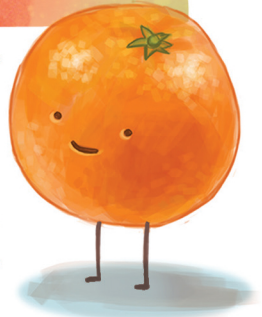


must be NiCE



your guide to
growing beyond
the **compare game**



jason kotecki



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for St. Josephine Bakhita

a survivor with a grace-filled smile
who suffered unspeakable hell and
still found reasons to be grateful





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Introduction



The stage
glowed with
electricity and
greatness.

Meanwhile, I sat there feeling dispirited and insignificant.



Even though I was surrounded by a thousand people, I felt very much alone, swallowed up in the dark belly of a cavernous ballroom.

The location was Philadelphia, at the annual convention for the National Speakers Association, of which I'd been a member for only a few years. The main stage was a showcase of the best of the best. It would have been inspiring had I not been swept up in an envy-fueled shame spiral.

After each speaker, I found myself muttering, "Must be nice."

Of course he's booked all the time; he played in the NBA and appeared on basketball cards. **Must be nice.**

She's got so many high-powered connections from working all those years as a Fortune 100 CEO. **Must be nice.**

I wish I could juggle and do backflips like that. **Must be nice.**

With each “must be nice,” I became more cynical and more miserable. Left unchecked, this game can get grim, especially in the speaker world. Here is a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad example of what has probably crossed the mind of every professional speaker at some point:

Of course he's in demand; he's a blind, double-amputee cancer survivor who climbed Everest.

Twice.

Must. Be. Nice.

(Oof. Hello, Rock Bottom, nice to meet you.)





Suddenly, in the midst of my despair, I had a vision. There weren't angels or trumpets or locust-eating prophets, but it was a grace-filled moment of perspective and truth. Sitting there in the darkness, I was reminded of my artistic talent. It occurred to me that even though it's a gift few professional speakers possess, I was treating it as an afterthought, an unrelated skill that had nothing to do with saying words from a stage. I realized that were I to devote the time and attention to making my art an integral part of my unique selling proposition, someday I'd be on that main stage.

I sensed the inevitability of people in that future audience saying to themselves, "Of course he's a successful speaker. Being a great artist is a killer hook, and the ability to incorporate it into his storytelling and slides to drive home points, offer it to clients to help market their meetings, and sell it on merchandise that helps people remember the message for years to come is such an advantage!"

“Must be nice.”



I had gotten good at noticing all the things I wasn't while missing the things I was. This revelation—to combine my art and speaking talents—might be obvious to you, as it was to the many speaker friends I shared it with, but it changed everything for me. Since that fateful convention, I've made art the cornerstone of our offerings, infusing it into everything I do. This is the spark that launched my career to a new level.

It's a natural human tendency to compare ourselves to others, especially people in our field. A psychologist named Leon Festinger came to this conclusion in 1954 with his social comparison theory. He stated that the more time someone spends on social media comparing their pathetic lives to their friends' highlight reels, the more likely that person is to eat an entire bag of Doritos.

Wait, no, that's not it.

What Leon *did* determine is that people compare and evaluate their opinions, accomplishments, and abilities by comparing themselves to others. That may seem obvious to us now, but it's interesting to go deeper into his findings. He noted that the more similar we are to another person, the more we tend to compare ourselves to them, like the way I did with other speakers.

Further, he suggested that the more important we view a group, the more pressure we feel to conform to that group's opinions and abilities. For me,

it was a collection of people at the top of their game. If I can't measure up to them, what right do I have calling myself a professional?

Leon also pointed out that if we stop comparing ourselves to someone because it makes us feel bad, we deal with those feelings by mentally tearing that person down. We brand them as a hack, or maybe even a little evil, and rejoice when bad things befall them.

Pass over that bag of Doritos, will you?

“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not; remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for.”

—Epicurus

As you probably have deduced, the “must be nice” game is not exclusive to the speaking world. In your world, it might look like this:

She can eat whatever
she wants and never gains a pound.

Must be nice.

He gets straight As and he doesn't even have to study.

Must be nice.

She's pregnant again? I can't imagine it being that easy.

Must be nice.

They're always driving a new car because his company pays for it.

Must be nice.

She has all the time in the world to be involved in her kids' activities;
her husband has a great job and she doesn't have to work.

Must be nice.

Everything he touches turns to gold.

Must be nice.

Of course she is the top sales performer; she has a ton of contacts.

Must be nice.

Everybody likes him because he is a natural-born comedian.

He's the life of every party.

Must be nice.

She's tall and athletic and got a free ride to college because

she's a great volleyball player.

Must be nice.

He can afford a house like that because he's a carpenter

and can do all the labor himself.

Must be nice.

Of course they get to travel all the time; they have

two incomes and no kids.

Must be nice.

We identify someone we consider to be living a charmed life, and then we tack on “must be nice” as our backhanded way of voicing our envy and making excuses for ourselves.

It's also a
cop-out and
a tragic waste
of time.

Let's face it; as much as we may wish otherwise, life is not fair.

Call it what you want—luck, privilege, winning life's lottery, whatever—but the truth is this: inequality has existed for thousands of years, and it will exist in some form for thousands more. Creating a level playing field for everyone is a worthy pursuit we should all be striving for, but until we reach utopia, we must deal with the cards we've been dealt.

It's enticing to complain about being dealt a bad hand. It lets us off the hook. It's tempting to point fingers at institutions, blame the system, and cry foul over other people's unfair advantages. It's easy to play the victim.

And that might make you feel good, but it doesn't make you any better.

In her book *Tiny Beautiful Things*, Cheryl Strayed writes, “Nobody's going to do your life for you. You have to do it yourself, whether you're rich or poor, out of money or raking it in, the beneficiary of ridiculous fortune or terrible injustice. And you have to do it no matter what is true. No matter what is hard. No matter what unjust, sad, sucky things have befallen you. Self-pity is a dead-end road. You make the choice to drive down it. It's up to you to decide to stay parked there or to turn around and drive out.”

You have to fight to be happy. It really is a choice, not something bestowed upon you by your fairy godmother or a genie in a lamp.

The first step is choosing to be accountable for your own life. I love this take from Gary Vaynerchuk, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist who said, “The mindset of accountability is what makes you win and makes you happy, whether it is true or not. The thought of taking on responsibility for everything that’s not working is the win, whether you’re right or wrong.”

My friend Eliz survived a harrowing health emergency that left her with a compelling story. That story led to dozens of media appearances and launched her speaking career. So does that make the heart attack she had while pregnant with twins a “must be nice”?

I could write a million-page book with example after example of people from every walk of life, with every disadvantage you can name, who have overcome the odds to find happiness and experience joy. I’m sure you could add examples from your own life.

I’m not here to tell you it’s **easy, just that it’s **possible**.**

What these success stories all have in common is that the heroes didn’t settle for playing the victim. They went to work making the most of what they had. And what they had was more than enough.

Jealousy and envy only distract us from a most important truth:



We all have a
“must be nice.”

Everyone has unique gifts, circumstances, and experiences that they can leverage and benefit from. Some refer to it as an unfair advantage. In business, it could be a patent, a prime location, a charismatic founder, or an exclusive distribution deal with a big retailer. In everyday life, it might be your good looks, family connections to an influential person, or two decades of exhaustive experience in a particular field.

As I shared earlier, one of mine is my artistic ability. Your unfair advantage might be your grit, your intelligence, or your way with words. Maybe it's your position as an outsider who isn't held back by feeling the need to do things the way they've always been done. It could even be a heartbreaking past that enables you to empathize with people in similar situations in a way that no one else can.

We all have unfair advantages, but we rarely take time to identify them. And oftentimes, we overlook our greatest gifts because we undervalue the abilities that come easily to us. We fall into the trap of thinking if it's easy for us, it must be easy for everyone. (Hint: it's probably not.)

My goal is not to convince you that other people don't have advantages over you, but to lead you to uncover your own.

I was thinking about the American Revolutionary War the other day (because I like keeping up on current events), and a few things struck me.

I imagine it would have been easy for the American colonists to look at all the advantages held by the British and wallow in the land of Must Be Nice.

They have the most powerful navy in the whole world . . . must be nice.

They have way more professionally trained soldiers than we do . . . must be nice.

They have a ton of money to buy food, supplies, and mercenaries for hire . . . must be nice.

Their team has sweet red road uniforms . . . must be nice.

It's easy to lament other people's advantages and languish in jealousy and disappointment. But this only ensures defeat. Everyone has a must be nice (if not several), so we are better served spending our time figuring out what they are and using them to our full advantage.

That's exactly what those American revolutionaries did.

One must be nice of theirs was having home-field advantage. Their intimate knowledge of the nooks and crannies of the terrain benefited them. Also, many of the untrained soldiers were good marksmen, thanks to all their practice hunting small prey. And the biggest must be nice of all was that they were

fighting for freedom and a better life for their families, while the British were merely doing their job.

In fact, this desire and passion helped give the Americans the will to identify rules that didn't exist and the courage to break them.

For instance, the British employed traditional firing line methods, which they were hesitant to abandon (hey, it worked for one hundred years!). The problem was it made them easy picking for snipers with long rifles who were hidden behind trees. And although the British held fast to the rule "thou shalt not shoot officers," the Americans determined this was one big fat #notarule and created confusion and weakness when they singled them out as the primary target.

I'd wager those fancy red coats made them easier to spot.

Consider these two lessons in your life, family, or organization.

First, just because something worked for a century (or a year) doesn't guarantee its success this year. The rules of yesterday can lead to ruin today.

Second, don't waste any time whining about someone else's must be nice.

Figure out yours and get to work.

Eight years after my private pity party in Philadelphia, I found myself backstage at Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. My wife Kim and I were preparing to open that very same speakers' convention with a main stage speech to our peers.

The title of the speech?



"Must Be Nice."



Get the full copy at

EscapeAdulthood.com/mustbenice

jason kotecki is a professional reminder-er and permission granter who moonlights as an artist, author and professional speaker. Jason and his wife Kim have made it their mission in life to help people and organizations break free from Adulthood to build better lives, businesses, and teams.



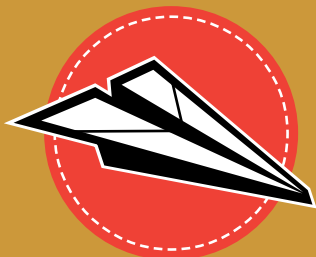
Jason has written eight books, and his colorful art has been collected and licensed all over the world. As a speaker, Jason works with organizations to beat burnout and become more innovative by breaking rules that don't exist. His content-rich programs are balanced with a refreshing mix of humor and emotion, serving as the perfect antidote for people who find themselves in a personal or professional rut.

Ultimately, Jason creates art, observations, and experiences that give people hope and the freedom to live joyfully. His greatest desire is to use his talents to share God's love and impact lives by inspiring, entertaining and encouraging people to rekindle their childlike spirit and create the lives they were made for.

An avid eater of sugar-laden cereal, Jason enjoys Star Wars, soft t-shirts, and brand new tubes of paint. He and Kim homeschool their three weird kids and live in Sheboygan, Wisconsin where they eat way too many cheese curds.



Scan to tour
Jason's studio!



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Drop Jason a line at
jason@escapeadulthood.com

For a treasure trove of Adulthood-fighting tips & tools,
or to learn more about bringing in Jason to speak
to your organization, skedaddle on over to
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