy ones

If you knew Leslie Knope it meant celebrating and commemorating everything. Here's a partial list of Leslie Knope holidays:

Galentine's Day - A day when women around the world celebrate their friendships.

Chicken Dance Day - Her husband, Ben, once danced a chicken dance and the day is forever memorialized with an annual celebration.

Text Message Day - The day Ben and Leslie first texted each other as a couple.

Cheesecake Day - Memorializes the first time Leslie and her best friend, Ann, ate cheesecake together.

Cauliflower Day - The first time Ben and Leslie ate cauliflower together. She did not like it, so now they celebrate her never eating it again.

Red Shoe Day - Leslie and Ann wore the same color shoes on the same day...which, of course, resulted in an annual holiday.

The random and often weird holidays were quirky, sometimes difficult to keep track of, and possibly annoying at time to those involved, but they showed that Leslie took pleasure in the smallest things. Shouldn't we all celebrate more of the smallest things in life?

Try remembering and celebrating those moments in life that may seem insignificant, and in doing so, you create lasting memories for you and those you love.

2. She showed love with her actions, not just her words

I'm willing to sacrifice all that I've worked for just to put a smile on your perfect little face.

Leslie had boundless energy and she used it to show love to those around her:

- Her husband
- Her friends
- Her family
- Her co-workers
- The citizens of her community

Most of us (myself included more than I'd like to admit) are more comfortable watching from the sidelines. We'd rather be comfortable than serve others, especially people we don't even know.

Leslie, on the other hand, would stop at nothing to serve those who meant something to her, which was just about everyone. Even when circumstances were against her. Even when she was sick. Even when it was hard. Even when she didn't even particularly like someone, she did what it took to show love. Kind of reminds me of a certain prophet from two milleniums ago.

3. She was relentlessly optimistic

I am big enough to admit I am often inspired by myself.

Leslie Knope exuded optimism. Sure, she knew pain. She knew setbacks. She knew discouragement. All of us do. But through it all, she countered the difficulties of life with grit, a lot of spunk, and a contagious positivity.

Her optimism literally infected those around her. Even the toughest pessimists were affected over the course of the show's seven seasons.

I believe that is one of the reasons the show was so successful. We saw in Leslie Knope what we wish we saw in ourselves:

- Persistent hope
- Seeing the best in others
- Shining brightly in dark times

It's easy to get discouraged. It's easy to see what's wrong with others and the world. It's just so easy to focus on the negative (I should know). But what if we all spent a little bit more time focusing on the things and people we are thankful for and celebrated the things that are going right in our lives?

I believe the world would be a better place.

4. Her work was extremely important to her, but it wasn't her life

We get to do work worth doing, alongside people we love.

Leslie's credo was: "We need to remember what's important in life: friends, waffles, work. Or waffles, friends, work. Doesn't matter, but work is third."

Take some time regularly to figure out what truly matters to you. It's easy for our priorities to get messed up during a busy season or difficult time at work. So it's important to schedule time to remind yourself about what is important to *you*. And then you must make time to invest in those things.

I recently wrote about how my wife, Tara, and I recently set our 2015 goals. What surprised me is how the process defined clearly what was important to me. I expected to set mostly business goals, but more than half of them were related to family, spiritual, and personal goals. As a result, how I spend my time is evolving. I am intentionally making time for the things most important to me.

Leslie loved her job and loved work, but she never forgot what was *most* important to her.

5. She fought for what she believed in, even at a personal cost

John McCain: Has anyone ever told you your tenacity can be a bit intimidating.

Leslie: Yes, every day of my life since the 4th grade.

When you are passionate about something, as Leslie was about the town of Pawnee, you do whatever it takes to achieve success. Even when it hurts.

The ironic thing about fighting for what you believe in is that even when it causes temporary pain, your long-term happiness increases. Doing nothing or giving it only a partial effort will result in misery.

When the town government wasn't acting fast enough for Leslie's liking, she adopted 32 cats and dogs to make sure they were cared for. It was certainly an inconvenience, but it embodied who she was.

When she loved something she fought for it. She sacrificed for it. She suffered personal attacks, long nights, and physical and emotional pain. And in the end, it all brought her joy.

The lesson: Spend more time fighting for the causes, the people, and the things you love. Spend less time attacking the things you hate.

If you are a fan of Parks & Rec, what was your favorite Leslie Knope trait? If you aren't a fan, which of these traits do you wish you had more of?