

Living the Creative Life

*For Creative People and Those
Who Want to Live Their Lives Creatively*

Sharon Good

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Dedicated to the readers of Living the Creative Life who inspired and contributed to these articles.

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Welcome to Living the Creative Life!

The purpose of this newsletter is to present ideas for creative artists to live their lives more elegantly, and for all of us to tap into our inherent creativity to enhance our lives.

Topics that will be addressed include:

- ~ Enhancing your creativity
- ~ Having a career in the arts
- ~ Self-care and personal growth
- ~ Dealing with rejection and discouragement
- ~ Creative role models
- ~ Dealing with life situations creatively
- ~ Having fun with your life

I hope you enjoy and benefit from the articles to come!



Note about Bookshelf:

Click on the icon next to the title to find the resource.



"When you know that you're creating, you are aware of all life and not one piece of it."

~ Louise Nevelson

Issue 1

What Is Creativity?

Since the focus of this newsletter is creativity, I thought I'd begin by defining what creativity is. Many people have the misconception that creativity is something that only artists, writers and performers are blessed with. Not so. Everyone is creative. It's one of the gifts we're given that helps us thrive as human beings.

While creativity is not just about being in the arts, we can get a sense of what it is by looking at the artistic process. When someone is creating, what qualities do we see in action? Focus, imagination, inspiration, being in the moment are some of them. Creators learn skills and technique, but they go beyond it. These are qualities of the artist, but you can bring them to any endeavor, be it business or pleasure.

Creativity can mean bringing fun to a job that would otherwise be drudgery. It can mean doing something that's already fun in a new and different way that makes it even more pleasurable.

Several years ago, I worked for a boss who managed a group of us who were young, aspiring actors and filmmakers. She constantly deferred to us as the creative ones, and yet she was one of the most creative managers I've ever worked for. She brought tremendous flexibility and imagination to everything she did.

Creativity is:

- ~ Being imaginative
- ~ Being present in the moment and responding freshly to each situation
- ~ Being willing to try a new approach
- ~ Trusting your intuition
- ~ Using your unique gifts
- ~ Allowing yourself to be inspired
- ~ Bringing enthusiasm and energy to whatever you're doing
- ~ Working synergistically with others
- ~ Doing something for the joy and fulfillment, even if you're not "talented" at it

Look at what creativity means to you. Be creative in your quest!

Creative Tip

When confronting a choice, ask yourself, "What would a winner do in this situation?" Follow that guidance.

Wise Words

"Part of the secret of creativity is learning to look at things in different ways. Children are very good at this, as their minds have not yet hardened into set patterns." ~ Jean Houston, *A Passion for the Possible*

Bookshelf



A Passion for the Possible ... Jean Houston



The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity ... Julia Cameron with Mark Bryan



Think Like a Genius: Use Your Creativity in Ways That Will Enrich Your Life ... Todd Siler



Think Like a Genius: How to Go Outside the Box, Analyze Deeply, Creatively Solve Problems, and Innovate ... Peter Hollins

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Issue 2

The Creative Process

The creative process seems so elusive to us, and maybe in some respects it is. But when you're feeling blocked or unable to even start, breaking the process down into workable components can help you through that hurdle and assure that the job emerges more smoothly and effortlessly.

Roger Von Oech, in his book, *A Kick in the Seat of the Pants*, offers a model for creativity that consists of four "personalities": the Explorer, the Artist, the Judge and the Warrior. We've already agreed that creativity can be applied in business as well as art, and this model applies equally to writing an annual report, a novel or a song.

The Explorer begins the process by doing the research and collecting the data. This could mean researching facts and figures, coming up with plot ideas and how to make them work, or deciding which medium or style would best express your vision. The Artist then sits down and writes or paints or compiles the data. The Judge shapes and edits, and finally, the Warrior goes out and sells the finished piece, whether to a publisher, a gallery or a client.

When each personality does its job at the proper time, the project goes smoothly. But if the Judge kicks in when the Artist should be at work, you may find yourself paralyzed, judging each word as it comes out of your keyboard. Or the Warrior will be worrying about how commercial your novel is, rather than the Artist delighting in its unfolding. Conversely, the Artist, whose work is very personal to them, shouldn't be the one trying to sell it. And if you get stuck in the Explorer, you'll never complete the project.

So, our job is to keep each personality in its proper place. When you're in the creation stage, as personified by the Artist, give yourself the freedom to go with it. Have fun. Don't judge. Give the imaginative child in you free rein. Don't worry what anyone else will think. While you may eventually have to become the Warrior and sell your work to someone else, when you're in the creative process, stay present, in the moment, and let your creative juices flow. And when the time is right, chances are the selling process will come that much more easily because of the sparkle and originality in your work!

Creative Job Hunting

In the old days, looking for a job meant searching the classifieds or contacting an employment agency, hoping to squeeze yourself into a

prescribed slot. You acquired skills to suit the job. But the new way of job hunting is to create a job that suits you. A job that fits *your* skills.

One way to do this is to create a vision of your ideal job and let it find you. What are the qualities or essences that you want? A friendly, cooperative environment? Challenging, satisfying work? Congenial working companions and a compassionate boss? Do you want to work for yourself? And don't forget about the down-to-earth logistical issues. Do you want a short commute or to work at home? No overtime so you can spend more time with the kids or on your own interests? A large company with room for advancement?

Some key areas to look at:

- ~ Atmosphere and environment: type of company, casual or formal, corporate or creative, large or small
- ~ People: the kind of people you want to work with, work alone or in teams, manage and/or be managed
- ~ Location: nearby or relocate, work at home, commercial area vs. quieter area
- ~ The work itself: something you've done before or something new, something you feel secure in or new challenges, a career you can develop or a job to support your personal interests or creative career
- ~ Qualities or essences: freedom, challenge, fun, companionship, opportunities for growth or education, spiritual, friendly

Sit down and make lists of all these items, or at least get clear about them in your mind. Think about them. Enjoy them. Feel gratitude that you can have them. And then expect them to show up.

Now this doesn't mean that you don't have to take action. Personally, my belief system doesn't allow me to sit home reading or watching TV, secure that the phone will ring with my dream job. Do what works for you. Put together a nice resume. Register with job listing sites. Search on LinkedIn. Call your friends and let them know you're looking. Go visit some headhunters. Knock on doors. But go into the hunt with a clear picture of what you want, and you'll be much more likely to find it.

Creative Tip

Brainstorm ways that you can make money doing things you enjoy. Try putting together skills that you might not ordinarily think go together. For example, if you love animals and the outdoors, you might enjoy walking dogs or exercising horses. If you like children and books, create a "storytime"

program for your local library. If you're analytical and creative, program web pages.

Wise Words

"You learn that wanting what you want is not enough, but that you must both want it deeply and create it every day, that you must bring it into being and hold it in being with your intentions." ~ Gary Zukav, *Seat of the Soul*

Bookshelf



A Kick in the Seat of the Pants: Using Your Explorer, Artist, Judge and Warrior to Be More Creative ... Roger Von Oech



A Whack on the Side of the Head: How You Can Be More Creative ... Roger Von Oech



The Career Chase: Taking Creative Control in a Chaotic Age ... Helen Harkness



What's Next?: Follow Your Passion and Find Your Dream Job ... Kerry Hannon



Creative Careers: Making a Living with Your Ideas ... B. Jeffrey Madoff

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Issue 3

Creating Community

Creativity can be a lonely business. You're either in your office or studio, writing, painting or practicing – alone – or sending out pictures and resumes or query letters in hopes that they won't represent another set of rejections. You need social contact and you need support. In other words, you need a life outside your work.

Creating community is particularly important these days. Few of us have a tightly knit family unit or neighborhood anymore. In fact, the families of many artists would rather see them in a suit climbing the corporate ladder and aren't very supportive of their creative work. In their love and concern for you, they may unintentionally undermine your confidence.

Community serves two important functions. First, we need support. As inspired and engrossed as you may be when you're creating your art, the rejection you face when you're trying to sell it can be devastating. And those who are not artists per se may have to face yet another grueling board meeting or another cold sales call. You need someone you can go to for encouragement, for a shoulder to lean on during discouraging times, and to celebrate with you when you succeed.

You also need to spend time with people socially. No matter how much you love your work, you need to take a break from it sometime. Create a social community that you can just hang out with and have fun. They may be colleagues, friends, family, neighbors. Or join a group around a common interest, something different from the work you do. That could be some type of spiritual community, a hobby group or a bowling league.

If you feel that community is lacking in your life, get out, literally or virtually. Join a special interest group. Take a class. Take part in an online community. Make conversation with people at the gym. Go out for a drink with friends or co-workers.

As the old saying goes, no one is an island. Spending time with people will replenish your creative juices and enrich you as a person, which will ultimately enrich your art and your life.

Finding Solitude

The flip side of community is solitude. While community is important, some quality time for yourself is also essential.

Life is busy. We work, take care of the house and personal business, tend to our loved ones, spend time on our hobbies and interests. Oh, yes, and somewhere in there, we have to sleep. It's enough to make your head spin! It's hard to think clearly when you're in the midst of a whirlwind of activity. Once in awhile, you just have to get away from it all. Break the routine.

A few years ago, when I was on the verge of making several important decisions, I decided to take myself on a solo retreat for a few days where I could get some perspective on the various issues going on in my life. Since money and time were issues, I found a waterfront hotel that was on the commuter line from my home city and booked a weekend there. I packed a couple of books, borrowed a friend's laptop, and set off. I didn't give anyone the number and didn't check my messages. I read, wrote, took walks by the water and in the quaint village nearby. No chores to do, no busy work. Just peace and solitude. I came back feeling refreshed and ready to tackle the matters at hand.

Taking a personal retreat is something I highly recommend. If you live alone, be aware that solitude means not just being by yourself, but also having time to be quiet, to think and relax, without the bombardment of the TV, the telephone and the Internet. Take yourself away from your normal environment, where there's always something that has to get done or a ringing phone. Go to a hotel or borrow a friend's country house. Break your routine. If you live in a city, get out into nature. Do the things you never have time to do at home. Give yourself a break.

And when you get back home, set aside some time each day, or at least each week, for solitude. Write in your journal, listen to music, draw, meditate, exercise – whatever feeds your soul. You may feel like the time is hard to find, or a sacrifice, but you'll find that you come back clear-headed and refreshed, and your work time will be more efficient and productive.

Creative Tip

If you're feeling blocked in your creative process, stop. Take a walk, see a movie. Part of the creative process is letting go and giving your ideas time to gestate. You'll feel refreshed and the ideas will begin to flow again.

Wise Words

"You must have a room or a certain hour of the day or so where you do not know what was in the morning paper ... a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are, and what you might be ... At first

you may find nothing's happening ... But if you have a sacred place and use it, take advantage of it, something will happen." ~ Joseph Campbell

Bookshelf



Sharing the Journey: Support Groups and America's New Quest for Community ... Robert Wuthnow



Find A Quiet Corner: A Simple Guide to Self-Peace ... Nancy O'Hara



Solitude: A Return to the Self ... Anthony Storr



The Call of Solitude: Alonetime in a World of Attachment ... Ester Schaler Buccholz



Fifty Days of Solitude: A Memoir ... Doris Grumbach

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Issue 4

Creativity and Foolishness

We adults are too serious. As we grow up, we're taught to give up "this foolishness" and get responsible. But being responsible doesn't mean you can't be harmlessly silly at times. A little silliness, at appropriate times and places, can be good for the soul and help your creative juices flow.

A few weeks ago, I was determined to go ice skating in Central Park one Friday. It turned out to be the first hot day of the season and the rink, although skatable, was covered with puddles. While we adults were carefully skirting around the puddles, the kids were deliberately falling into them. They came out soaked, but what a great time they were having!

Back in my acting days, my theatrical friends and I used to play some theatre games that are great for stimulating the imagination and a lot of fun. One is based on an old method acting technique called "endowment." You take an object and pretend to use it as something else. For example, a lightbulb can become a pen, a cigarette, a telescope, a spoon, a doorknob, a baseball, etc. An ashtray can become a hat, a frisbee, a rice bowl or a compass. Some of the ideas you come up with may be pushing credibility, but the point is to stretch your imagination as much as you can and have some fun.

Another fun game is storytelling. You can do this with as few as two people, although the more, the merrier. One person starts a story with a few sentences and abruptly stops, perhaps even in mid-sentence. The next person takes over the story and adds a few more sentences, passing it on to each subsequent person. The story may take a lot of bizarre turns and get very silly, but it's a great exercise for imagination and thinking on your feet. The important thing is to just keep it going and not worry about making sense. This can be a great game for a party or a writers' group.

People who are creative tend to be creative in many areas, and stretching creativity in one area can enhance the others. So, why not join a community theatre group or take an improvisation class. Sing in the shower. Get some crayons and a sketch pad and go to it; post the results on your refrigerator. Doodle. Write limericks. Tell bad jokes. Get in your kid's sandbox. Play a sport whether you're good at it or not. March through puddles and splash around. Write your name (or something else) in fogged-over windows. Do things that make you laugh.

It's hard to create when you keep yourself in a box of acceptability. Allowing yourself to be a little foolish, even if you do it privately, can help you to give

yourself permission to let your imagination loose in your work and in your life. And you can always edit later!

The Power of “Enough”

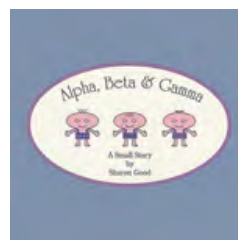
One of the biggest bugaboos in being creative is the thought or belief that you’re not good enough. As you do your work, you have that nagging feeling in the pit of your stomach that whatever you do just isn’t going to cut the mustard. Experience doesn’t matter, nor do credentials. You simply aren’t good enough and neither is anything you do.

If we all waited until we were perfect or knew everything before we put our ideas out into the world, nothing would ever happen. If Edison had been afraid to fail, you might be reading this by candlelight. Humanity would be deprived of that and numerous other beneficial ideas and products.

When I was in school, I wasn’t particularly good at writing or art, so I never pursued either one. Years later, as an adult, I consulted with a psychic who told me I should be writing. I thought she was out of her mind, but decided to give it a try anyway. Although I wasn’t one of those people who *has* to write, I disciplined myself to practice and managed to knock out a few pieces. Nothing special, but I got through them. I still didn’t know why the psychic told me to write.

A couple of years later, I got my first Macintosh computer. The thing I loved most about it was the drawing capabilities (this was back in the pre-Windows days of the plain C prompt). Although I wasn’t very good at it, it was fun to create little drawings and print them out on my Imagewriter. By making changes pixel by pixel, I could compensate for my lack of freehand drawing ability.

While playing with the drawing program, I came up with a cute little character that I liked. As the character developed, along with two little friends, I created a story about them and more drawings. I even used picture fonts and adapted them to create what I wanted. In time, *Alpha, Beta & Gamma* was published in several small magazines and newspapers. A few



years later, I started a publishing company and, with additional pictures, my story became a book. Although I’m neither Hemingway nor Rembrandt, there are people who have enjoyed and benefited from my creation.

You *are* enough – good enough, smart enough, knowledgeable enough, attractive enough, have enough. You don’t have to be perfect or have it all.

Who and what you are now is enough to create something that matters, that will benefit someone. At the very least, it will be a wonderful outlet for your soul and spirit. And who knows where it will lead you.

There's a saying in the Bible about hiding your light under a bushel basket. We are all lights in this world, and it takes all of our light to make it shine as brightly as it can. Listen to your friendly neighborhood psychic – or better yet, to yourself – and trust that if you're drawn to create, there's a reason for it. You are enough!

Creative Tip

Do something childlike to unleash your creativity. Borrow your kid's Legos and build something. Get some clay or dig around in the dirt. Build a sand castle. Fly a kite.

Wise Words

"People want to know why I do this, why I write such gross stuff. I like to tell them I have the heart of a small boy ... and I keep it in a jar on my desk."
~ Stephen King

"When in doubt, make a fool of yourself. There is a microscopically thin line between being brilliantly creative and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth. So what the hell, leap." ~ Cynthia Heimel

Bookshelf



A Creative Companion: How to Free Your Creative Spirit ... Sark



Living Out Loud: Design Your Life of Unlimited Possibilities ...
Angela Wilson



Five Star Mind: Games and Exercises to Stimulate Your Creativity and Imagination ... Tom Wujec



Ending the Struggle Against Yourself: A Workbook for Developing Deep Confidence and Self-Acceptance ... Stan Taubman



The Confidence Course: Seven Steps to Self-Fulfillment ... Walter Anderson

Issue 5

Making Powerful Life Choices

One of the hardest things we do in life is making choices and decisions. But it's also one of the most powerful. Choices are the hinges upon which the paths of our lives turn. You can probably remember a choice you made sometime in your life that set your life on a completely different course than if you had chosen one of the other options available to you.

We're faced with choices every day. Some are big, life-changing choices, but many are small, day-to-day ones. So, how do you approach these different types of choices? How can you make the day-to-day choices without getting caught up in minutiae? How can you deal with choices in the moment while keeping the big picture in mind? When you've thought out the larger choices, which I'll call fundamental choices, you create a context for choosing that allows the smaller choices to fall into place more effortlessly.

Fundamental choices are based on knowing who you are and what truly matters most to you. These are the kind of choices that take time and contemplation. Who are you? What makes you really happy? If you could do anything with your life, what would it be? What do you need (physical, emotional, mental, spiritual) to thrive, not just survive? What do you value, both in terms of what feels morally right to you and what makes you feel whole?

As I contemplated these questions, these are some of the fundamental choices I came up with:

- ~ I am someone who needs variety.
- ~ I am someone who needs a creative outlet.
- ~ I am someone who needs to be stimulated and grow intellectually.
- ~ I am someone who needs to be physically and mentally healthy.
- ~ I am someone who needs to explore and be in touch with my spirituality.
- ~ I am someone who needs to be challenged.
- ~ I am someone who needs community.
- ~ I am someone who needs to feel loved and valued.

These choices provide a sort of compass upon which to gauge the choices that come up in life, something solid to balance the "shoulds and oughts" that bombard us and throw us off course. With these fundamental choices in place, I can go on to make specific choices about how I want my life to be:

- ~ Although I am ambitious in my work and have plenty to keep me busy, I make time for spiritual pursuits, fun and exercise.
- ~ I choose to pursue a variety of endeavors rather than focus on one, although I may never be as great an expert on any one.
- ~ Although I can get caught up at my computer till the wee hours, I also need a certain amount of sleep to function well, so I choose to turn off the computer at a certain time even though I want to do more.
- ~ I make my friends a priority because it feeds me emotionally and provides the community I crave.
- ~ I choose to live a balanced life rather than go for achievements and accolades at all costs.

Having thought these through, when a friend calls me to come out and play, I have specific criteria by which to decide whether my needs and values will be served better by spending time with my friend or getting some work done. It can help me see if I'm focusing too heavily on one area at the expense of another, and I can make choices to restore balance.

Choices can be challenging and demanding, and sometimes you feel like you'd just like to sit back and let someone else tell you what to do. But choice is a gift, and when you practice it regularly and see the ease with which your life begins to fall into place, you'll welcome it.

Dealing with Rejection

We all hate rejection, maybe even fear it. And we all have to face it at some time in our lives. But for the artist, rejection can come often and cut deeply. An actor may face rejection as much as daily, and when you yourself are the instrument of your work, it's hard not to take the rejection personally.

People who are creative are sensitive by nature. It can be a delicate balance to build up the emotional strength to handle the ups and downs of your work without shutting yourself down. When I was just starting out as a young actress, my ego was more fragile, and it sometimes took me months to recover from a major rejection. As I grew stronger and more confident, I could eventually deal with a disappointment in an hour or even minutes.

There are times when you simply need to give yourself time and space to heal from a big disappointment or rejection. But you don't have to wait helplessly until you're ready to heal. There are techniques you can use to ease the way.

When the rejection comes, feel it deeply (suppressed feelings will only show up later for resolution), but then let go and move on. Be careful not to fall into despair or self-pity, as this can keep you stuck and affect future opportunities. You may need time to grieve or feel sorry for yourself, but set a time limit so it doesn't go on indefinitely.

Get support from someone who believes in you, whether it be friend, significant other or coach. Have them support you through the grieving process and lovingly let you know if you're indulging in it too long. Let them know you need to lean on them for awhile and return the favor when they need you. Do be wary, though, of friends who unknowingly support you in not succeeding. Having someone who's always willing to lend a shoulder and say "poor baby" can become more attractive and easier than facing the next challenge. You can easily get stuck in the emotional gratification of the sympathy or hold yourself back for fear of outdoing your friends and losing them or leaving them behind.

Separate your work from who you are. When you're creating something – whether it be a performance, a work of art, a verbal or musical composition – it's an expression of yourself, of who you are, and it feels very close to you, if not virtually a part of you, and often something that you love and touches you deeply. But there are times when you may need to step back and let the work have a life of its own, apart from you, as well as you having a life apart from it. Be sure that you have an identity outside of your art, so that your work doesn't become you exclusively. Develop a strong sense of who you are independent of your work. Get involved with other pursuits and other people. Find a healthy balance.

On days that you have an interview, audition, jury or critique, plan an activity afterwards (preferably with someone) so you're not focusing on it. If it turns out to be an occasion for celebration, so much the better. But if it's a disappointment, having something else to do will keep you from dwelling on it.

And finally, focus on the future, rather than the past. The past will affect future work only if you let it. Learn the lessons it offers and let it go. Failure happens, but that doesn't mean it will continue to happen. People who are winners at life have both successes and failures. The difference is, they use their failures as learning experiences rather than opportunities to beat themselves up or hold themselves back. If you've faced a rejection, learn from it, evaluate the value of the feedback, make the improvements, and move on to the next opportunity.

Creative Tip

When you need to make a major life choice, pretend you're at the end of your life looking back. Consider each option from that perspective and see whether it leaves you feeling gratified or regretful.

Wise Words

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them." ~ George Bernard Shaw

Bookshelf



Find Your Purpose, Change Your Life: Getting to the Heart of Your Life's Mission ... Carol Adrienne



Elegant Choices, Healing Choices ... Marsha Sinetar



Choices With Clout: How to Make Things Happen By Making the Right Decisions Every Day of Your Life ... Wilbur Cross



The Joy of Failure!: How to Turn Failure, Rejection, and Pain into Extraordinary Success ... Wayne Allyn Root



Don't Take It Personally!: The Art of Dealing With Rejection ... Elayne Savage



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

Issue 6

Making Money While You Create

Very often, while we're building our creative careers, we have to find other ways of making money. We may fall into jobs we began in high school or college, developing additional skills and getting better positions. Computers have opened up a myriad of well-paying jobs that you don't have to "take home" with you and that don't carry the stresses of waiting tables. If the work is pleasant enough, pays enough and doesn't drain your creative energy, these are certainly viable options. But another possibility is to adapt your creative skills for the market.

Make a list of the skills and resources you've developed in and around your craft. How else can you apply these skills? Do they fit into an existing job, or can you create something new? If you have an entrepreneurial bent, you might want to start your own business. One actor I know who's self-motivated and efficient set up his own "guy friday" business, doing errands for other people. Another started a service organizing and managing home moves and relocations for busy executives. Or get the Sunday classifieds and go through with a fine-tooth comb and some imagination to see where you could apply your skills.

How about a mailing service to send out pictures and resumes or press releases using databases you've developed for your own mailings? Or selling your mailing list on self-stick mailing labels? How about teaching kids or beginners what you know? Selling theatre books, art supplies or musical instruments in a retail store? Or turning a hobby into a job, like teaching tennis or skating, or working in the pro shop?

Or how about these ...

- ~ Artists: Portraits, hand-made notecards, commercial illustration or graphic design
- ~ Writers: Write articles for a local newspaper or regional magazine, write back cover copy for books, edit other people's writing or ghostwrite
- ~ Actors: Witness at mock trials in law schools, record audiobooks, coach executives on public speaking
- ~ Singers: Supernumerary for operas, lead singalongs at children's parties, church choir
- ~ Dancers: Fitness trainer, artist's model, social dance instructor
- ~ Musicians: Play at weddings and private parties, accompany singers or dance classes, busker (street entertainer)

Taking other jobs may feel to you like a failure. But doing what you need to do to support yourself while you build your artistic career is smart. The suffering, starving artist image just doesn't cut it anymore. Aside from the expense of your training and supplies, you deserve to be comfortable and creative. If you work it right, you can certainly have both.

Taking Care of Yourself

Being involved in a creative pursuit often takes a lot of time and energy. In the whirlwind of our hectic schedule – pushing ourselves to earn money, create and still get the dishes done – we can easily drop out on taking proper care of ourselves. But if you're sick or exhausted, you can't create. You need a clear mind to generate ideas and a healthy body to implement them, especially when your body is your instrument.

I find that when I'm excited about a project, I become driven to work on and complete it and forget to take time for self-care. But when I do that, I'm usually not happy with the consequences. Sure, I get a lot done. But sooner or later, I become fatigued, and if I keep pushing it, start to burn out or just feel awful. I need to find the balance between getting my work done and taking care of the day-to-day concerns of life without running myself into the ground.

A few key ways to take care of yourself:

- ~ Have a survival job that doesn't drain you and provides you with adequate resources. There are all kinds of flexible, well-paying jobs for imaginative, self-motivated people. You might even find one that enhances your creative work through contacts, information or new skills.
- ~ Eat fresh, healthy food. If you're eating on the run, pack a sandwich or choose something other than fast food or junk food. If you don't have time to cook, there are services that prepare home-cooked meals and deliver them to you at a reasonable price.
- ~ Get enough sleep. I know it's hard sometimes, but being fatigued is counterproductive. Honor the amount of sleep that you need and don't feel you have to compete with people who function well on less.
- ~ Exercise. If you're a performer, you need to keep your body in shape anyway. For everyone, getting adequate exercise helps keep you healthy, both physically and emotionally. Better to stimulate your endorphins with exercise than chocolate!
- ~ Minimize stress. Do what you can today and put the rest aside. The world won't stop if you don't complete your project that day. Worry is

wasted energy. Most of what we worry about never happens, and on the few occasions that it does, worrying doesn't help anyway.

- ~ Take time to rejuvenate. Spend time with friends. Meditate. Take a walk in nature. Take a bubble bath. Get a massage. Read a good book. Go to a movie. Enjoy a delicious, well-prepared meal.
- ~ Have a good support system and social outlets. Some creative work is isolating. Be sure you have contact with other people, as well as those in your life who support and encourage you.
- ~ Keep your environment neat and functional. A home that's uncomfortable, or where you can't find what you need, drains your energy and distracts you.
- ~ Recognize when you need a "mental health" day to just walk away from it all and pamper yourself.

This may sound like a lot, but when you're in good shape and focused, you can accomplish more in less time. If you can't do everything on the list, think of it as an ideal and go for what you can. Start where you're most out of balance. And you don't have to do it alone. If possible, hire someone to run errands or do housework, or divide tasks among your family or roommates. Trade favors with friends. Clean your house together one week and theirs the next. Have a house-painting party followed by a barbeque. Go to the gym with a friend.

And I strongly suggest not treating relaxation time as an indulgence. I can always find more work that needs to be done, so if I don't deliberately set aside time for play and rest – and put it in my calendar – it won't happen. I've even come to hold my periodic massages as a health necessity, to level off accumulated stress, rather than a luxury. However you choose to use it, do make sure you have some down time to restore body and soul.

Make self-care a priority. Set aside the time. It may be hard, but you'll find your productivity increasing, you'll feel better, and you'll enjoy what you're doing that much more.

Creative Tip

If you're supporting yourself with work you don't particularly enjoy, think of ways you can make your job more palatable. Approach the job with a fresh attitude. Create positive relationships with people at work. Make it a game. See what you can bring to the party that will make it a more positive experience for everyone.

Wise Words

"When we truly care for ourselves, it becomes possible to care far more profoundly about other people." ~ Eda LeShan

Bookshelf



The Job Book: 100 Acting Jobs for Actors ... Glenn Alterman



100 Best Careers for Writers and Artists ... Shelly Field



How to Launch a Freelance Copywriting Business: Creative Writing for a Living ... Jules Horne



Seeking Your Healthy Balance: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Whole-Person Well-Being ... Donald A. Tubesing



Joan Lunden's Healthy Living: A Practical, Inspirational Guide to Creating Balance in Your Life ... Joan Lunden and Laura Morton

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Issue 7

Being Creative Throughout Your Life

Creativity is often perceived as something that “happens” to young people, but dwindles as we get older. It saddens me to see people give up on life when they retire, feeling useless and bored. Unfortunately, our society has lauded the benefits of youth, diminishing the time of old age in the process. But each passage of life brings different lessons and different strengths, and we stand to benefit from paying attention to the wisdom of those older than us and using their experiences to open our vision for our own lives.

Creativity can not only continue throughout our lives, but deepen as we get older. There is much in life to explore at any age. Rather than seeing things through the eyes of our youth and mourning what we can no longer do, we can shift our focus and pursue the things we may not have had the time or patience for when we were younger. We can always learn something new.

Recently, I have become aware of two very special people who we would classify as senior citizens. One is my former singing teacher. The other is the father of a neighbor. What caught my attention was the level of creativity at which these two people are functioning. Both have been creative throughout their lives and are continuing to try new things, rather than resting on the laurels of age. In this issue, I am pleased to profile these two inspiring people.

Joyce Suskind

Joyce Suskind’s youthful vigor and appearance belie her 70 years. During the several years that Joyce was my singing teacher, my favorite picture portrayed her in the summer of 1947 as a student at Tanglewood. On the day the picture was taken, her “lunch club” had the good fortune to be joined for spaghetti on the grass by an also-young Leonard Bernstein. That summer, they had the privilege of participating in the US premiere of Mozart’s *Idomeneo*. Joyce, playing oboe in the orchestra, sat in the pit during the daily rehearsals and “died of ecstasy.”

Joyce had the good fortune to grow up with parents who believed in her and had a vision. Her mother always urged her to have a profession and not be dependent, and Joyce found herself espousing feminist principles at the tender age of 9, long before the word was even invented. She inherited her father’s love of medicine and planned to be a doctor until the age of 13, when her passion for music prevailed. Having studied piano from the age of 7, she entered the High School of Music and Art as one of its highest-rated

entrants, took up the oboe and became the best oboist in the school. After entering Juilliard on an oboe scholarship, she changed her major to singing. In studying to improve her English diction, she became so good at it that she later went on to teach speech and public speaking.

After Juilliard, Joyce specialized in contemporary music. Along with singing, she began teaching singers, as well as playing piano in nightclubs and accompanying modern dance and ballet classes. The need to make up her own music for the modern classes led her to composing when a friend challenged her to write music for a lyric he had written, and everyone loved what she wrote. She has since composed numerous pieces. As her former singing student, I can testify that she is equally adept at handling classical, jazz and contemporary music.

Although music became Joyce's primary focus, she did not give up her healing aspirations entirely. At the age of 16, she began learning the Alexander Technique to heal a back problem and went on to teach it, along with stress management techniques and Neurolinguistic Programming. She learned to appreciate the beauty of sexuality and childbirth from her father, who would say that childbirth was a natural phenomenon and should be painless. Years later, when she learned of the Lamaze Technique, she trained with Mrs. Bing, the only physiotherapist teaching the method in New York at the time. Joyce became the first lay teacher of Lamaze in the United States and is a founder of the American Society for Psychoprophylaxis in Obstetrics, as well as the American Center for the Alexander Technique.

Currently, Joyce has taken on the daunting task of learning orchestration. She composed a piece for a singer that she felt should be performed with an orchestra. Since hiring an orchestrator who was up to her standards of excellence was prohibitively expensive, she decided to do it herself. She began teaching herself from books, but realized that she could only get the feedback that she needed from a teacher and began taking private lessons. She feels that this pursuit is bringing her deeper into music than ever before in her life.

Joyce compares learning orchestration with climbing Mt. Everest. Along with the challenges and hazards comes a certain excitement. Orchestration, Joyce says, "poses an interesting problem to you. The thrill that comes with it; that's why you do it. It gives you back something. If you go out just to have a good time, you have a good time and feel good. But that's not enough for me. That's what you call a creative person. For the creative person, if they're not creating, they feel that their life ... that there's a gap in their life. You can fill it up, but it doesn't get full-filled."

Joyce is married to photographer Olaf Ringdahl, and they've been "having a marvelous time together" for 40 years. She advocates marrying someone you love and have lived with for at least two years. As for the future, the study of music continues to be her life's work. Along with that, she would love to live in foreign countries and study languages. She is continually working on her French and has made frequent visits to Paris, and she would love to learn other languages as well.

When I asked what advice she would give, Joyce suggested finding some kind of balance in your life. Find out who you are beyond the external pressures of family or society to be or do something, to have children. Examine your life, examine your choices. Discover what really drives you, rather than just doing what's expected of you. How would *you* live your life? If there's something that you *have* to do, are you willing to take the risk?

The word "old" has taken on a stigma in our society, but our later years can be a rich time of life. With aging and a waning libido, there are fewer distractions, and it's a great time to focus on things of the mind. Joyce Suskind is living proof that creativity doesn't have to diminish as you grow older, but can build on a lifetime of knowledge and experience, with a deeper sense of appreciation for all that life offers.

Mardo Williams

Mardo Williams was born in 1905 in an historic Ohio farmhouse. He began his writing career in 1927 as the only reporter at the Kenton, Ohio daily, the *News-Republican*, covering everything from sports events to major tragedies. He moved in 1945 to the copy desk of the *Columbus Dispatch*, becoming first a travel writer and later going on to write a daily business column with his byline. After mandatory retirement in 1970, he continued to write for a PR firm and edited a weekly trade paper.

When Mardo's wife of 65 years died in 1992, his daughters urged him to keep busy by writing down some of the family stories they had heard as children, drawing on a treasure trove of photos, letters, notes and newspaper clippings his mother had saved. At the age of 88, he bought a computer and learned to use it. (So much for excuses about being too old to learn computers!)

What began as a 50-page memoir about his mother's 110 years that his children and grandchildren could enjoy and learn from blossomed over the next two years into a 335-page book paralleling his mother's life with the emergence of modernized America. *Maude (1883-1993): She Grew Up With The Country* was published by Calliope Press in 1996. And then at the age of

91, Mardo gathered his courage and, accompanied by his daughters, found himself on the road doing book signings, talks at libraries and senior complexes, and radio and TV interviews, along with writing a children's book patterned after the adventures of his four great-grandchildren.

In his travels, Mardo has run into old friends and lost relatives, as well as meeting many new people. Last year, he autographed a book for Ann Davis, a former co-worker from the *Columbus Dispatch* who saw him on television and tracked him down at his daughter's house to buy the book. She became his biggest fan and has personally promoted his book, carrying a copy with her wherever she goes. They started going out dining and dancing and now share a home in Florida. Together, they are writing a novel about a romance between two 80-year-olds that they hope will inspire others to find the happiness that they have.

Mardo wrote his book as a tribute to his mother, and it has changed his life. He urges people not to sit home alone, but to use their talents. "If you can sing, then sing. If you can write, then write. Volunteer. Find new experiences. Commit yourself to a new interest." But then, this is a man whose mother, upon moving into a retirement center at the age of 106, first asked, "Do you have an exercise program?" and then, without waiting for a reply, added, "Well, I'm sure if you don't, you'll set one up for me, because I have a lot of living to do yet."

What more can I say.



You're never too old to start something new. And with all the breakthroughs in health and longevity, many of us will be living longer, healthier lives. According to Dr. Richard Restak, the brain can actually expand the connections between neurons if we continue to be intellectually stimulated and curious. And we can even push the physical barriers. The book *North of 40* features inspiring stories of older athletes.

While you may not be starting your ballet or baseball career at the age of 75, there are many things you can do that are suitable for any age. Dreams have no age limit. And when the kids are grown and you don't have to be concerned about going to a job every day, you can take the time to savor your new studies and accomplishments. Personally, I'm looking forward to taking piano lessons and learning to speak Italian. And who knows ... maybe I'll finally get to perform on Broadway!

Creative Tip

The latest research shows that staying physically active can prevent a lot of the diseases and deterioration we traditionally associate with old age. Create a strategy for keeping physically fit throughout your life. Choose forms of exercise that are appropriate for your abilities at different times in your life. If the sport or practice you've been doing since your teens is starting to get too strenuous, look for other forms you can begin to learn now – like tai chi, yoga or ballroom dancing – that you can do indefinitely. And walking is always beneficial at any age.

Wise Words

"Life is not a 'brief candle.' It is a splendid torch that I want to make burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations." ~ George Bernard Shaw

Bookshelf



Maude (1883-1993): She Grew Up With the Country ... Mardo Williams



Older and Wiser: How to Maintain Peak Mental Ability for As Long As You Live ... Richard M. Restak, MD



Successful Aging ... John W. Rowe, MD and Robert L. Kahn, PhD



Successful Aging for Women Over 50 ... Janine Hunka



The Last Gift of Time: Life Beyond Sixty ... Carolyn G. Heilbrun



North of 40: Inspiring Stories of Older Athletes ... Lauren Hurst



The Most of George Burns: A Collection Consisting of Living It Up, the Third Time Around, Dr. Burns' Prescription for Happiness, and Dear George ... George Burns

Issue 8

Being Different

Growing up different is hard. Adolescence is a time when we're driven to belong, to fit in. When we don't, it hurts, and the scars can carry over into adulthood. As adults, we need to learn to understand our differences, heal the scars and appreciate our uniqueness.

Feeling different can come as a result of being artistic, gifted or highly sensitive, and the three often come as a package. People with these traits will find themselves seeing or sensing things that others don't. They may have a vision that most people just can't see yet. They're more empathic to people's feelings. They can walk into a room and sense the "vibes" and will often respond more strongly to stimulus such as violence, both physical and emotional. If you fall into this category, you may have found yourself being called a "party-pooper" because you couldn't tolerate roller coasters or horror movies. You may have felt shy or alone or misunderstood.

In *The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You*, Elaine N. Aron, PhD explains that most modern societies have evolved from a social order that included two classes: the warrior/kings and the priest/advisors. Western society gives greater value to the aggressive/athletic type, and thus tends to undervalue the thinking/feeling type. We might also equate this with masculine vs. feminine energy, and I don't have to tell you that feminine sensitivity is looked upon as a weakness. But this thinking/feeling group makes up about 20% of our culture – a minority perhaps, but not a small one. Each group serves a vital purpose, and both are integral to a healthy, functioning society.

Each of us is on this planet to make a unique contribution, and to do so, we need to nurture and encourage our individuality. Anyone who has ever been on the cutting edge has had to find the courage to risk stepping out. If we try to conform, we may sacrifice the very thing we're here for. On the positive side, our society has granted a freer range of expression to those it deems artistic or gifted. This can range from sporting an eccentric form of dress to the expression of divergent ideas and strong feelings. While this has sometimes led to the stereotype of the "temperamental artist," that's a small price to pay for freedom of thought and action.

We need to learn to value our differences and respect them. Rather than trying to shoehorn yourself into a career that suits only your gifts, find one that also honors your preferences. You may have a talent that puts you in an atmosphere that you can't tolerate; you don't have to. You might choose to

build your endurance by staying there, but you can also make another choice. Chances are, if you fall into this group, you have many gifts and talents to choose from, so choose the ones that bring you the greatest joy in the most agreeable circumstances.

Choose to be around people that appreciate you for who you are. Find like-minded community, whether spiritual, artistic or activity-based, or maybe even within your family. As a child, your scope may have been limited, but as an adult, you have greater access to different types of people. I've found that my spiritual and personal growth has accelerated enormously since I connected with a community of people who study with the same spiritual teacher and, therefore, accept me and speak my language. I feel at home and supported there, and that gives me a strong foundation from which to take risks out in the world.

Being different as a child was a challenge. But now, with years of adult perspective, I can be grateful for my differences. If I had fit in and had a "normal" life, most likely I never would have taken my first steps on the spiritual path. Because I did, I have people and experiences in my life that have made it richer and more exciting. Learning to accept myself fully will be a life-long pursuit, but the more I can do that, the more I can contribute my unique gifts to a world that very much needs them – and yours.

Competition, Cooperation and the Pursuit of Excellence

One of the big sticking points for me in my pursuit of success has been an uneasy feeling about competition. To me, competition meant a battle and a defeat. Coming from a belief that there wasn't enough to go around, there would have to be a winner and a loser. So it wasn't about how well I performed, but how well I performed compared to someone else. And so, for me to win, it meant I had to hurt someone else or take something away from them. Not a very good feeling.

The resolution came for me when my spiritual teacher pointed out that "competition" didn't always carry the same meaning we give it today. Originally, he said, it meant "working together to bring out the best in each other." To confirm this, I went to the dictionary. According to *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, "compete" means "to strive consciously or unconsciously for an objective (as position, profit, or a prize), be in a state of rivalry." But if we look to the derivation of the word, we see something else: "Compete" comes from the Latin, with "com" meaning together and "petere" meaning "to go to, seek." In others words, "to seek together." So, my teacher was right.

I found further validation when I mentioned this to a friend. He told me about an aunt who was a big Scrabble fan and attended the national championships in the UK. The top players would play at their “competitive best,” meaning that they would not only strive for their own high score, but also to open up opportunities for their competitor to score. Those who played this way would usually have a combined game total that far exceeded the game totals of those who just played to win. This is definitely not the way I was taught to view competition, but what exciting possibilities it presents!

Think of science and the world of ideas. Very often, researchers will carefully guard their discoveries in order to be the first to publish them. What if, instead, they shared their discoveries each step of the way and collaborated with their “competitors” in order to advance their research more quickly? What if the objective was the value and timeliness of the achievement itself, and the service it will provide to humankind, rather than being the one to get the credit?

Like scientists, creative artists, particularly writers, will sometimes hide their ideas and their material, afraid to show it to anyone for fear of having it stolen. Unfortunately, this is a reality of life, and there are times when it’s smart to protect yourself, but how can you get published if you never show anyone your work? And often, when an idea’s time has come, several people will bring that idea into the world simultaneously and individually anyway.

And looking at the bigger spiritual picture, what if your contribution is to bring the ideas into the world, whether they carry your name or not? Perhaps you have a colleague or student who has greater visibility in the world and can give greater impact to the ideas or present them in a way that you can’t. We all have egos, and we certainly deserve to be acknowledged for what we create, but nothing is accomplished without an occasional risk. At times, it may have to be enough to know yourself what you did, even if the world doesn’t.

So, if we choose to discard the old notion of competition as a win/lose proposition, what do we replace it with? How about cooperation in the pursuit of excellence, for the greater good balanced with personal glory? If competition is “striving to do better than others,” then excellence might be “striving to do better than you did before.”

Let’s look at some other components of excellence:

- ~ Doing things consciously and proactively, not habitually or reactively
- ~ Paying attention to details, with an eye to impeccability
- ~ Producing the maximum result with the least effort

- ~ Being persistent and persevering; not giving up at the first sign of difficulty or adversity
- ~ Following your heart and your passion; caring about what you do
- ~ Giving value to what you do and who you are, not in comparison to anyone else, but for its own sake
- ~ Having a clear intent (a vision of your goal) and focused attention
- ~ Having the courage to hold your vision even if others don't see it
- ~ Being willing to take the risk of doing it "wrong" or making a mistake
- ~ Striving for your personal best; having the intention of doing better than you've done before
- ~ En-joying the process!

So, go forth in pursuit of excellence. It's okay to win, and it's okay to lose. Either way, do so knowing you gave your best, not to outdo someone else, but because it feels so good and you learned something in the bargain!

Creative Tip

If you encounter someone who's trying to provoke you to compete, rather than giving in to the impulse to fight back, back off. You can't have a tug-of-war without someone on both ends of the rope. Chances are, they'll get bored and leave you alone.

Wise Words

"If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." ~ Henry David Thoreau

"To be nobody-but-yourself – in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you everybody else – means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight; and never stop fighting." ~ e.e. cummings

Bookshelf



The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You ... Elaine N. Aron, PhD



Coming Home: The Return to True Self ... Martia Nelson



The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self ... Alice Miller



No Contest: The Case Against Competition ... Alfie Kohn



The Evolution of Cooperation ... Robert Axelrod

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Issue 9

Living with Uncertainty and Chaos

Nowadays, the world is moving so fast that we don't seem to know what our reality will be like from one day to the next, or even from one moment to the next. For many of us, uncertainty has become part of our day-to-day existence, and it can be very unsettling.

As humans, our tendency is to gravitate toward, or attempt to create, safety and security. We want to know what's going to happen next. When our lives are shaken up, we do everything we can to bring them back to "normal," to stasis. We try not to make waves. But reality is constantly redefining itself. By trying to make it constant or static, we inhibit growth and change.

One way we can cope with chaos and uncertainty is by understanding that it can be a result of something positive, that it doesn't always signify a crisis.

- ~ When you're stretching and growing, learning something new, you're in unfamiliar territory. Uncertainty is part of the process, and it can be uncomfortable.
- ~ Chaos is an inherent part of creativity. If you try to pin down the creative process to make it feel safe and comfortable, you stop or inhibit it.
- ~ Chaos is a part of choice. When faced with choices, the more possibilities you can come up with, the more powerfully you can choose. But having more choices creates more complexity and, therefore, more chaos.

So, we've acknowledged that uncertainty and chaos can be good. But that doesn't make it any less uncomfortable. Fortunately, coping with the discomfort is a skill that you can develop. You probably have some techniques of your own, and I'll suggest a few.

- ~ When you're in the midst of chaos, you may feel like you're on a merry-go-round and can't control what's going on. Stop. Take time to pause. Don't keep running. Take the time to think things out, to get grounded and centered.
- ~ Look at the chaos and determine where it's coming from. Is it a positive or negative place? Is your life truly out of control, in a downward spiral, or is the chaos a result of new surges of creativity and change?
- ~ When you're in the midst of a creative project, don't try to stop the chaos. Allow the creative ideas to flow without trying to organize them; that comes later.

- ~ Keep moving forward through the chaos, even if it's confusing. Do whatever you can to keep the momentum going, or perhaps to ride it, even though the direction it's going isn't clear to you yet. Just keep getting your ideas down. Eventually the fog will lift and the chaos will give way to order. Don't force it; allow it.
- ~ Remind yourself that you're safe and do what you can to reinforce that and get yourself centered. You might:
 - Use written affirmations or recordings.
 - Meditate, pray, do yoga or exercise.
 - For those who work with chakras ... The first chakra represents security, and its color is red. Get red flowers. Visualize yourself wrapped in a red "security blanket," or even get a real one.
 - Have a touchstone, one that feels good in your hand and calms you. If you like crystals, you might choose a black obsidian or onyx to repel negativity, a red stone like carnelian or garnet for security, or aventurine for emotional balance and mental clarity.
 - Pet your dog or cat, or hug a stuffed animal.
- ~ Get support from family and friends. Align yourself with other individuals or a group who understand what you're going through and will support you in moving through it rather than avoiding it.

Some days, it may seem as if the world is whirling about your ears. But if you can discern and understand the chaos for what it is, you can learn to cope with the uncertainty and use it as the creative opportunity that it is. At the very least, it will build character!

Dealing with Money

Okay, I admit it. Finance is not my strong point. Oh, I do okay financially and manage to keep myself out of trouble, but when someone starts talking about financial planning and investments, my eyes glaze over. I want the freedom and security that money offers, but I want it to just be there without having to think about it.

While some people love playing with money, watching the stock market and moving their money around to get the highest returns, many of us would rather not have to think about it. Financial advisor Marian Wellman says, "I think many people, and perhaps creative people in particular, have the tendency to throw up their hands when it comes to money." We would

rather not let concerns with money take our attention from our work, and as a result, we may end up managing our finances in a haphazard way.

Wellman continues: "The thing to keep in mind is that money is not a religion, or a belief, or a political persuasion that one is embracing or not. It is a tool. Knowing how to handle money is like learning how to drive a car, how to get around on a subway, how to pick out the right clothes. As a tool, money can be (is!) your servant, to help you run your life creatively."

So, how can we do this? Often, we find ourselves trading off time and money. Either we find ourselves settling for less money so we have the time to do the work we love, or we go for the money and sacrifice the time. We may be making enough to cover our expenses, but not enough to save (or so we think).

For me, the two major concerns regarding money are: 1) making more and 2) making the most of what I have.

1) How can we make more money?

- ~ Look for a better job. If necessary, take some classes to upgrade your skills.
- ~ Give value to your work. Many feel that because creative work is fun, you shouldn't be compensated, or at least not well. Love the work you do and expect to be handsomely compensated.
- ~ Have a positive attitude and expect abundance. Focus on and affirm your abundance. Create a collage with pictures representing the things you want in your life. Phrase your desires in a positive way; ask for abundance, rather than to avoid lack. Remember that abundance can show up in other ways besides money. When you do achieve your goals, enjoy them and feel the gratitude. There are numerous books and recordings you can use to help you with this.
- ~ Look at your parents' beliefs, attitudes, habits and patterns around money and see which ones you've picked up that you want to change.

2) How can we make the most of the money we do have?

- ~ Watch where you spend. Get value. Shop around, especially for major purchases. Don't let the computer salesman talk you into a top-of-the-line computer when all you want to do is word processing, Internet and e-mail. Avoid impulse spending. Create a budget and follow it.
- ~ Use a program like Quicken to manage your money. It's easy to use, allows you to see where your money is going, and makes tax time a

breeze. Take advantage of the financial planning calculators to plan savings, investments, debt reduction, budgets, etc.

- ~ Avoid debt. The interest on credit cards can eat up a lot of your income. If you need a cash advance, consider a bank loan, which has regular payments and a set payment schedule. Shop around for credit cards with low interest rates and pay off the balances as quickly as you can.
- ~ Handle your taxes wisely. File on time to avoid penalties. Find an accountant who can do your taxes in the most beneficial way. Invest your tax refund or use it to pay off debts.
- ~ Set financial goals. Prioritize. Think about what really matters to you and where you want to flow your money. Plan ahead for things you want, such as education for career change or advancement, a house or a special vacation. Have a financial reserve so you're not always living on the edge.
- ~ Save and invest. Have two bank accounts, a liquid fund that you can access for immediate needs and a long-term account that you add to, but don't touch. Make sure you put some money away on a regular basis. You can start small. According to Wellman, if you put \$2,000 into an IRA every year starting at age 20 and earn 10% a year, you would have over half a million dollars by age 65. That means putting aside only \$5.48 per day. Most of us could do that by eliminating some unnecessary or impulsive spending.

If you can't handle that much, do what you can. Put aside small amounts weekly or monthly, rather than a lump sum once a year. When I was an aspiring actress, a pension counselor started me off with a whole life insurance policy for only \$25 per month. As my income grew, I began putting aside more, but that original investment gave me something I could grow on.

- ~ You can't be an expert at everything. If handling money eludes you, get help. Some financial planners take commissions from the products they sell, so their services might not cost you anything. You may feel embarrassed to tell someone that you're in debt, but trust me, you've got a lot of company, and taking care of it now will prevent it from escalating.
- ~ Avoid get-rich-quick schemes. Very often, the only one getting rich is the person selling you the information. Yes, people do win the lottery, but for most of us, financial planning takes time and thought.

As much as dealing with finances may scare you or bore you, being responsible is powerful. Wherever you are, start now. Forgive yourself if you've messed up. Develop new habits. Give value to yourself and your work so you can attract more money. Make wise, conscious choices. Don't leave finance to chance.

Creative Tip

There used to be a time when each person could have all the skills needed to get through life. But life has gotten much more complex and busy, and we don't have the time or the ability to learn and do everything needed to support our lives. If you don't have the skills to accomplish a necessary task, think about hiring someone. Don't feel you have to do it all yourself.

Wise Words

"What I had learned from Buddhism was that I did not have to know myself analytically as much as I had to tolerate not knowing." ~ Mark Epstein, MD, *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart: A Buddhist Perspective on Wholeness*

"It takes as much imagination to create debt as to create income." ~ Leonard Orr

Bookshelf



Coping With Uncertainty: 10 Simple Solutions ... Bruce Elmer, PhD and Moshe S. Torem, MD



When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times ... Pema Chödrön



Spiritual Madness: The Necessity of Meeting God in Darkness ... Caroline Myss (audiobook)



Left-Brain Finance for Right-Brain People: A Money Guide for the Creatively Inclined ... Paula Ann Monroe



Your Money or Your Life: 9 Steps to Transforming Your Relationship With Money and Achieving Financial Independence ... Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin



The Wealthy Barber: Everyone's Commonsense Guide to Becoming Financially Independent ... David Chilton



*The Seven Pearls of Financial Wisdom: A Women's Guide to Enjoying
Wealth and Power ...* Carol Pepper and Camilla Webster

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Issue 10

New Year's Resolutions

Well, that time of year is coming upon us again. The time when we make our New Year's resolutions. How many of us have done this year after year, only to be discouraged and give them up by February?

The turn of the year is certainly a good time to reevaluate and create new pathways. But often the high energy and enthusiasm we start out with is deflated before we know it. We may be daunted by a huge list of things we've been wanting to change for years and never succeeded at. We may start out optimistically and then give up when nothing seems to move. So, why bother making resolutions at all?

New Year's resolutions are not a bad idea, but the trick is to approach them in a way that has some real impact. To make just the right list, with deliberation and intent, and then follow through. Some ways we can do this ...

- ~ Rather than making a "wish list" that you toss off, sit down and really think about it. Include only things that you're ready and committed to change.
- ~ Be realistic about what you can do. Don't make a huge list that will overwhelm you from day one. Perhaps choose one thing to focus on each month, each quarter, or just one major item for the entire year.
- ~ Write your list and put it someplace visible.
- ~ Create a strategy or action plan for how you will approach each change.
- ~ Give it meaning. Think about *why* you want to make these changes – how they will impact your life, the benefits you'll receive, the problems that will be eliminated. Find the motivation.
- ~ Make it fun. Engage your family and friends. They might even choose to make the same resolution, and you can work together and support each other.
- ~ If you "fall off the wagon," forgive yourself and start over. Ingrained behavior patterns don't always loosen up that easily, and it may take a few tries. If you're really committed to making this change, don't give up. Go back to square one as many times as you need to until it "sticks." And it will.
- ~ Allow a reasonable time to achieve your goals. Be patient and persistent. We live in a time of the "quick fix," and we forget that things don't always happen overnight.



Remember, the word “resolution” comes from “resolve” – “firmness of purpose or intent, determination.” (*Random House Webster's College Dictionary*)

When you make your list of New Year’s resolutions, give it thought. Make your commitment. And then follow through. Let the first resolution on your list be that this year, you’ll really do it.

Busy-ness: Friend or Foe

It happens time and time again. I run into a neighbor on the elevator. They ask me how I am. I say, “Busy” and perhaps roll my eyes a bit or sigh. They respond, “Good!” and I respond in turn with a quizzical look. To me, “busy” usually means “too busy” and having to come down with a cold before I’ll give myself a break and get some rest, while for my neighbors it seems to mean “getting a lot of business and making a lot of money” or simply “not bored.”

They say you teach what you need to learn, and right now, I’m faced with the challenge of finding some balance in my schedule and my life. Boredom has never been my problem, but I have yet to resolve how to accomplish all I want without periodically running myself into the ground. I can see how the stress of overscheduling is taking its toll on me, and I want to put a stop to it before the consequences become more serious than a bad cold. But how can I do that without sacrificing activities that are meaningful to me or those that support me financially?

I can read such books as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* and the myriad of books on simplifying life and come up with a few ideas:

- ~ Get in touch with your true values. Make sure they’re yours and not anyone else’s. Our society puts a high price on success, but you need to define what that means to you, rather than your parents, your spouse or anyone else.
- ~ Based on your values, prioritize. Make sure to give weight to the things that are important for your mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health, and not just to your obligations. You need to keep up with your responsibilities, but not at your expense.
- ~ Eliminate. If you can’t do all you want without stressing yourself or getting sick, do some cutting. This is the hard part for me. There’s a lot I want to accomplish and many people I want to spend time with. But something has to give, and there are things I need to let go. If I don’t, I may still get it all done, but find myself angry or overwhelmed, feeling tired or not having time for myself. And if I’m not enjoying it, what’s the point?

- ~ Schedule work time and personal time and keep them separate. As a self-employed person, I found myself inundated with personal and professional responsibilities that were always on my mind. My coach suggested designating “work days” and “personal days.” Now, I have separate “to-do” lists for each and only think about each list on its designated day. As a result, I find myself less stressed trying to hold it all together all the time.
- ~ Get help. Delegate tasks wherever possible or hire help. This may be as simple as sending the laundry out instead of doing it yourself, or buying prepared meals instead of cooking. Hire someone to run errands or grocery shop for you. Even if you *can* do it yourself, look at what is the most “cost-effective” use of your time and money.
- ~ Eliminate unnecessary clutter. Let magazine subscriptions run out. Stop watching TV programs that are just time fillers and don’t give you any real enjoyment. Un-join some clubs and organizations or participate less frequently. Delete junk e-mail without reading it (this goes for junk snail mail as well).
- ~ This is a hard one: Let go of friendships that are no longer serving you, or reduce the time you give to them. This may sound harsh or cruel, but time is precious and you need to actively choose how you want to spend it and with whom. In many cases, such friendships will drift on their own if you withdraw your attention. If not, you can move away in a kind, yet firm way.
- ~ This may sound paradoxical, but make sure you have some time where you don’t have to do anything. Schedule this time if necessary. Include time for self-care, exercise, spiritual pursuits, leisure, time with friends, a walk in the park, reading, thinking – things that you love to do and nurture you that don’t produce income. When your mind, body and spirit are cared for and refreshed, you’ll be more productive during your work time.

Looking at this list, I see that it’s not just knowing *what* to do, but *doing* it. Taking action. Perhaps it boils down to commitment and discipline. To do what I know needs to be done. The scary part is that if I do this, my life will change, and change is uncomfortable. But if I look at the consequences of not changing, I find myself more willing to face up to the hard choices and make them.

So, my resolution for 1999 is to eliminate some of the overwhelming busyness in my life and find a new balance. I’m going to start with what I know

and need to act on. If you have any other suggestions, I'd sure love to hear them.

Creative Tip

Be willing to live in the open question. Sometimes asking (and contemplating) the question is more powerful than having the answer.

Wise Words

"Determine what specific goal you want to achieve. Then dedicate yourself to its attainment with unswerving singleness of purpose, the trenchant zeal of a crusader." ~ Paul J. Meyer

"How you spend your time is more important than how you spend your money. Money mistakes can be corrected, but time is gone forever." ~ David B. Norris

Bookshelf



The Art of the Fresh Start: How to Make and Keep Your New Year's Resolutions for a Lifetime ... Glenna Salsbury



First Things First Every Day: Because Where You're Headed Is More Important Than How Fast You're Going ... Stephen R. Covey



Beating Burnout: Balanced Living for Busy People ... Frank B. Minirth, et al



How to Organize Your Work and Your Life ... Robert Moskowitz



Time Management for Busy People: How to Make Time for What Matters Most, by Getting Things Done Better and Make Time Work For You Instead of Against You ... Sam Amoo



The 10 Natural Laws of Successful Time and Life Management: Proven Strategies for Increased Productivity and Inner Peace ... Hyrum W. Smith

Issue 11

Keys to Learning: Transcending Limitations

As creative people, we are continually challenged to learn new things, whether by necessity or by choice. There are times when learning is fun and easy, especially when the subject is something we've chosen. On the other hand, learning something we *have* to learn can be like pulling teeth. And for some of us, with much of our formal education well behind us, absorbing new information becomes harder.

But learning is a muscle that can be exercised and developed just like our physical muscles. There is some truth to the old adage, "Use it or lose it." The more you continue to use your mind and body, the easier learning will be for you. Having a spirit of adventure and a few tools and techniques to work with can make a world of difference.

- ~ Do what you can to make the experience pleasurable. Study with a friend. Create games to help you learn data. Take a class rather than learning by yourself. Plan rewards for yourself as you achieve goals along the way.
- ~ Break the task down into small pieces that you can assimilate. Make it more manageable and less overwhelming. Let each phase build upon the previous ones.
- ~ Create a conducive environment. Have the proper tools and reference materials handy and in good working order. Find a quiet place if that's what's needed, or play some music that helps you focus. Get a babysitter or go to the library.
- ~ Are you tackling something you really don't want to do? If you're learning something to please someone else, you may need to look at whether you really want to, and either drop it or break through your resistance and renew your commitment for yourself.
- ~ Honor your learning style.
 - Do you learn better by visual, auditory, tactile or kinesthetic means? (Author Ricki Linksman discusses this in *How to Learn Anything Quickly: An Accelerated Program for Rapid Learning*.) While teaching computer skills, I discovered that some students learned better by watching me perform the skills, while others learned better by doing it themselves.
 - Do you favor left-brain or right-brain styles of learning? Or whole-brain learning? Perhaps the music I listened to while doing my homework in high school actually enhanced my learning process!

~ Learn new techniques of learning. The books in the Bookshelf section below, among others, offer up-to-date techniques for learning more quickly and effectively.

~ Take on a new identity for the purpose of learning.

I recently read about a language teacher who found that her students learned faster if they were given a new identity. When they came to class, they were given a new name, occupation, birth place and marital status and wore nametags with the new name. She found that the students who took new identities learned the language substantially faster. By changing identity, these students were able to transcend their old limitations.

Or simply create an identity for yourself as someone who has mastered this material and gone on to use it successfully. Hold that image of yourself as you go through the learning process. When I started ice skating this year (something I chose, but definitely a challenge!), I found that I was more courageous when I imagined that I was Michelle Kwan or Tara Lipinski.

~ If the pursuit is physical, remember that it takes time for your body to create new pathways and patterns, and that certain bodies are better suited to certain pursuits, just as we each excel in different intellectual arenas.

~ Be persistent. I've found that when learning something that's difficult for me, there comes a "breaking point" where it suddenly begins to make sense and flow a lot more easily. That point may come sooner or later, so stick with it.

~ Ask for help. When I was an actress, I was slow at learning lines. I would ask my fellow actors to "run lines" with me so I could learn them more solidly and feel confident in rehearsal and performance. Ask someone to quiz you, coach you or give you feedback on your progress.

~ Continually challenge yourself to learn something new. Make it fun. The world is full of interesting things to study – for career advancement, personal growth or sheer pleasure. The more you learn, the easier learning will be.

Learning is something you can continue to do throughout your lifetime. While there are times you may be required to learn new skills, learning is also something you can choose to do to enrich your life. So, don't be discouraged if the process moves slowly. Use the techniques available to you to make it easier, and enjoy the journey, rather than just reaching for the destination.

Being a Clear Channel, or Getting Out of Your Own Way

When you're blessed with a gift (and everyone is), whether it's artistic, intellectual or physical, it's very easy to let ego get in the way. Our gifts may make us feel better than others. Or our gift may overwhelm us; we may feel inadequate to do it justice or live up to other people's expectations.

Nowadays, when we think of channeling, we think of bringing through another consciousness. But, in a sense, we also channel our gifts. How often do you get ideas that seem to come from outside of yourself? We've all had the experience of creating something effortlessly. Many people feel that their talents are gifts from God. It's what we call "inspiration."

Each of us comes to this life with something unique to contribute. We can give that to our egos and insecurities, or we can acknowledge it for the honor – and the responsibility – that it is. It's like being caught between the angel on one shoulder and the devil on the other.

When I got the idea for my book, *Managing With A Heart*, the little devil voice kept saying, "Nobody is going to want to hear this from you; you don't even have an MBA." At the same time, the angel voice was saying, "Just keep going. You got this idea for a reason. You're acting as a conduit, and you have no idea who it's going to impact." I chose to listen to the angel, and the book went on to wonderful success. Had I listened to the devil, I might have kept this material from someone who really needed to hear it, along with blocking my own success.

If you get an idea you can't get out of your head, go with it. Get out of your own way. Don't judge or block it. As they say, the lord works in mysterious ways, and your idea is something that is needed somewhere in the world, in some small or big way. We're led to believe that bigger is better, and anything short of a best-seller is a failure. But if your book reaches "only" a few thousand people, your painting is seen by a few hundred or your poem is read by one special person, you've done your part. You can feel satisfaction in that.

Creative Tip

If you're faced with a difficult or confusing task, or an overwhelming day, stop for a minute, close your eyes, and visualize yourself having completed the task(s) in question. Feel the feeling of satisfaction, and perhaps relief, at having successfully accomplished your goal. Now, go about your work. You'll be amazed at how much smoother your day goes.

Wise Words

"There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost. The world will not have it.

"It is not your business to determine how good it is; nor how valuable it is; nor how it compares with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours, clearly and directly, to keep the channel open. You do not even have to believe in yourself or your work. You have to keep open and aware of urges that motivate you. Keep the channel open." ~ Martha Graham

Bookshelf



The Einstein Factor: A Proven New Method for Increasing Your Intelligence ... Win Wenger, PhD and Richard Poe



The Photoreading Whole Mind System ... Paul R. Scheele



Natural Brilliance: Overcome any challenge ... at will ... Paul R. Scheele



How to Learn Anything Quickly: An Accelerated Program for Rapid Learning ... Ricki Linksman



Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century: The 6 Step Plan to Unlock Your Master Mind ... Colin Penfield Rose



Inspired Lives: Exploring the Role of Faith and Spirituality in the Lives of Extraordinary People ... Joanna Laufer and Kenneth S. Lewis

Issue 12

Reclaiming Your Power: Forgiveness and Guilt

In this issue, we're going to look at a couple of significant, although perhaps uncomfortable issues. While forgiveness and guilt are matters that need to be faced by everyone, as creative people, we need to be especially conscious of how withholding forgiveness and hanging onto guilt rob us of energy that we could use more creatively elsewhere.

Forgiveness

As difficult as it can be, forgiveness is imperative if we want to move our lives forward. The myth about forgiveness is that it's something you do for the other person. By the end of this article you will see that it is, in fact, something you do for yourself.

So, if forgiveness is such a good thing, why is it so hard to do? Why would we refuse to forgive? For one thing, we may be holding out for vindication – for an apology that may never come – or for revenge. I find that when someone is willing to admit that they hurt me, forgiving is easy. But if they repeat the injury or refuse to acknowledge it, I want to hurt them back. We may enjoy the feeling of righteous anger, which can make us feel strong and powerful. Or we may want to punish the other person by withholding our forgiveness. But illogically, we often withhold forgiveness from someone we're not even in communication with. So, who are we really punishing?

Refusing to forgive keeps us connected to that person and anchored to the past. When you hold onto the anger, hurt or resentment, you tend to play out in your head either the scene where you were wronged or, more likely, a scene of revenge or vindication. And that takes some of your energy, every day. By forgiving, we can reclaim the energy that is going into playing out this scene over and over and release ourselves from that past. Also, we tend to be least forgiving about qualities we find hard to forgive in ourselves. We can use forgiveness of another as an opportunity to see where we might be doing the same thing to other people and change that behavior in ourselves. So, how do you forgive? Do you just say, "I forgive you"? Yes, sometimes that works. But more often, there are a few steps you need to take first. There are numerous processes available from books and teachers, and I will share with you the process that works for me.

~ First, realize and acknowledge what you're doing – that you're holding onto old anger, hurt, resentment, and perhaps trying to punish someone, feel sorry for yourself or create an excuse not to move

forward in your life. These are hard things to admit, but important to the process and to your growth.

- ~ Express your feelings. Often, we hold onto negative feelings because we don't feel heard. If possible and appropriate, talk it out calmly with the other person. Let them know how you feel and why. If this doesn't feel right or the person is not accessible, you can still have a conversation with them in meditation or your imagination; it will still have impact. You can also write an "anger letter" that you don't send, or express your feelings to a trusted friend or a counselor, so that you feel heard.
- ~ Look at the situation from the other person's point of view. Why would they have chosen to hurt you? You may be surprised at some of the insights that can surface with this step that will make forgiveness much easier. Also, there may be times when it's difficult to forgive what someone did, particularly in cases of serious abuse, but it is usually possible to understand and forgive *why* they did it – we're all flawed humans doing the best we can at the time.
- ~ Be willing to let go. This step is important to all types of healing. We may do tons of work in therapy or workshops, but to truly be done with it, we must at some point actively choose to let go and put it behind us. Be honest about this one. If you're not ready to truly let go, you may need to repeat the earlier steps (or the whole process) a few times first.
- ~ Forgive. This may be as simple as saying, "I forgive you," or you may want to perform some sort of actual or meditative ritual of release. Perhaps light a candle, write "I forgive so-and-so for doing such-and-such" on a piece of paper, see yourself releasing them, then tear up the paper and burn it. Or literally or meditatively draw a line, step over it and say, "I forgive; I am done with this." Or create a ritual of your own.
- ~ And finally, visualize taking back your energy from that person and situation. Feel released, renewed and revitalized.

Once you've done this process, if you later find yourself feeling angry or running the scene of revenge again, stop and change your thoughts. Or do the process again until you feel clear. You may have to go through it a few times to truly forgive and let it go. And whether you choose to continue a relationship with that person or not, the act of forgiving will free you both.

Guilt and Self-Forgiveness

What if you're the person who has committed the wrong? There are times when you don't mean to hurt someone, but you do. And there are times when, in the heat of anger or hurt, you deliberately lash out. It happens. Or

as you become more conscious, you may look back regretfully on past behavior that seemed all right at the time but no longer does. And you feel bad. You feel guilty.

Understand that guilt is often a “substitute” for a feeling you don’t think you should have or that feels too uncomfortable or painful. You may be angry at someone who died, or an aging parent or small child, and don’t feel you have a right to feel that way. Or you may have deliberately hurt someone you love, and that’s too painful or shameful to admit. But like withholding forgiveness, holding onto guilt keeps you imprisoned in the past. As painful as it may be, there’s value in dealing with feelings of guilt.

Some ways you can handle guilt:

- ~ As always, give yourself permission to feel the feelings. If you’re feeling a feeling, it’s the right feeling, no matter what anybody tells you or told you. You may not choose to act on it, but it’s certainly okay – and beneficial – to allow yourself to feel it. If you find yourself feeling shamed – which may very well happen if you’ve hurt someone – it doesn’t mean you’re a bad person. You’re just someone who’s committed a hurtful act; in other words, you’re human. (See Issue 106 for more on this.)

Very often with guilt, the feeling that you really want to get to is called “remorse,” to truly feel sorry (or sorrow) for what you said or did. This is not about blame, but about taking responsibility and owning it. *The Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* defines remorse as “deep and painful regret for wrongdoing; pity, compassion; from *remordiere*, to bite again.” Yes, remorse can be painful, but once you get through it, you can truly release your guilt. So, as bad as it may feel, stick with it until you get through to the other side.

- ~ Forgive yourself. Do the forgiveness process for yourself. Look at why you hurt, take responsibility for it and forgive yourself.
- ~ If appropriate, you may want to apologize to the other person and ask them for their forgiveness. Be careful of the temptation to turn the tables to make them feel sorry for you and soften your own pain. Feel the remorse and give them the space to express their feelings.
- ~ If you’re feeling guilty over past behavior, acknowledge it, forgive yourself and make the commitment to change the behavior from that point on – certainly a more productive use of your energy than punishing yourself through eternity!



So, take a few moments today to see where you need to forgive and where you need to release guilt. And remember, nothing is unforgivable. If you can't forgive the "what," you can always forgive "why." And that goes for yourself, too. The past is over, and the best thing you can do for yourself and those you interact with is to let it go, reclaim the energy that kept the anger and guilt in place and redirect that energy into a more positive future.

Action Challenge

Identify one person who you need to forgive and start the process above. It doesn't have to be the hardest one; you can start with the easiest and build your forgiveness "muscle."

Wise Words

"Never does the human soul appear so strong and noble as when it forgoes revenge and dares to forgive an injury." ~ E.H. Chapin

"Once you become detached from things, they don't own you any longer."
~ Wayne W. Dyer, *Staying on the Path*

Bookshelf



Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart ... Robin Casarjian



Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness ...
Dr. Fred Luskin



To Forgive Is Human: How to Put Your Past in the Past ... Michael E. McCullough, Steven Sandage and Everett L. Worthington



Forgiveness: How to Make Peace With Your Past and Get on With Your Life ... Sidney B. Simon and Suzanne Simon



The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive and Don't Know How ... Lewis B. Smedes



Beyond Shame and Pain: Forgiving Yourself and Others ... John Bercz



The Choosing to Forgive Workbook ... Les Carter, PhD and Frank Minirth, MD



Healing Life's Hurts: Healing Memories Through Five Stages of Forgiveness ... Dennis Linn and Matthew Linn

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Issue 13

Working Hard vs. Struggle

While some of us have trouble motivating ourselves, others have a tendency to push ourselves relentlessly. It may come from a feeling that what we do isn't good enough, so we have to keep doing more. It may come from having an abundance of ideas and interests to keep up with. Or it may simply come from the myriad of tasks we need or want to accomplish in this age of busy-ness.

My parents grew up during the depression. My grandfather worked two jobs, and his family did well. But in that time when survival was of utmost importance, personal preferences were not even a consideration. You did what you had to do to feed your family. My grandfather passed his relentless work ethic on to my mother, who passed it on to me.

Working hard has been ingrained in me since early childhood. Being responsible and disciplined is something I do naturally. But I began to realize that I was making my life a lot harder than it had to be. I made my hard work into a struggle. I've had the good fortune that never in my life did I wonder where my next meal was coming from or where I was going to sleep. I trust that most of you are in the same position. But I continued to behave as if I were in survival mode rather than enjoying the privilege and luxury of being able to choose work that nourished soul and spirit as well as body and mind.

Now, there's nothing wrong with working hard, and I want to pause a moment here to make the distinction between working hard and struggling. When you struggle, it's painful and gives you little or no pleasure. But working hard can be accompanied by a gratifying feeling of accomplishment. You're pushing your limits, but enjoying the process, or at least the outcome.

Recently, a friend sent me a copy of an interview with Frank Darabont, writer and director of *The Shawshank Redemption*, that appeared on the Wordplayer web site. Darabont claims that while his job does have a certain glamorous aspect, the work itself is very un-glamorous, with long, grueling hours during production. But he also says that he's not asking for sympathy. He realizes how lucky he is to have realized his life's dream. And he contends that "there are potentially more talented writers and directors than I working in shoe stores and Burger Kings across the nation; the difference is I was willing to put in the nine years of effort and they weren't. More to the point, it took Thomas Edison a thousand attempts before he got that

damn light bulb to turn on. Imagine if he'd gotten discouraged enough to quit after only nine hundred and ninety nine tries."

Some of the New Age media has led us to believe that once we get on the path to our "right livelihood," the rest will be a piece of cake. It's true that once we commit, opportunities often come to us that we never expected. But it's a half-truth that it will always come easily. Sometimes it does, but even our chosen path can involve hard work. But if we love that work, it doesn't have to be a struggle.

If you feel that you have been struggling, try some of these:

- ~ See where you can simplify. Eliminate tasks that contribute little to your life or find a way to accomplish them more efficiently.
- ~ Reframe your tasks so that you enjoy them. Perhaps do them at a different time of day, in a different way, or enlist someone to do them with you. Or simply change your attitude about them.
- ~ One of my pitfalls has been that when things come too easily, I feel guilty, so I make things difficult to avoid the guilt. I've taken to reminding myself that I do work hard and deserve to reap the rewards that come from my work, even when they seem to come "unearned." That way, when things just show up for me, I can enjoy them.
- ~ Watch out for perfectionism. I've found that most perfectionists are talented hard workers, so your work is probably more than good enough already. If you want to go the extra mile, do so for the love of excellence rather than needing to be perfect.
- ~ Acknowledge your limitations. If you're always tired or sick or resisting your work, you're probably pushing yourself harder than your body or mind can handle. Take a hard look at where you can eliminate or make changes. There isn't much pleasure in worldly success if you're paying for it with your health.
- ~ Reassess what you're doing. Are you doing work that you've chosen or something that your parents wanted for you so that you could make a lot of money? Consider whether a career change is in order.
- ~ Remember to feel and express your gratitude for having the privilege of choosing work that nourishes you. Many people spend a lifetime trying to find their calling. If you've found it, whether it be vocation or avocation, you have a lot to be grateful for.

Struggling doesn't add value to your accomplishments; it simply takes more of your energy. So, work hard, but do it because you love what you're doing,

or find a way to love it. And if it comes easily, so much the better. Enjoy it. You deserve it.

Getting Organized

One of the effects of being creative is that you tend to have a lot of ideas and interests. These often blossom into piles of books, papers and projects that build up around your home. And since you often have several ongoing projects, you want to leave everything out where it's easily accessible. This can result in a lot of clutter.

If you're anything like me, your home is "organized chaos" – filled with piles of papers that seem random, but as long as nothing is moved, you know exactly where to find almost everything. But despite my periodic attempts at clean-up, the piles seem to procreate, getting bigger and more numerous, while the size of my apartment, much to my dismay, remains constant.

In *Organizing for the Creative Person*, authors Dorothy Lehmkuhl and Dolores Lamping explain how creative "right-brain" types negotiate their world differently than thinker "left-brain" types. Left-brain types tend to be verbal, logical, sequential, structured and analytical. They're usually not junk savers, forming fewer sentimental attachments to objects and, therefore, finding it easier to throw things out. They find it easy to create and implement organizing systems.

Right-brain types, on the other hand, are nonverbal, abstract, holistic, simultaneous and unlimited. They tend to be junk savers and, when working on projects, like to see things laid out around them. There's nothing inherently wrong with this mode of operation, but you can see how it could lead to clutter. While I would find a Zen-like environment a little cold, I do find that when my clutter gets out of hand, it steals my attention and my energy.

We live in a world that demands at times that we engage in left-brain activities, such as time management, paperwork and finances, whether we like it or not. The degree to which you are right- or left-brained is on a continuum, and it can serve us right-brainers to learn to move the dial a little to the left.

Let's look at two aspects of getting organized: managing your time and managing your space.

Managing Your Time

One of the best rules of thumb I've found for managing time is presented by Stephen Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey uses two criteria for prioritizing tasks: urgency and importance. Tasks that are both urgent and important would obviously assume the highest priority. But where many of us go off course is when we assign "urgent and not important" the next highest priority. This essentially leaves us "putting out fires." It's the category of "not urgent and important" where we find the projects that will forward our lives and our goals, along with the relationships that sustain us. Staying in touch with this can help us prioritize in a way that will benefit us most. Doing the wrong thing efficiently will not make us more effective.



Have some kind of time management system so you're not filling the edges of your computer monitor with post-it notes or trying to keep it all in your head. Use a calendar or electronic scheduler, or create a system of your own. By getting your scheduling out of your head and down on "paper" (real or virtual), you free up your mind and reduce the risk of forgetting an important appointment, and you can accomplish your tasks more efficiently as well as effectively.

Managing Your Space

If you've already accumulated a lot of clutter, you need to deal with that. But in the process, if you set up organizational systems for yourself and begin using them immediately, you can prevent future clutter while making it easier to organize the existing clutter.

~ Handling Clutter

- Zoom in on one area and focus on that. This will help keep you from being overwhelmed by the enormity of the task.
- Visualize how the area will look when you're done.
- Work for only an hour or so at a time to keep from burning out, but for that hour, focus completely on cleaning that area. Choose a time of day when you have the energy and focus to stick with it.

~ Organizing and Filing

- Decide on a filing system that you like and buy supplies. This may require a filing cabinet, "milk crate" filing boxes, manila folders, a hanging file system, wall slots, etc. A stationery catalog or website

will be particularly useful for determining your style, as most stores don't openly display all available systems.

One system I like is using manila pocket folders for my main categories (you can also use hanging file folders or wall slots for this purpose). I can then set up sub-categories in regular file folders that fit into the pockets, making things easier to find.

- Start going through a pile. Discard what you don't need. Be brutal (remember, right-brainers easily become attached to objects). Sort what remains into categories.
- From the sorted piles, create a file folder for each category and file each item. As you continue, you'll have some folders already set up, so you can simply file.
- If you have a lot of paper and limited space, consider scanning papers into computer files and filing them electronically. This way, you can name and organize your files in a way that's easy to retrieve them, and digital files take up considerably less space than stacks of paper.
- A great way to organize ongoing projects is a "project box." These have several slots big enough to insert a stack of 8-1/2 x 11 papers, and you can assign one or more slots to each project. It keeps your work organized and accessible without taking up a lot of tabletop space. You might even use the cardboard shoe organizers available in housewares, but be sure the slots are wide enough.

Your clutter may have reached a point where it seems beyond hope, but it's not. Tackle the job a step at a time, while doing your best to avoid future clutter by using your filing system. As you begin to see spaces open up, the lightness you'll feel will help motivate you to continue.

Creative Tip

If you're having trouble getting started with a project, get into it any way you can. Organize your tools, gather notes, jot down ideas, do mechanical tasks related to the project that don't involve thinking or creating. This will help get you on track and focused in a way that you can begin to create.

Wise Words

"Writing's not terrible, it's wonderful. I keep my own hours, do what I please. When I want to travel, I can. But mainly I'm doing what I wanted to do all my life. I'm not into the agonies of creation." ~ Raymond Carver

"Your work is to discover your work, and then with all your heart to give yourself to it." ~ Buddha

Bookshelf



Life Was Never Meant to Be a Struggle ... Stuart Wilde



Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life ... Gregg Levoy



Organizing for the Creative Person ... Dorothy Lehmkuhl and Dolores Lamping



Organizing from the Inside Out: The Foolproof System for Organizing Your Home, Your Office and Your Life.... Julie Morgenstern



File ... Don't Pile!: A Proven Filing System for Personal and Professional Use ... Pat Dorff

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Issue 14

What Does Success Mean To You?

All of us want to succeed; that goes without saying. But what is success? According to the media, success means a busy and lucrative career, good relationship and family life, a great house, exciting vacations, lots of friends and, last but not least, plenty of money and material things.

But is this what feeds your soul? Your answer may be “yes,” to some if not all of the above, but for many of us, the American Dream is a far cry from what we want deep in our hearts. You may be successful in the eyes of the world and have all the trappings that go with it, but if your path doesn’t come from the heart, no matter how successful you are, you will always feel that something is missing. You need to stop and consider what success means specifically for you. What is it that, if you don’t do it, will fill you with regret when you look back on your life?

Very early in life, we’re sidetracked from our own dreams. Our parents and teachers see where our greatest skills lie and start steering us in that direction. They mold us in their own image, so to speak, and “for our own good.” You may have an activity that brings you joy and fulfillment, but if you don’t excel at it, you soon become discouraged and let it go. Or you may limit your choices based on what’s “appropriate” for your gender or economic status. Dreams are soon relegated to the stuff of fantasy.

But dreams are real. Each of us is here to fulfill a unique purpose, and we usually find our way to it via our passions, the things we love to be and do. Living in an achievement-oriented world, though, by the time we’re adults, our earliest dreams have been so covered by layers and layers of being told what we *should* want that we can hardly see them anymore, if at all. But dreams have a way of nagging at us until we pay attention.

Living someone else’s dream for you simply doesn’t work. You may have gone to law school or business school to appease your parents or make a lot of money, but if you hate your work and the accompanying lifestyle, you need to make some changes. You need to discover – or rediscover – your own dreams. This may lead to a major life change or a compromise, like practicing law in an arena that you love, such as arts law, or starting a business teaching artists how to set up their own companies and doing the paperwork for them.

One way of rediscovering your dreams is to recall what you loved as a small child. It may take a little digging, and your parents and other relatives can help by recounting their memories about you. Some of those childhood

dreams may no longer be valid – your longing to be an astronaut may now be relegated to watching *Star Trek* – but some of them may still be seeking expression. Your youthful dream of being a painter or working with animals or children can easily be resurrected. The form it takes may be different at this stage of your life, but it's the function that matters.

If you have a well-paying job that you enjoy and that serves you, you can make time for your dream activity during evenings and weekends or on your vacations. Having to make a living at something can take away from the pure joy you feel when doing it just for fun, so doing it avocationally may prove the better choice for you. If you choose to go for it 100%, turning your dream into a new career, be sure that you're prepared emotionally and financially for the change. Create a plan that gives you adequate time to make the adjustments. You may even consider doing your dream job part-time and taking a lucrative second job to supplement the income.

Be open to different formats. If you're attracted to the healing arts but don't want to go through the many years it takes to become a doctor, you may choose instead to become a licensed masseuse or acupuncturist. If you want to contribute to children, but don't want to go for a master's degree, you might sign on as a Big Brother or Sister. Or you may choose to apply your administrative skills at the animal hospital rather than the bank.

Look at the big picture of your life. Take into consideration what you love, what you need, your family, your finances, your age, etc. Even if you've been doing what you love, reevaluate periodically to make sure it's still serving you and perhaps redirect it a bit.

There's no better time to make a change than the present, whatever your age or circumstances. While you may have more freedom to change direction when you're younger, you may feel more driven to finally "do it" as you reach middle age and older. If you're in the middle of inescapable circumstances or commitments, then start with whatever steps you can take now and plan for the long term. Success is what's meaningful to you, not to your family or society. So, turn off the TV, disconnect the phone and allow yourself to dream and plan.

Getting Through Creative Blocks

Sooner or later in our creative life, we encounter the dreaded creative block. You're faced with an empty screen, a blank canvas, a lump of clay, and don't have a single idea about what to do with it. Your mind itself is a blank.

Everything in life has its ebbs and flows, and like life, the path of creation also waxes and wanes. There are times when the work flows – we're in sync

with the universe, and it's fun and easy. And there are times when we feel like a dry well; our cup is not just half empty, but completely.

Take comfort from knowing that blockages are part of the process, rather than a deviation from it. Instead of turning it into a monolith and trying to knock it down or navigate around it, we can find ways of embracing and working through the block and learn something about ourselves in the process.

When you find yourself blocked ...

- ~ Don't fight it. Stop. Meditate. Take a walk. Go to the gym. Get calm and focused, and give your ideas time to germinate. Then go back to work.
- ~ Think or meditate about why you're blocked. You may discover an underlying fear or anxiety that needs to be dealt with, or at least acknowledged, so that you can move beyond it.
- ~ Create a ritual to ease into your work time. Set up your tools, turn on soft music, fill the water pitcher, grab your favorite crystal or touchstone, say a prayer or invite the muse, and go to it. A ritual can help alleviate any anxiety or resistance you might be feeling as you face the day's work.
- ~ Find something that inspires you – another artist's work, a favorite piece of music, a poem. Perhaps make this part of your ritual.
- ~ Don't judge yourself. If you're worrying about what others will think, you tie your creative hands. Focus on the work and forget about the audience. Once you get something down, *then* you can evaluate it and make adjustments.
- ~ Eliminate distractions. Turn off the phone. Close your studio door. Take your laptop to the library. Get someone to take the kids to the movies. Forget about the dishes piled in the sink until later.
- ~ Make sure you've set aside an adequate amount of time, so that you have time to focus and you're not distracted by the pressure of completing your work in the allotted time frame.
- ~ Break the project down into phases. Set up short-term goals and when you intend to achieve them – deadlines can be a great motivator. Reward yourself upon completion of each goal and the whole project.
- ~ Have someone to be accountable to – a writing partner, coach, friend, support group. Communicate your goal to them and then set a time to report back. It's often harder to let someone else down than yourself.
- ~ Consider whether you're stopped because you need to do more research or get more clarity on what you want from this work.

- ~ Work on something that's already in progress to get your juices flowing.
- ~ Just start. Take baby steps. Brainstorm ideas. Make a few false starts (some of which may blossom into future projects). Write one sentence; make one brush stroke. Ideas rarely come out fully formed, and it may take time to develop one. When I'm writing this newsletter, my first day's work often consists of a few random ideas jotted down, and I flesh it out from there over the course of several sittings.

Art, like any other endeavor, requires discipline. By pushing against a weight, we build a muscle. By actively working with our obstacle, we build our creative muscle. Treat your blockage as part of your process – as a person as well as an artist – and you'll find new creative depth and discover new layers of yourself in the bargain.

Creative Tip

Having trouble coming up with ideas? Try getting quiet. Turn off the radio, TV, stereo. Close the door. Sit still. Allow yourself to go within and find the quiet space there. If you meditate, you're already familiar with this place. If you're new at this, give it time; it can sometimes take 20 minutes to still mind and body.

Allow the ideas to emerge from the void. If it doesn't work the first time, try again later or tomorrow. Like *Field of Dreams*, if you continue to provide the space, the ideas will come.

Wise Words

"From a higher point of view, success is creating something when you need it, making a contribution to others, and loving and respecting yourself and others." ~ Sanaya Roman & Duane Packer, *Creating Money: Attracting Abundance*

"The director and the producers had me write a lot of dialogue both before I came to Toronto ... and especially after ... (Interesting to me was the fact that I had no writer's block, not even for one second; I often was asked, at two or three a.m., to produce something by the next day – and I did it with no trouble whatever. It seems as if I'm not blocked when I can't afford to be.)" ~ Barbara Branden, author, *The Passion of Ayn Rand*, on the making of the film

Bookshelf



Celebrating Success: Inspiring Personal Letters on the Meaning of Success ... Gerald Smith, editor



Balancing Act: Create an Incredibly Healthy Life That Fulfills Your Dreams ... David Essel (audio)



Live the Life You Love: In Ten Easy Step-by-Step Lessons ... Barbara Sher



On Writer's Block: A New Approach to Creativity ... Victoria Nelson



Fearless Creating: A Step-By-Step Guide to Starting and Completing Your Work of Art ... Eric Maisel



Trust the Process: An Artist's Guide to Letting Go ... Shaun McNiff



Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking ... David Bayles and Ted Orland

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Issue 15

Consciously Creating Your Life

As we approach the turn of the Millennium, most of us are familiar with the phrase, "You create your own reality." While we could certainly argue that there are many aspects of our reality that are beyond our conscious control, there are many that are well within our grasp.

We literally create our reality with our thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and choices. Perhaps choices are the easiest to get hold of. You can clearly see that choosing to go to art school rather than medical school will have a definite impact on your life. But what about the other, more intangible aspects?

Einstein said that a key question to ask yourself is whether you see the world as a friendly place. Your answer to that question, and the attitude and belief contained within that answer, will surely affect the experiences you have and the way you respond to those experiences. We commonly say that "seeing is believing," but in fact we tend to create experiences that corroborate our beliefs. If you expect the world to be a friendly place, it's most likely that it will be, at least most of the time.

Circumstances are neutral. Each of us infuses the circumstance with meaning. You can see this when people respond to the same situation in totally different ways. It's your attitudes, thoughts and beliefs about your experiences that give them emotional color. If you approach your day with a feeling of joy and adventure, you'll likely have a better time of it than if you start out feeling burdened and angry.

What about your thoughts? Where do you put your attention? What is your intention? And what outcome do you expect? What you focus on, and how you focus on it, impact what you create. Say you're up for a job. If you have a confident attitude about your work and a strong belief that the job can be yours, you'll have a much better chance of getting the job than if you have serious doubts that you can handle the increased responsibility – even if you have the requisite skills.

And finally, what actions do you take based on your thoughts and beliefs? Choices are twofold. They consist of both a decision and supporting action. If you make a decision, but don't act on it, it won't become manifest in the world. So, you may change your attitude about your work, but if you never throw your hat in the ring for a better job, you'll certainly never get one.

Work with your creativity to impact your thoughts and attitudes, your choices and beliefs. Use visualization and "treasure map" collages to

envision the future you want to create. Catch your negative thoughts and change them to positive ones. Look at the beliefs you grew up with. Reevaluate them – which are yours and which are your parents’?

Replace the ones that are no longer valid for you with new beliefs. Post them around your home or write them several times a day. Look at how negative attitudes are getting in your way, and how positive attitudes support you. Brainstorm ideas for creating the things you want with a friend; make it a game. Run the gamut – be as practical and as outrageous as you can. Ultimately, you’ll probably land somewhere in between.

Whatever else you’re creating, your life itself is your greatest work of art. So, why not put into it the conscious care you would give to any of your other creations? Be at cause in your experiences, rather than at the effect. If you consciously and actively choose, you will often get what you want. If you don’t choose, you’ll probably be spending a lot of time scrambling to fix what life has thrown in your path.

Choosing can be scary – there are no guarantees of making the “right” choice. But even if you go down a few blind alleys, you’ll achieve more happiness in the end by daring to choose.

Creating Stability and Balance

When you’re living the life of an artist, your work life can be chaotic and unstable. The creative process itself can stir up emotional turmoil, and putting your work out into the world can at times be frightening and demoralizing. It can serve you well to balance your artistic life by providing stability in other areas.

During the 20 years that I was an actress, my professional life was unpredictable. By nature of the profession, I often changed jobs, as well as finding myself frequently out of work. All this along with the stress of facing as many as 5 auditions or interviews during an average week.

This can be very unsettling. To balance this, I needed a living situation that I could count on. I found a wonderful apartment that I could settle into for the long-term, as well as using my typing (and later computer) skills to find temporary work to keep my income flowing. In my younger days, I might even work a temp job during the day and perform in dinner theatre evenings and weekends.

Another blessing for me has been the stability of long-term friendships. Early on, our common link was our connection to the theatre. As we’ve grown older, many of us have moved on to other professions, but the bond

of our history and understanding of each other's paths has offered a precious continuity and support system as our friendship has grown over the years.

Each of us has different preferences as to where we enjoy frequent change and where we need to create some sense of permanence. Find your stability where it works best for you, or try one or more of these:

- ~ Have a regular routine. This can be a job to go to, even a few days a week, or setting regular work hours if you work at home. If you are doing your art full-time, have specific hours or days for work and for leisure, and keep them separate.

For example, you may want to paint Monday through Wednesday, handle paperwork and press releases or visit galleries on Thursday, clean the studio on Friday, and take the weekend off for fun and relaxation. If you're performing at night, you may want to reserve your days for self-care and socializing. This is especially important if you have a family, so that your kids and spouse also have a sense of stability and consistency.
- ~ Be sure to have an adequate source of income, whether from your art, a steady job or a significant other who's willing to help. There's no shame in having a "meat and potatoes" job; being desperate about money can quickly take the joy out of your creative work. Save at least a little bit every week. (See Issue 9 for some tips.) Create a reserve for yourself, so you have a buffer if an opportunity comes along that requires time, but provides little or no income.
- ~ Nurture your relationships. Artists are often "swimming upstream" in that their families don't understand why they're "wasting their time and talents" when they could be making good money in the corporate world. It's much easier to do your work when you have a good support system. Find a support group or one or more friends who truly understand why you're doing what you're doing and the challenges you're up against, and who believe in you. Have a stable home environment, a kind of safe haven where you can go after facing a grueling day of making rounds and rejection or a frustrating work session.
- ~ If you're taking a risk, have a fallback plan – money in the bank or other marketable skills you can count on. Make your risk a calculated one, rather than putting your well-being in jeopardy.

Choosing a creative path takes a lot of courage, but it doesn't require being foolhardy. And compromise is not a dirty word. It's okay, and advisable, to set up for yourself a stable environment so that you can create freely

without worrying about where the next meal or emotional support is coming from.

Suffering for your art is an outmoded idea that sounds a lot more romantic in novels than it is really is, and you deserve to have a quality life *and* follow your heart.

What Is Creativity?

I found this excellent piece on the web site of the Archetype Group. It is reproduced here with their permission.

Creativity is seeing opportunities, options and alternatives instead of parameters, guidelines and limitations.

Creativity is daring to see things through the eyes of a child. Even if you're overweight, bald and forty-three.

Creativity is appreciating diversity ... understanding that grass doesn't always have to be green ... making the world your canvas.

Creativity is doing things your mother warned would land you a one-way ticket to hell ... all because you know that something so enjoyable can't really be so bad.

Creativity is innovation ... being viewed as being a "little weird," when all you really are is ahead of your time. And, creativity is waiting for others to catch up.

Creativity is doing things because you want to ... your way. Not needing approval ... not worrying about what others think.

Creativity is not knowing where you're going ... and not caring ... because the journey is the fun part anyway.

Creativity is seeking solutions ... finding answers and knowing all along you're right, but never saying I told you so.

Creativity is not getting caught up in fads or trends. It's looking for a little different twist on new and old ideas.

Creativity is being visionary ... it's seeing beauty where others see mundane. It's being frustrated by people who can't think outside of the nine dots.

Creativity is asking not if the glass is half full or half empty. It's asking if it has to be a glass at all.

Creativity is seeing colors where others see gray. It's being the person in a meeting who always asks, *Why?*

Creativity is appreciating accountants, engineers and actuaries ... and thanking God every day that you don't have to be them.

Creativity is coming up with cutting-edge ideas that others reject because they find them uncomfortable and off the wall ... and seeing those same ideas being viewed as brilliant by those same people years later.

Creativity is something our twisted society squelches in children and pays big bucks for in adults.

But most of all, creativity isn't a process. Or something you can get out of a book. Or a class you can take in school.

Creativity is a way of life.

It's being comfortable enough to be viewed as being different.

It's knowing that it's healthy not to take life, yourself ... or anything else too seriously.

Creativity is not being satisfied with the way things have always been done. It's being bored with people who say, "I can't." It's not accepting answers just because someone who's higher in the pecking order says so.

Creativity is not having a hidden agenda. It's seeing things as an individual ... and not needing consensus to feel validation. It's being misunderstood because people can't put you or your ideas into neat little boxes ... as much as they might try. Being creative is not letting them.

Creativity is an inner energy ... a strength ... a fuel for the soul. It's an expression ... a vision.

Creativity is a gift. And most of all, creativity is having fun all the while you take pity on people who only see the world one way.

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Creative Tip

Sometimes it pays to delay devoting yourself to your art. Spend a few years working at a money job and saving. Gain some life experience. Then you can go on to pursue your creative work full- or part-time knowing that you have some financial security and worldly wisdom to back you up.

Wise Words

"We can always choose to perceive things differently. You can focus on what's wrong in your life, or you can focus on what's right. But whatever you focus on, you're going to get more of. Creation is an extension of thought. Think lack, and you get lack. Think abundance, and you get more."
~ Marianne Williamson

"Be regular and orderly in your daily affairs that you may be violent and original in your work." ~ Gustave Flaubert

Bookshelf



Beyond the Winning Streak: Using Conscious Creation to Consistently Win at Life ... Lynda Madden Dahl



Before You Think Another Thought: An Illustrated Guide to Understanding How Your Thoughts and Beliefs Create Your Life ...
Bruce I. Doyle III



12 Secrets for Manifesting Your Vision, Inspiration & Purpose: How to Make Your Dreams Come True ... Dr. D. Richard Bellamy



Quality of Life: Achieving Balance in an Unbalanced World ...
H. Stanley Jones



Living in Balance: A Mindful Guide for Thriving in a Complex World Joel Levey and Michelle Levey



Balancing Act: Mastering Work-Life Harmony ... Stephen B. Cohen

Issue 16

The Healing Power of the Arts

While we've come to think of the arts as a form of entertainment, and even as personal expression, many of us have long forgotten that the arts also offer us opportunities to heal. In the distant past, the purpose of Greek drama was to produce an emotional catharsis. Tibetan monks still use chanting, bells and "singing bowls" as part of their prayer and healing, and many native cultures include drumming, song and dance as part of their ritual.

The joy you feel when creating art can be healing in itself. It's easy to get "lost" in your creativity, relieving stress and thereby eliminating a major cause of dis-ease. But the effects are even more profound. According to the Art and Healing website (<https://artashealing.org/>), scientific studies have shown that art literally changes not only a person's attitude, but their physiology. Art and music affect a person's brain wave pattern, along with the autonomic nervous system, hormonal balance, brain neurotransmitters, immune system and blood flow to all the organs. They change one's perceptions of the world, including their emotional state and perception of pain.

The body is made to heal itself, and it heals best when in a state of deep relaxation. Art and music can bring the body into its natural state of balance and harmony, so it can best do what it was meant to do. Many of us, when creating, become so absorbed that we fall naturally into that "altered" state. Scientists with highly sensitive measuring devices have discovered that when we are in deep meditation or relaxation, the frequency of our electromagnetic field becomes attuned to that of the earth – a state of harmony. Composers such as Stephen Halpern specialize in creating music (www.stephenhalpernmusic.com) that assists the body in aligning to this frequency.

The arts have found their way into modern medicine as well. Surgeon and author Bernie Siegel has used drawing as a diagnostic tool in determining the optimal treatment for his patients. The University of Florida/Shands HealthCare (along with the medical facilities at Dartmouth, Stanford and others) has incorporated an Arts in Medicine program (<https://artsinmedicine.ufhealth.org/>). Their mission is to bring together patients and caregivers – both staff and family members – to explore their creative energy through such forms as music, dance, singing, painting, drawing, writing, clowning, puppetry and magic. This empowers patients to

strengthen their own inherent resources and do their own healing by regenerating body, mind and spirit.

Art is also healing as a form of self-expression and a revelation of the subconscious mind – the emotions that we're not yet ready to face consciously or can't yet express. The images can reveal themselves through a kind of code, the way they do in dreams, so that we can decode them at a pace we can handle, sometimes with professional assistance.

According to art therapist Elissa Ruccia, "Some people are comfortable expressing their emotions verbally and some aren't. Even for those who express themselves verbally, the use of art-making often leads to a deeper expression of their emotion. Sometimes words limit us. Sometimes we have emotions that we haven't yet found words for. Sometimes our grief or anger is so deep that we subconsciously block the expression of it for fear it will overwhelm us. Using art is a way to get at those feelings, little by little. To express it in some way. To give it a voice. Once we can see it, via our artwork, then we can begin to understand it, and our relationship to it is altered."

We've heard much in recent years about the mind-body connection. "People who don't find ways to express their emotions," Ruccia continues, "might find that over time their body responds with symptoms such as back pain, ulcers, heart problems, headaches, etc. I feel that self-expression is an integral element of a healthy lifestyle. Just as our bodies respond to exercise, to healthy food, they respond to self-expression. ... Art can also afford people with a very private, quick, and inexpensive way to express their feelings."

So, how do you make healing art? First, make the time and space for it (this may be the biggest challenge in these busy times). If you're engaged in a healing process, make it part of your healing program. If you're basically healthy, include it in your weekly "maintenance" routine, just as you would exercise.

Choose a medium that feels comfortable to you, that allows you to express freely. For trained artists, this may mean choosing a form that you're *not* trained in, so you don't get hung up on technique. And then just relax into it. Focus on a physical or emotional issue you want to heal, or ask a question, and then go for it. Don't worry about it being "good art." It's more important to give yourself the freedom to express what's inside you.

Some common forms of art therapy you might try (either individually or in combination):

~ Visual arts: drawing, painting, pastels, clay, photography, crafts, collages (using found objects, pictures from magazines, art materials, etc.)

- ~ Performance arts: acting, singing, dance, improvisation, stand-up comedy, playing an instrument
- ~ Writing: blogs, essays, short stories, monologues, poetry, music, plays, letters (not necessarily to be sent)
- ~ Journaling: either words or art (or both)
- ~ Meditation: through drawing, painting, sound (music, chanting, drumming), movement (tai chi is a form of moving meditation)

Aside from these typical outlets, Ruccia suggests that “creativity can be expressed in a multitude of forms – for some it is through exquisite math calculations, for others it is through photography, writing, directing, cooking and baking, sewing, knitting, weaving, architecture, gardening, decorating, art collecting, music, landscaping, poetry writing, producing events or shows. Making Halloween costumes for the children, planning a birthday party or a wedding. Arranging flowers. How one celebrates the occasions of their life.”

So, if you find yourself in physical or emotional pain, if you’re stressed at the end of your work day, if you’re going through a difficult time, don’t let the tensions build up. Use the art form of your choice and express your feelings, release the pain. Let the art heal you. Use it on a regular basis as “preventive medicine.” It may sound too simple or easy, but it works, and we even have the scientific studies to assuage the skeptic in you.

So, go ... Create! Heal!

A special thanks to Elissa Ruccia for her contributions to this article.

Enhancing Creativity Through Exploration

There are times in your creative life when your ideas seem stale. It’s “same old same old,” and nothing you come up with seems to excite you. You need some new inspiration. A great way to prime the pump is to go exploring.

One of the prominent qualities of inventors is their curiosity – their drive to search, to know more, to take things apart and see how they tick. By exploring, you can stretch your imagination and vision, find new ideas and give new life to old ones.

- ~ Take a walk through familiar places, but this time, take the time to stop and really look. Engage all your senses. Notice the sounds, the smells. Touch things, feel the textures. Try a food you’ve never tried before. If you’re in the city, look at the buildings above eye level. You’ll find lots of interesting architectural designs, old signs or carvings in the facade, the

odd gargoyle, and perhaps some interesting characters hanging out the windows shouting to the neighbors. Bring along the video camera and record what you see.

- ~ Explore parts of your town that you don't usually go to. What do you see? How does it make you feel to be there? Is there a reason you avoid this area, or is a place you'd want to come back to?
- ~ Hang out in a public place – perhaps the park or a coffee bar – and talk to people. Hear their stories. Ask questions. Do more listening than talking.
- ~ Take a nature walk, but bring along a magnifying glass or loupe. A flower or leaf is a completely different experience seen close up.
- ~ When you're going about your daily chores, change your routine or take a different route. Stay aware, rather than going on automatic pilot, and see what you discover.
- ~ If you have a broken or outdated appliance, take it apart to see what's inside, what interesting shapes and textures you might find. If you're doing collage, you might even want to incorporate a few of the pieces! (A side benefit: adding more RAM to your computer can be a simple task once you've "cracked the case" and see that it doesn't bite.)
- ~ Get on the Internet and just follow links to see where they lead you.
- ~ Spend some time without a schedule. Take off your watch. Spend a day or a week going where your heart leads you. Follow your eyes, your ears, your nose – kind of like hyperlinking *without* the Internet. Be willing to go down a dead end and turn around.
- ~ Explore using a different art form than usual. If you're a painter, photograph. If you're an actor, sketch. Write stories about your explorations. Experiment with sound and movement. Take an improvisation class. Get your hands in some clay.
- ~ Visit museums, historic sites and even theme parks. You can pick up the feel of a particular location or period that you can use in your writing, acting, painting. As you walk through the pyramids at Giza in Egypt, or the Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum, you can imagine what it might have been like to live among these structures.

In an ancient graveyard, speculate on who the people were and what their lives were like. At the natural history museum, picture yourself coming face to face with a dinosaur (and not just the bones!). Browse the art museum and put yourself in Monet's gardens, at the ballet with Degas, or spending Sunday afternoon on the Isle of Grand Jatte with Seurat.

When we're trying to create with a deadline, we can become stifled in our creativity. And there are times when we're simply bored with what we've been doing. Exploring is a great way to open up new avenues and bring a breath of fresh air to your work and your life.

Creative Tip

An interesting form of journaling is a dialogue you can conduct by yourself. Using your dominant hand, write a question. It might be directed to your inner child, God, or a part of you that's hurting or confused. Then, with your nondominant hand, respond to the question. You may get some surprising results.

Wise Words

"Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in a human situation."

~ Graham Greene

"Research has shown us that a person in prayer, a person making art, and a person healing all have the same physiology, the same brain wave patterns, and the same states of consciousness." ~ Michael Samuels

Bookshelf



Creative Healing: How to Heal Yourself by Tapping Your Hidden Creativity ... Michael Samuels, MD and Mary Rockwood Lane, RN, MSN



Creative Transformation: The Healing Power of the Arts ... Penny Lewis



Art As Medicine: Creating a Therapy of the Imagination ... Shaun McNiff



Writing As a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives ... Louise A. DeSalvo, PhD



The Way of the Journal: A Journal Therapy Workbook for Healing ... Kathleen Adams



Music and Miracles, A Companion to Music: Physician for Times to Come ... compiled by Don Campbell



Poetic Medicine: The Healing Art of Poem-Making ... John Fox



Sounding the Inner Landscape: Music As Medicine ... Kay Gardner

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Issue 17

Arts and the Internet

Note: This article was written in 1998, so many of the concepts are now common knowledge.

Over the last few years, the Internet has become a major part of our culture. We communicate, we investigate, we play, we shop and so much more. For artists, the Web has become a valuable resource, both for finding material, contacts and supplies and for presenting our work to the public.

Getting online and surfing the Web can be intimidating at first, with its mysterious and confusing technology. But once you're up and running (and lots of help is available for that from books and Internet service providers), using the Internet is amazingly easy and productive. The World Wide Web is literally that – worldwide – and gives you access to data and resources that were unavailable or difficult to find just a few short years ago, and without even leaving your home.

The Internet offers several benefits and opportunities for artists:

- ~ Research and resources that in the past meant going to libraries or making numerous visits or phone calls are now available at the click of your mouse. This can be a huge time-saver. Plus, the search capabilities of the Web can, with the use of well-chosen keywords, lead you directly to pertinent information that might have taken you hours or days to uncover at the library. Many government documents, news items and a myriad of information from an endless variety of sources are accessible this way. Of course, like any other research, you do have to evaluate its credibility, based on the source and how well it's documented.
- ~ Many artists have taken advantage of the Web as an accessible and inexpensive way to display, promote and sell their work. A website is fairly easy and inexpensive to mount and maintain, and it can be reached instantly by anyone with an Internet connection. It can serve as a brochure, a gallery for your work, a way for people to contact you and, in some cases, a way to sell your work directly to the consumer. Writers, artists and even musicians can post samples of their work, both for the general public and as professional references. Rather than sending samples, you can simply direct prospective customers or employers to your website. And for graphic artists and web designers, the website itself can be a showcase of your work.
- ~ The Internet makes it easy for people to find and contact you, and for you to find them. Many artists, agents, suppliers, publishers and others have their own websites and often include contact information. Artists

can track down and order hard-to-find supplies and equipment that aren't available locally. Writers can find publishers' guidelines, a writing critique group or an online class. If you need to contact an expert to interview for your book or article, the Web is just the place to look. And e-mail provides a gentle, non-intrusive way to approach people you don't know, even famous ones.

- ~ The fast-growing technology of the Internet has opened up new avenues to graphic designers and writers. Websites need to be designed and written and require a different approach than printed materials. The interactive capabilities offer a new challenge and new ways for communicating with your audience that have never been possible before. And again, the accessibility can't be stressed enough. Despite the tremendous scope of the Web, people tend to gravitate to common-interest sites, and your name and work can become known in your particular community.

Much of your research on the Web can begin with the use of search engines and directories such as Google (www.google.com), Yahoo (www.yahoo.com), DuckDuckGo (www.duckduckgo.com) and Dogpile (www.dogpile.com), or by using the "Search" function on your browser. Use the "Bookmark" function to record sites you may want to visit again. Start with some of the following to find appropriate resources for your field and see how other artists are using their websites, and then follow links to find additional sites on your favorite topics:

THEATRE

www.backstage.com

www.playbill.com

www.londontheatre.co.uk

DANCE

www.dancefacts.net

www.dancemagazine.com

MUSIC AND MUSICIANS

www.musiciansnetwork.com

www.spotify.com

www.classical.net

www.csmusic.net

www.youtube.com

ART AND CRAFTS

www.michaels.com

www.etsy.com

<https://www.founderjar.com/inspiration/artist-websites/>

PHOTOGRAPHY

www.photographymuseum.com

www.icp.org

www.bhphotovideo.com

WRITING

www.writerswrite.com/

www.writers.com

www.wikipedia.com

<https://blog.reedsy.com/guide/author-websites/>

https://kdp.amazon.com/en_US/bookshelf

This list is just a beginning. The World Wide Web is an endless resource, with new links being created every day. Set aside some time and go off on a cyber-adventure. You'll learn how to navigate the Web, in both random and directed ways, and find resources you can use now and in the future.

Cyber-Support Groups and Communities

Note: This article precedes the proliferation of social media and some of the information will be outdated.

One of the great boons of the Internet and the various online services has been the opportunity to get connected with people. The "Net" enables you to communicate with others near and far on a daily basis without even leaving your home. It provides opportunities to meet people with common interests who you might not find locally, particularly if you live in an isolated area. The Internet can help you expand your world.

Online groups can be tremendously fun and beneficial, and many kinds are available. You can engage in conversation about common interests at your convenience and find kindred spirits far from home. You can form professional alliances or keep in touch with family and friends. You can form new friendships and, in some cases, romances. If you're busy or housebound, you can meet people and have social contact that might otherwise be difficult or impossible. Cybergroups offer wonderful

opportunities for creating community beyond your geographic neighborhood.

But online groups also have their downside. While your group may start off with good intentions, it's easy for the conversation to devolve to the online equivalent of small talk. That may be fine if your purpose is purely social, but if not, online conversation can become a distraction (and in some cases an addiction), rather than serving you. Also, people in cyber-communities, as elsewhere, have their own opinions, preferences and motives. Arguments and fights can erupt, and the attacks can be just as painful as they are in person. Public forums in particular are prey to rabblers who just want to stir things up. Being aware of these possibilities is a good precaution when joining or forming a community or support group.

To help you get the most benefit from your online communities and avoid some of the pitfalls, I would like to offer a few tips from my own experience:

- ~ Have a common focus or interest. It can be artistic, professional, spiritual, a health issue, a hobby, your children, something you love and enjoy, something you're curious about. As a writer, you may have trouble finding enough local people who work in your genre to form a support group, but with the Internet, you have access to the entire English-speaking world, along with any other languages you may speak. And being exposed to the views of people outside your usual sphere can offer you new insights and understanding. If you're dealing with a health issue, the information available through some of the newsgroups can literally be lifesaving. And sharing tips, resources, encouragement and feedback about your work or hobby can be useful and fun.
- ~ Have a leader or moderator, at least at first. While decisions about group activities may be made democratically by the group as a whole, having someone who's willing to stimulate conversation can be important in the beginning in getting the momentum going and sustaining it until the community takes on a life of its own. The leader may be the person who initiates the group, someone chosen by the group, or someone who emerges naturally. Eventually, as the group members become acquainted and find their "level," the job of the leader may dwindle or disappear.
- ~ Have some ground rules, spoken or unspoken.
 - Define the scope and intent of the group. Some groups have a very social outlook, where all types of conversation are acceptable, while others prefer to stay focused on the common topic. Holding the focus may fall to any group member who spots a detour or to a group leader, depending on how the group is structured.

- Decide whether you want a private group, by invitation only, or a public forum or newsgroup. If the group is public, be sure that new members are informed of the parameters and ground rules.
 - Even in the nicest of groups, some conflict is bound to arise. Set an example of the type of behavior that's expected and how you would like conflict to be handled. Make some decisions about how far you're willing to let a fight go before the leader is to intervene. If it's your own group, create rules that will shape the group the way you want it. If it's a peer group, create the rules together so that each member of the group feels that their preferences have been heard, even if the majority of the group ultimately chooses differently.
- ~ Get to know the individuals in the group, or at least some, if the group is large. The people you meet online may be very different from the people you ordinarily choose as friends. Be open to the differences and benefit from the diversity. Also, people's online personas tend to reflect only a part of who they are, often very different from their personalities when you meet them, and getting to know the members in more personal ways can ease and deepen communication. (Online communications are notorious for being misunderstood, as you don't have the advantage of vocal inflection or body language in interpreting them.)

Phone and video conversations are a great way to connect more closely with individuals you feel particularly drawn to. If possible, meet in person on occasion, either one-on-one or in groups. Good places to get together include a common-interest conference, an artists' retreat, a concert, a workshop or a museum exhibit. Plan some activities to hold the focus, but leave time just to get to know each other.

- ~ Be tolerant of the various personalities in the group and their personal preferences for the group. Some people like getting a lot of mail; others prefer limited amounts. (Some groups offer a "digest" version, with an entire day's mail collected into a single e-mail.) Some love long, in-depth posts, while others like short, succinct ones. Some prefer to let the conversation wander and have fun playing together, while others are adamant about staying on topic.

Be willing to compromise and allow the group to find its level. This may mean that some will read every post, while others will weed through and delete the ones that don't interest them. Some will participate daily, while others will drop by occasionally or "lurk" (read without posting). Find a way to manage your participation so that it serves you without trying to force the group to adapt your needs.

- ~ Give the group time to grow. In the beginning, as you're getting to know each other, you may have little to say (which is why a leader is helpful). But as you get acquainted, you'll be sharing more about your common interest along with other, possibly more personal arenas. And be prepared for the number of messages to ebb and flow. It's natural to have periods of spirited conversation followed by periods of relative quiet. Likewise, allow the group to evolve and change as the individuals and relationships within the group grow and change.

There are many opportunities to join or form support groups and communities using your Internet connection and e-mail. Nowadays, most people find groups in their social media. Many sites dedicated to a particular subject or teacher have bulletin boards where you can share information with like-minded people. (Find these using search engines or through the teacher's website.) It's not uncommon to meet one or more individuals that you "click" with and form a relationship outside the group, or perhaps a private group of your own.

So, what are the logistics of joining or creating a group? There are several options:

- ~ Find common interest groups on Meetup.com and social media, or create your own group.
- ~ Set up a private bulletin board on your own website. Ask your webmaster or Internet service provider what would be required.
- ~ Use group e-mail. If you already have a group or are splitting off from a public group, the simplest way is to set up a "Group" in your e-mail address book and mass-mail your posts to everyone in the group.
- ~ Set up meetings on Zoom. Being able to see each other and share visuals makes it more alive and personal.

Online groups can be immensely beneficial and gratifying and offer you opportunities beyond your current horizon. Use your knowledge and experience with social groups and interaction and add to it the special parameters of meeting online to make your group the satisfying and worthwhile experience it can be!

Creative Tip

Technology has expanded so vastly and rapidly in the last few years that it's impossible for each of us to keep up with it on our own. So, don't try. If you have (or can acquire) the artistic, computer and writing skills required to create your own website, great! But if not, don't sell yourself short by

presenting yourself and your work in a less-than-adequate setting. Hire someone to create, design and/or write your website and contribute the parts that you can do well.

Wise Words

"All of you have skills; if you hone them through training and practice and then gain access to these ontological depths, your creativity can rise exponentially. If in addition to this, you also do your human homework, then you become more than a creative, interesting person; you become a moral force for good." ~ Jean Houston

"Science does not know its debt to imagination." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf



Arts and the Internet: A Guide to the Revolution ... V. A. Shiva



Writing.com: Creative Internet Strategies to Advance Your Writing Career ... Moira Anderson Allen



The Writer's Internet Handbook ... Timothy K. Maloy



The Photographer's Internet Handbook ... Joe Farace



The Internet Research Guide ... Timothy K. Maloy



The Internet Publicity Guide: How to Maximize Your Marketing and Promotion in Cyberspace ... V. A. Shiva



Communities in Cyberspace ... Marc A. Smith and Peter Kollock, editors



The Rise of Virtual Communities: In Conversation with Virtual World Pioneers ... Amber Atherton



Cyberville: Clicks, Culture, Creation of an Online Town ... Stacy Horn

Issue 18

Taking It Slow

Living in today's fast-paced world – especially if you live in a big city – it's hard to slow down. There's so much to do, so much to achieve, so many things pulling at you. The media is constantly telling you to reach for more-better-faster. Or your own inner drive may be pushing you to make a difference, and there doesn't seem to be enough time to do that and still take care of everything else in your life. It seems you can never do enough, fast enough.

Some high-energy people thrive on this pace, but many of us don't. We find ourselves getting tired and sick trying to keep up. We may achieve a lot, but the process becomes painful, and we begin to feel trapped in our lives.

Happily, there's a new trend toward simplification and paring down your to-do list. Time management plans can certainly help us pack more into our days, but that isn't always the solution. Sometimes we simply need to do less. It may be hard to give up things we enjoy, along with things we feel we *should* do, but better to do a few things well and enjoy them than do many things in a rushed and haphazard way.

Giving up the fast pace may not be easy, especially if you've been driving yourself for a long time. Try some of the following, and remember to stick with them. Change doesn't happen overnight.

- ~ Become more efficient. Get the unpleasant tasks done on a regular basis, rather than resisting and avoiding them so they pile up. Set up systems for repetitive tasks. For instance, take the time to get your finances on the computer once and for all, so that you can spend less time on it in the future. Reorganize your work space so you have easy access to the tools you need. Have a family meeting and brainstorm ideas for streamlining chores. Then have each person choose which tasks they'll be responsible for. Have weekly meetings to make sure your plans are working and to make improvements.
- ~ Honor your own needs. Go at your own pace. Aim for your personal best rather than competing with others. If being in the fast lane makes you anxious and stressed, create a strategy for moving over, at least to the center lane, if not the slow lane. It's not about how much and how fast you achieve, but how much you learn and how much you savor the accomplishment. There are lots of successful people who never experience their success, because it's never enough, and they're always on to the next conquest without taking time to enjoy this one. Celebrate

your successes, and let them be enough. Then, go on to the next challenge out of choice, not because you're driven to.

- ~ Prioritize. Get in touch with your values, then give priority to what will bring the most value to your life, rather than answering phone calls, dealing with junk mail and e-mail, or whatever other distraction comes up. Set aside time for what matters, and don't let the interruptions become more important. Eliminate activities that are old and familiar, but no longer serve you.
- ~ Let it be okay to be less of an achiever. Take a long, hard look at all you have in your life and all you want, and decide what *really* matters. Eliminate the things that don't, and move to the back burner those that you're not prepared to handle right now. Then, prioritize what's left and see how much time you can realistically devote to each. Be sure to include time for unexpected snags and interruptions. Pare down the list again if necessary. Many creative types have a zillion interests, and it's easy to overwhelm ourselves trying to fit them all in.
- ~ Take small steps. If you keep putting one foot in front of the other, you'll get where you want to go, at a pace that serves you. There's no value in reaching your goal if you're too burned out to enjoy it.
- ~ Learn to say no. Decide where you want to spend your precious time and resources, and courteously turn down offers that don't meet your criteria. Yes, you may lose some friendships, but they will likely be ones that you aren't enjoying much anyway. Set your own pace and direction in your career, not what anyone else expects of you. Go for quality, not quantity.
- ~ Be sure to set aside time to take care of yourself. Service is honorable, but if you're burned out, you won't have much to give to anyone else. Make sure your life is balanced. Include time for play, self-care, friends – whatever rejuvenates you, whether that be a creative pursuit, a sport, meditation, playing with a pet or a walk in nature.
- ~ If you want to bring new opportunities into your life, make space for them by eliminating. If you try to pour more water into a full container, it won't make it in. Let go of activities that no longer serve you, or that you choose to release to make room for more beneficial ones. Use the newly-found time to relax and enjoy rather than creating busy work to fill it. If you're devoting time, energy and intention toward preparing for and creating new opportunities, it will fill soon enough.
- ~ Remember, you don't have to live up to anyone else's standards. There will always be people who achieve less or more than you. Set goals that

feel good to you, that you enjoy working at, and stick with them. Many self-help technologies encourage you to set higher and higher goals and achieve more. If that doesn't feel good to you, don't do it. The new slogan is "do less, achieve more." You can do that by picking and choosing your goals – ones that are joyful and realistic for you – and staying focused on them, rather than spreading yourself too thin.

- ~ Begin and end the day quietly, with meditation, breathing exercises, prayer, writing in your gratitude journal, listening to soft music, spending a few moments with loved ones or just doing nothing. Eastern spirituality speaks of the power of silence. When you come from a place of being calm, clear and centered, you'll be more focused and productive, accomplishing more in less time. It's hard to be creative when your mind is racing in a thousand directions.
- ~ Stick it out. If you've been going at a fast pace for years, you've probably been running on adrenaline, and when you start to slow down, you may find yourself feeling bored or restless. Stay with it, rather than falling back on old patterns to relieve the discomfort for the moment. Adrenaline can be addictive, but you can get beyond the need for it. Likewise, you may need to stick through feeling guilty that you're not doing enough. When things start flowing more easily and effortlessly in your life, the guilt will disappear soon enough.

Remember the tale of the tortoise and the hare. You can be busy and active and never get anywhere, or you can move slowly and methodically and arrive in due time. You'll have to tune out the voices calling for more-better-faster, but it's the inner voice of your authentic self that really matters anyway.

Celebrating Your Successes

At times in our artistic careers (or any career, for that matter), we find ourselves dependent on the approval of others. In some cases, it may take years of work and practice before we're ever gratified with acknowledgment from other people, in the form of reviews, sales, jobs or promotions. That can leave us feeling defeated, deflated and discouraged.

If you sell your art or need to get a job in order to practice it, then certainly, you're dependent on other people's approval to make your living. But in a deeper sense, it's your own approval that really matters. The approval from others may never come – or it may, but not the way you want it to – but you can always give it to yourself.

By celebrating your own work, you can periodically produce for yourself a sense of accomplishment. Rather than waiting for that big commission or your big break, find opportunities to reward and celebrate your work yourself. You can create an air of success and celebration around yourself that will bring joy and give value to your work, and that ambience will attract others. Celebrate solo or include other people, but don't hesitate to initiate it yourself. It doesn't have to come from someone else to be worthwhile.

- ~ Celebrate the small successes as much as the big ones. Include celebration as part of your personal management strategy. Set short-term goals and reward yourself when you complete them, rather than waiting until you finish the entire project. If completing the first draft (or even the first page!) of your book or screenplay is a big deal for you, then celebrate. You don't have to wait till someone buys it.
- ~ Keep a success journal. Each night before bed, write down at least three successes you had that day, however small. Many people find that the inner, intangible successes are the ones that really matter. You can also review your journal when you're feeling discouraged to lift your spirits.
- ~ Take yourself out to dinner, alone or with friends. Toast your success.
- ~ Buy yourself something you've been wanting. You might put aside \$10 or \$20 each week that you work toward your goal, and once you achieve it, use that money to treat yourself to something special.
- ~ Invite appreciative friends over to see your work (or work-in-progress). Enjoy their enjoyment of it. Serve champagne.
- ~ Throw a party. Perform your work or let it be the centerpiece.
- ~ Your celebration can also be a quiet "going within." For example, create a gratitude ritual. Whenever you reach a goal, give thanks for all the help you received, both human and divine. Also, give thanks in advance for achieving your next goal to set the stage for the next success. Your ritual may be as simple as a brief meditation or prayer, or as elaborate as setting up an altar, lighting candles, singing, dancing, tithing, whatever. Keeping a daily gratitude journal has also proven beneficial to many people.
- ~ The completion of a project often comes with a feeling of being let down, particularly if you've been working with a group, as in a performance, and your "family" of months or years is disbanding. So, your celebration may also be a ritual of completion, letting go and moving on — a transition to the next project or quiet phase.

Remember, you don't have to wait for your "big break" to have a celebration. Honor all the work you've done, the breakthroughs and growth you've had, and all that you've learned about yourself in the process. Create that feeling of success about yourself, and let it know where to come find you!

Creative Tip

If you're feeling scattered and unproductive, stop, take some time to clear your mind and get centered, get clear on what you'd like to accomplish, and then go back to it. You'll find that things flow a lot more smoothly when you're calm and focused.

Wise Words

"There is only one success – to be able to spend your life in your own way, and not to give others absurd maddening claims upon it." ~ Christopher Morley

"Don't aim for success if you want it; just do what you love and believe in, and it will come naturally." ~ David Frost

Bookshelf



Take Time for Your Life: A Personal Coach's Seven-Step Program for Creating the Life You Want ... Cheryl Richardson



Doing Less and Having More: Five Easy Steps for Discovering What You Really Want – And Getting It ... Marcia Wieder



Slowing Down to the Speed of Life: How to Create a More Peaceful, Simpler Life from the Inside Out ... Richard Carlson and Joseph Bailey



What's the Rush?: Stepping Out of the Race, Freeing Your Mind, Changing Your Life ... James Ballard



Stop Screaming at the Microwave: How to Connect Your Disconnected Life ... Mary Loverde



Create a Celebration: Ideas and Resources for Theme Parties, Holidays, and Special Occasions ... Ellen M. Pals



Rituals for Our Times: Celebrating, Healing, and Changing Our Lives and Our Relationships ... Evan Imber-Black, PhD and Janine Roberts, EdD



Cultivating Gratitude, Gratefulness & Graciousness: Practice-Informed Solutions Supporting Your Journey Toward Authenticity, Empowerment and Healing ... Catherine G. Cleveland

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Issue 19

The Business of Art

As much as we would like to devote our lives to our art and forget about the business aspects, there are times when, for our own benefit and protection, we need to deal with some legal issues and paperwork. While there are professionals to help us handle this, it serves us to at least know enough to spot the areas in which we may need such help. Some of those areas:

~ **Setting Up A Business**

If you're creating work to sell, you may need to establish a business from which to do your selling. There are several different forms within which to do business: sole proprietorship or "dba" (doing business as), partnership and various types of corporations. Your lawyer and accountant can advise you on the best form for you. If your product or service might in some way cause harm to the purchaser and liability is an issue, you'll want to give some serious consideration to incorporation (and possibly liability insurance) as a means to protect your personal assets.

~ **Insurance**

As much as we hate to think about it, insurance can be important should disaster strike. You should have coverage for your finished work, tools, equipment and workspace. Life insurance can pay off business debts should something happen to you. And, as stated above, if your product might in any way be dangerous to someone – pottery that could break and injure someone or health advice that could be misused – check into liability insurance.

~ **Taxes**

Get yourself a good accountant, one who's familiar with the arts. As an artist, you may be entitled to all sorts of deductions, and an accountant could save you lots of money. Actors Equity offers free tax preparation to members.

~ **Copyrights**

Writers, musicians and artists will want to protect their work by copyrighting it. Technically, once your work is created, it is copyrighted, and you can lend additional protection by including "© [Year] Your Name" on each piece. But in the event of a conflict, registering your unpublished work with the copyright office will give you an edge. When a work is published, the publisher will register the copyright for you, in

your name. Electronic rights are still being defined, so be especially careful in this arena. Go to <https://www.copyright.gov> for forms and information.

~ **Trademarks**

If you have a distinct logo or trade name, you may want to protect it by registering it as a trademark, so that others cannot cash in on your hard-earned reputation. A lawyer can help you file the appropriate papers and check to see that your trademark is not already in use through a trademark search.

~ **Unions**

If you are a professional actor or musician, membership in one or more unions will eventually become mandatory. The unions set minimum standards and oversee contracts, removing that responsibility from the performers themselves, who can safely turn their attention to the work itself. They may also offer such benefits as health insurance, credit unions and training to enhance your skills (or change professions). In some cases, they may help you find work.

~ **Professional Associations**

While not a union per se, membership in professional associations can afford you all sorts of benefits, credibility, networking opportunities and support. They may help you negotiate contracts, provide legal support and offer group benefits, such as health insurance and travel or other business-related discounts. Some offer skill-enhancing and informational seminars.

~ **Contracts**

If your field is not covered by a union or professional association, you will need a lawyer or agent to review employment, booking or commission contracts to assure that you are being compensated fairly and not taken advantage of. It is easy for an unsuspecting artist to sign a contract that assigns ownership of their work to someone else. And if you are collaborating in your work (band members comprise a partnership, for example), you will want to consult a lawyer about a partnership agreement that spells out your rights and responsibilities.

~ **Agents, Representatives (“Reps”) and Arts Lawyers**

These professionals can find you work (or at least set up auditions or meetings), negotiate contracts and deals, and basically protect your rights and interests so that you can focus your attention on your work.

There are several good books that cover these issues in depth; some of them are listed in the Bookshelf section below. To find appropriate professionals, consult trade publications and associations, the Bar Association and get recommendations from colleagues in your field.

While it may be tempting to handle these areas yourself to save money, it could cost you big in the long run. Law and finance are complicated, with many nuances and obscure details. So, save your pennies and hire the appropriate professionals. You'll avoid many problems up front and be well prepared should any arise.

Getting Professional Help

Over a number of years as a spiritual seeker and coach, it's become very clear to me that none of us is meant to go it alone. It's too hard. The stance of the "lone ranger" individualist has become glorified over past decades, and I believe many of us have suffered for it.

In days gone by, extended families provided community and a support system. As we've broken away from our families and asserted our right to do as we please with our lives, rather than pleasing the "tribe," we've also sacrificed the foundation of support that our ancestors had. While it feels good to have a clear path to follow our dreams, it can be a lonely struggle without allies.

But not to worry. Help and support is available. I've spoken before about creating community (Issue 3) – something I feel is of utmost importance for all of us. But sometimes we need to go beyond that and seek professional help of some sort. That help can come in several forms:

~ **Personal coach**

Since becoming a coach myself, I've come to see how beneficial a coach can be in helping you stay focused and resolve or heal issues that you couldn't on your own. Many of us are not in a place where we require therapy, but we're still human and tend to get mired in our own thought processes. A coach can help us clear our vision, gain perspective and see beyond our self-imposed limitations. And the encouragement and support can work wonders for those of us who suffer from self-doubt or insecurity.

~ **Professional Coach/Teacher**

Just as athletes continue to have a coach throughout their career, you may find it useful to continue working with a teacher in your field who can help you to hone your craft and provide feedback, encouragement

and guidance. A teacher can, for example, help a singer use their voice in a way that promotes optimal health and avoids damage to the instrument, where they might otherwise push themselves too hard in their drive to succeed.

~ **Mentor**

It's not uncommon for someone accomplished in their field to take on a younger person as a protégé. Conversely, if you're new in your field, you might seek out someone older and more experienced to guide you. Like a coach, a mentor can give you guidance, feedback and perspective on your work and your career. (In his book, *Callings*, Gregg Levoy talks of a man who called his mentor a "tor-mentor," because he was constantly needling him to do stretch beyond his current ability.)

~ **Therapist or Counselor**

While the artist has gained an image of being more neurotic than the average population, this is not true. In fact, facing up to the demands and challenges of an artistic career can help you build great inner strength and a confident, positive ego.

However, if you've had a traumatic childhood or a recent crisis, or are depressed over a setback or continual discouragement in your career, therapy may be just the thing for you. You may be able to work through the issue(s) in time on your own, or with the assistance of one or more of the numerous self-help and personal growth workshops and books currently available, but a professional can help you "cut to the chase" and heal more quickly with their guidance and support.

Therapy can also help you clear blockages such as writer's block. In *The Tomorrow Trap*, Karen Peterson points out that procrastination is often not an issue of time management, but a fear that once we complete our work, we'll be shamed or humiliated for being inadequate, in much the same way we were as children. A therapist or counselor can help you find a realistic view of yourself and your work and free you to express your creativity.

So, if you're feeling overwhelmed or discouraged trying to be a lone ranger and do it all yourself, take off your mask, get off your horse and head to the nearest appropriate professional.

Creative Tip

If you have several stories, songs, recordings or pieces of artwork that you want to register for copyright, submit them as a compilation. That way, you can cover them for a single fee.

Wise Words

"We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit." ~ e. e. cummings

"The worst thing in your life may contain seeds of the best. When you can see crisis as an opportunity, your life becomes not easier, but more satisfying." ~ Joe Kogel

Bookshelf



The Writer's Legal Companion: The Complete Handbook for the Working Writer ... Brad Bunnin and Peter Beren



Mastering the Business of Writing: A Leading Literary Agent Reveals the Secrets of Success ... Richard Curtis



The Business of Being an Artist ... Daniel Grant



Legal Guide for the Visual Artist ... Tad Crawford



This Business of Music ... M. William Krasilovsky and Sidney Shemel



Music, Money, and Success: The Insider's Guide to the Music Industry ... Jeffrey Brabec and Todd Brabec



All You Need to Know About the Music Business ... Donald S. Passman



This Business of Artist Management ... Xavier M. Frascogna, Jr. and H. Lee Hetherington



Mentoring: A Success Guide for Mentors and Proteges ... Floyd Wickman and Terri Sjodin



Mentoring: How to Find a Mentor & How to Become One ... Bobb Biehl

Issue 20

Rediscovering Your Authentic Self

Many of the sages have said that growth is not a matter of adding to who you are, but of stripping away the layers you've added over the years that cover and hide your truer self. In Jim Cathcart's *The Acorn Principle*, the author asserts that "success and happiness come not from changing oneself, but rather from discovering one's natural talents and abilities and aligning one's life accordingly."

As a newborn baby, we're in complete touch with who we are – our needs and feelings. As children, we naturally gravitate toward things that are fun for us or arouse our curiosity. But as we get older, we're taught that certain aspects of our behavior are unacceptable and if we want to be loved, we're going to have to toe the line. We give up our hopes and dreams in order to fit in. This socialization may continue throughout our lives, unless we stand up for ourselves and actively seek to reignite the spark that was extinguished.

Those of us who have pursued our creativity and our passion have managed to stay in touch with our authenticity to some degree. But nobody escapes entirely; it's part of the human condition. An important component of personal growth is discovering ourselves anew, and the pursuit of reconnecting with our authentic selves can lead us to lives that are more pleasing to us, with less pain and struggle and new depths to our creativity.

So, where do you find this authentic self? It's not something that's foreign to us, but something that was always there and got submerged under layers of protection and conditioning. We want to gradually strip away those layers and find the treasure that has always awaited us underneath.

Some of the ways you can touch upon your truer self:

- ~ What did you love doing as a child? If you don't remember, ask parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles, anyone who knew you then. Look at old pictures or, if you have them, videos or 8mm films. Dig up old diaries or journals.
- ~ What are your values? What really matters to you? Look at each item carefully. Where did it come from? If you learned it from your parents, is it still something that you would choose for yourself? If so, restate it in a way that makes it your own. If not, replace it with something that's meaningful to you now.
- ~ What's fun for you now? What would you like to do, but avoid because you don't think you'd be very good at it or you're afraid of what people

will say? My writing skills in high school were not particularly noteworthy, but as an adult, I came to realize that writing is a great way to express myself and communicate with people, and my skills have developed with practice.

- ~ What topics are you drawn to? If you were going to subscribe to a bunch of magazines, blogs or podcasts, which ones would you choose? You might want to access a list of periodicals or journals from the library or the Web and see which ones appeal to you.
- ~ What do you do because you know it will please other people? How would you change that if you only had to please yourself? This may be a tough one, because after many years of sacrificing your own desires for those of parents, spouses, friends, etc., your own desires may be a distant memory. If this is the case, be patient with yourself and keep looking. Growth has often been compared to peeling the layers of the onion. Keep peeling.
- ~ Be aware of your body. What messages is it giving you? Which activities allow your body to feel relaxed and open? Which ones make you tense or uncomfortable? How can you stop or change the stimulus that causes your stress? It's like eating food that doesn't agree with you. Taking an antacid may handle the symptoms for awhile, but if you keep ingesting the irritant, the problem is going to recur. Likewise, if you hate your job, staying in a warm aromatherapy bath with soft music and pink light all weekend won't stop you from tensing up again on Monday at 9 am.

Reconnecting with your authentic self will be a long process that will happen in steps, so be patient with yourself. Enjoy the hunt and revel in each new insight. And keep in mind that this is not just about work. While the things you discover about yourself may lead to a career, they don't have to. It's also about making time for the things that feed your soul, whether it be music, art, a sport, reading a good mystery, building furniture, knitting, taking a class, gardening, spending time mentoring a child or volunteering for a favorite charity.

- ~ Take another look at your dreams from earlier times in your life. While you may not want to do the same things you did back then, you'll get some great clues. Then extract the essence of your childhood or early adulthood passion and give it a new form. For example, if you loved treasure hunts, you might enjoy doing research on the Web. If you were notorious for taking apart your toys, being a mechanic or building computer systems might be great fun for you now. If you graduated from acting school, but never had the nerve to pursue a professional career, joining a community theatre could be a very gratifying pastime.

- ~ Begin to be aware of the ways you function best. Are you a morning person or a night person? Can you accommodate your schedule to suit this? Do you like working alone or on a team? Do you prefer a quiet environment or an active, bustling one? Are you caught up in the fast lane when you really want to move at a leisurely pace?

When you're a tortoise in a world full of hares, it can be hard to slow down without becoming suspect to others. But part of rediscovering your authentic self is giving value to your needs and preferences and honoring them. It may be hard to be different as a teenager, when fitting in is so crucial, but as an adult, we can find the strength to be different and revel in our uniqueness.

- ~ Look at yourself in new ways. Rather than doing things habitually, stop and evaluate *why* you're doing them. Is this activity something that used to serve you, but no longer does? Is it something you're doing only because your spouse wants you to? Is there another way you can spend time together that you could both enjoy equally? Is there something else you can do that would be more pleasant and beneficial? Our needs and preferences change over time, and it's useful to periodically reevaluate the things we include in our lives.
- ~ As you come more in touch with what's truly meaningful to you, start to make a place for it in your life. Take time to do things that are pleasurable. Rethink your priorities. Begin to eliminate things that you do solely because you think you should. Certainly you have responsibilities to yourself and your family, but a lot of our obligations tend to be self-imposed, and you can negotiate some of the other ones with your loved ones.

It may be a little scary to do this, because people have come to expect you to be a certain way, and you could meet up with some resistance from those close to you. Try sharing your discoveries with them, so they don't feel left out or left behind. They might even want to join you in some of your new activities and make some changes in their own!

- ~ Start to bring your new authenticity into your creativity. When you're faced with a challenge at home or at work, instead of resorting to your usual options, try brainstorming some new ones. How would the person you are now (or the person you want to be) handle this?

Include some options that seem outrageous, and let that outrageousness expand the boundaries of your usual thinking. If you're in the arts, how can you approach your work in a fresh, new way? If you're a veteran, you may have habitual ways of working that are comfortable to you. Try something new. You may not stick with it, but it

can open up new avenues of expression for you. Try a different medium, a different style, a different approach.

Finding your authentic self may be a lifelong quest, and you may never achieve it 100%. But the insights you'll have along the way and the greater happiness you'll enjoy are well worth the pursuit. We're each unique beings, and the more we can uncover our authenticity, the more we can bring our special contribution to the world and feel really good about our lives.

Where Dreams and Reality Meet

"Follow your dreams" is a common mantra these days. For those of us, particularly in the western world, who have our basic needs met pretty easily, we have the luxury to pursue self-actualization, to "find our bliss." Up to a point. We still have to pay rent and put food on the table, sometimes for others as well as ourselves, and the standard of living these days can get pretty expensive.

Dreams are great. It's fun to fantasize about what we can be, and dreams are the seeds that lead to the realities we create. But how many of you had a dream as a child or teenager, only to have the roof blow off the house (figuratively, not literally!) when you announced to your parents that that would be your career?

When it comes to dreaming and "getting real," we tend to think of the extremes. You know the typical image of the dreamer, whose dreams are all fantasies that stay in their head. They talk about all the great things they're going to do, but they never seem to get around to them. The flip side is the realist who is constantly worrying about finances and impending disasters and doesn't have time to pursue anything just for pleasure. But keeping your fantasies in your head can leave you with some good feelings and long hours of daydreaming and nothing to show for it, while being too much of a realist can be a very dry existence indeed.

There are some dreams that are meant to remain fantasies. As a child, you may have wanted to be an astronaut, veterinarian, fireman, inventor, baseball star or President of the United States; that's part of testing the boundaries of who you are. As a teenager, you have your typical "they'll be sorry when I'm famous" type of dreams. These serve their purpose in comforting you during a very challenging time of life, but most of them are not meant to be lived out. True, some people really do become rich, famous movie stars, but most of us don't. Even so, it's not good to use that as vindication.

But what about the real dreams, the ones that still make your heart sing? Those are the ones that you want to give life to in some form. But often, we're stopped by the practical considerations of our daily existence. How can I give up my law practice and open a crafts shop when I have 3 kids to put through college? Or how can I become an astronaut when I can't even get myself to the gym twice a week and I'm afraid of heights?

Following your dreams is a balancing act. While some people do give up their lucrative jobs to live a simplified existence in the country, it doesn't have to be all or nothing. Perhaps you'll begin living pieces of your dreams as a hobby or a side job. As your skills and income grow over the years, you may choose to make your hobby a full-time job. Or it may happen when you retire. If you happen to be on the verge of graduating from school as you read this and are in the throes of choosing a career, giving reign to your dreams may mean taking a job at McDonald's while you practice shooting video on the weekends, or temping or waiting tables while you audition or write your book.

Despite the myth of the overnight success, most dreams are achieved slowly and steadily, through small, consistent steps. It doesn't all have to happen tomorrow. Make a long-term plan that includes interim steps and short-term goals. Look at where you want to go and work backwards to map out the steps that will get you from here to there. Then start pursuing step 1.

And while you're doing that, make sure your financial needs are met; it's hard to put energy into creating your dream when you're terrified of getting evicted because you haven't paid the rent in 3 months. Part of your long-term plan may be to start putting away money on a regular basis, so that when the kids graduate from college, you can quit your high-paying corporate job and open up that crafts shop or become an astrologer or massage therapist.

And if your dream just isn't physically possible, like becoming a ballet dancer at the age of 40, you can still take a class at the local dance studio or go to performances. And your dream of being an astronaut could evolve into a study of astronomy, aeronautics or cosmology, or perhaps directing or acting in movies like *Apollo 13*.

A word of caution. If you share your dream with someone and they want to give you a "dose of reality," take it with a grain of salt. They may be afraid that you'll be hurt and disappointed, or they may be jealous that you had the guts to pursue your dream. Either way, they feel the need to tell you the hard facts. But nobody can predict another person's future, and dreams are achieved all the time. So, I strongly suggest only sharing your dreams with

people who will understand and encourage them. As long as the odds may be, who's to say that you're not the one who will beat those odds.

You need to keep your eye on the dream and the reality at the same time. Like a hot air balloon, if there's too much air, it will float away, but if the ballast is too heavy, it'll never get off the ground. You want enough of each to fly at just the right level.

Remember, your dreams are a signpost to your authentic self. You're meant to pursue them. While you don't want it to be at the expense of your responsibilities to yourself and others, by finding the balance and the appropriate pace, you can make your dreams a reality!

Creative Tip

A fun way to learn more about yourself is to treat yourself to a reading with a good astrologer or psychic, or read a book on numerology or a personality system like the Enneagram. You'll gain interesting new insights and validate things you "kind of" knew about yourself already.

Wise Words

"I sometimes ask myself how it came about that I was the one to develop the theory of relativity. The reason, I think, is that a normal adult never stops to think about problems of space and time. These are things which he has thought about as a child. But my intellectual development was retarded, as a result of which I began to wonder about space and time only when I had already grown up." ~ Albert Einstein

"Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken winged bird that cannot fly." ~ Langston Hughes

Bookshelf



The Acorn Principle: Nurture Your Nature – Find Out How Rich, Full, and Rewarding Your Life Can Be ... Jim Cathcart



The Adventure of Self-Discovery ... Stanislav Grof, MD



The Adult Years: Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal ... Frederic M. Hudson



9 Chances to Feel Good About Yourself ... Judy A. Laslie



Live Your Dreams Workbook: Discover and Live the Life of Your Dreams ... Joyce Chapman



All About Me: The Story of Your Life Guided Journal ... Philipp Keel



Discover Your Destiny: Finding the Courage to Follow Your Dreams ... Bill & Kathy Peel



Achieve Your Dreams ... Kathleen Russell and Larry Wall

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Issue 21

Creativity in Communication

Communication is probably not something you would instantly equate with creativity. It's something that we do throughout our lives, but often don't give much thought to how we're doing it. But communication is a skill (and perhaps an art), and like any other skill, we can improve upon it.

With better communication, we can enhance our relationships, both personal and business. And since just about everything in life is based on relationship, the impact of improved communication can be far-reaching.

Business and personal development coach Henry Barbey, whose seminars on communication have impacted many people, has shared some of his thoughts on communication with me.

Barbey suggests that one of the primary factors in good communication is listening. Listening is hearing, but with the added component of seeking to understand what the other person is communicating. We achieve this by listening with the intent to understand, rather than thinking about our reaction or response to the communication. The result is that the other person feels that we are interested in them and what they have to say. By paying attention, we can pick up clues about the person and what they are saying that will forward the conversation and help create relationship.

It's also important to note that communication is a two-way street. Speaking is only half the picture; the message needs to be acknowledged in order to be complete. When someone else is speaking, you can let them know you're receiving their communication by focusing your attention on them and perhaps adding an occasional nod or saying "uh-huh" to let them know you're with them. (This is particularly important on the phone, where the speaker is otherwise met by dead silence.)

Barbey also uses what he calls a "feedback loop." What this means is that, from time to time in the conversation, you rephrase or paraphrase what the person said and repeat it back to them. They can then acknowledge that you understood what they said or provide clarification. It's as if the person is communicating in code, and you're decoding the message and sending it back to them for verification. By using the "feedback loop," you can confirm that the communication has been received accurately. You'd be surprised how often this is not the case.

Part of becoming conscious of good communication is being aware of the barriers. Barbey lists several categories to consider:

- ~ **Environmental:** There are times when the environment is not conducive to certain kinds of communication. For example, a noisy restaurant is not the place for an intimate, meaningful conversation. Likewise, the office may not be the best place to discuss personal issues.
- ~ **Preoccupation with one's own thoughts:** Often, as we listen to someone, our minds are busy planning how we will respond. Or we're off thinking about a personal issue that's on our mind, or in a past memory that the conversation has triggered. When we do that, we're not fully present and miss a lot of what is said. This is an example of hearing rather than listening.
- ~ **Personal judgments and biases:** As with preoccupation, as someone is speaking, we may find ourselves off in our head, having a running monologue judging what the person is saying. "I like that, I don't like that, I don't agree" and harsher judgments fill our mind. Or we may have personal biases about what the person is saying, or about the person themselves, that block us from really listening to what is being said.
- ~ **Cultural factors:** Different cultures have different styles of communication, including use of words and body language. We may misinterpret what is said or even take offense. The person's gestures, or lack of them, may be distracting. The language barrier itself or a difficult-to-understand accent may also cause us to "tune out" and lose what's being said.
- ~ **Low self-esteem:** If you feel unworthy, and therefore intimidated by the person you're speaking with, it's hard for the communication to flow. Your attention tends to be on yourself – what you're saying, how you look, what they think of you – and not on really listening to what's being said.

So, how do we begin to improve our communication?

- ~ Become conscious of your communication. Awareness is the first step to change. Start noticing how you communicate, how you listen, which barriers are getting in your way.
- ~ Have an intent to communicate more effectively. Intention is a powerful force that sets change in motion.
- ~ Listen with the intent of understanding. Give your attention fully to the other person. If you find your mind wandering, pull it back. Refocus on the message and its meaning. Trust that you will be able to respond appropriately and at the right time, and let it be okay if you don't have a brilliant response prepared!

- ~ Whether you're speaking or not, actively engage in the conversation. Begin practicing the "feedback loop." At appropriate points, rephrase and "mirror" what the other person said. Ask questions or build on what's been said.
- ~ On a more advanced level, we can become aware of whether a person's primary sensory system is auditory, visual or kinesthetic (touch). So, you would connect more with an auditory person by asking, "Do you hear what I'm saying?" rather than "Do you see/feel what I'm saying?" You might get through more easily with a visual person by drawing a diagram. And a kinesthetic person would learn more easily hands-on, rather than watching a demonstration or hearing an explanation.

As artists, better communication can help us in our work. For actors, listening and *then* responding, rather than just waiting for your cue, is integral to good acting. One of the things I admire about musicians playing together is the way they tune into each other so beautifully; this is an excellent example of non-verbal communication.

For visual artists who work solo, the communication may be with yourself. By tuning into your own intuition and creativity without the critical chatter, you can more authentically touch your own self-expression. Or if you're doing a commissioned work, by listening to what the client says and using the "feedback loop" to be sure you're receiving their communication clearly (as well as expressing your own vision for the project), you can create greater rapport and thereby more accurately fulfill their desires while also completing the project to your own satisfaction.

So, start by becoming more conscious of your communication and practicing some of the skills listed here. As you begin to listen more fully, your relationships and your life will become more effective and begin to take on a flow that makes them more fun and pleasurable. And with practice, you can lift the skill of communication to an art!

A special thanks to business and personal coach Henry Barbey for sharing with us his passion for helping people communicate more effectively.

Creative Tip

When you're in a conversation with someone and feeling distracted, stop. Acknowledge your distraction and ask them to repeat or clarify what they said. If the issue on your mind is preventing you from giving them the attention they deserve at this time, explain that and set up another time when you can.

Wise Word

"The greatest compliment that was ever paid me was when one asked me what I thought, and attended to my answer." ~ Henry David Thoreau

"Excellence, to me, is the state of grace that can descend only when one tunes out all the world's clamor, listens to an inward voice one recognizes as wiser than one's own, and transcribes without fear." ~ Naomi Wolf, "The Most Important Thing I Know"

Bookshelf



The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships ... Michael Nichols



The Art of Mindful Listening: Exploring the Foundations, Overcoming Challenges and Practical Mindful Listening Exercises ... Adrian Sage



Listening: The Forgotten Skill ... Madelyn Burley-Allen



Changing the World One Relationship at a Time: Transformational Listening for Mutual Support & Empowerment ... Sheryl Karas



Effective Listening Skills: Learn Effective Communication, The Importance of Listening, Improve Your People Skills and Communication in Relationships ... Richard King



Listening: How to Increase Awareness of Your Inner Guide ... Lee Coit



If I Understood You, Would I Have This Look on My Face?: My Adventures in the Art of Relating and Communicating ... Alan Alda

Issue 22

The New Millennium

I couldn't let the year go by without addressing the momentous occasion that is now upon us: the turn of the millennium. Certainly a once-in-a-lifetime event.

You've probably heard enough about the "Y2K problem," earth changes and other apocalyptic predictions that have inundated the media these last couple of years to last you through the *next* millennium. That's to be expected. The turn of a century or millennium tends to bring up some deep-seated human fear of the "end times."

But the new millennium can also be the harbinger of exciting new possibilities. The advances in technology, even over the last two decades, foreshadow incredible new developments in the coming decades. Already, the Internet has brought a flood of information into our lives and enabled us to connect with people all over the world for business and pleasure, through e-mail, chat rooms and the like. While there are still factions trying to limit our human rights, the current is toward greater freedom, and we will continue to see more of that in the coming century. And the frontiers expand inward as well. Joseph Campbell foresaw these times as "the very greatest leap of the human spirit to a knowledge not only outside nature but also of our own deep inward mystery."

We must keep in mind, though, that the speed and potential isolation of a highly mechanized world needs to be balanced with human connection – through community, spirituality and the arts. It's a time to give as much credence to intuition and senses as to mind and machine. We need to get away from our computers and meet with people face-to-face, and to support each other more and depend less on institutions. We need to get our hands on soil and clay, and not just on keyboard and mouse. To balance the assault on our senses of digital noise and images with the soothing sounds and sights of nature. We need to slow down long enough to savor the moment – time with people we love and enjoy, as well as attention to the painstaking details of our work that express the beauty and excellence of who we are.

It's customary at this time of year to prepare our resolutions for the coming year. That can be challenging enough. The idea of contemplating resolutions for a new millennium can be absolutely daunting! But we can take it a step at a time.

Normally, when we make our resolutions, we think about what we want to accomplish in the coming year, the things we want to *do*. That's fine. But let's take it up a notch. Who would you like to *be* in the new millennium? What parts of you do you like that you want to bring forward? What would you like to change? What "excess baggage" would you like to leave at this millennial threshold? Who is the "you" that you would ultimately like to be? Be aware that these are not changes that you will accomplish overnight. Deep changes like this take time. But you can go into the new millennium with a picture of who you want to be, to set a direction for your journey. You can get in touch with your strength, talent, kindness, compassion and other positive qualities that you currently embody and commit to continuing and expanding them. You can look at parts of yourself that you're not pleased with and begin to create a strategy for change. It's about setting an ideal for yourself, a beacon to move toward, knowing that you may never accomplish all of it, but knowing that it will make you a better person to try.

We can also look at the things we envision for our world, such as:

- ~ A world in which everyone has their basic needs met and the freedom and resources to pursue a life that brings them joy and fulfillment
- ~ A safe, loving environment for all children to grow up in
- ~ The re-greening of the earth, restoring the damage and learning to live in harmony with nature, producing products that serve our needs without destroying the earth in the process
- ~ Learning to live together peacefully and resolve conflict without violence, to be willing to listen and accept others' views, even if you don't agree

These may sound like cliches anymore, but they never cease to be worthy objectives. Again, it's about having and holding a vision, no matter how remote it may seem or whether it will be achieved in our lifetime.

Artists have always been on the cutting edge when it comes to leading the way into the future. While our individual dreams may differ, we can each become clear on our personal vision for a positive future and begin to express it in our lives and our work. We can use our creativity and imagination to expand beyond the current view of what's possible.

You may fear that your "little" vision doesn't matter, or that it may be different from other people's visions. But creating a positive future isn't about everyone agreeing what it should look like. It's about holding the vision that rings true for you and contributing that to a sort of "melting pot" of positive visions. It's the confluence of our collective visions that will change the world. You may not be able to create that vision alone, but it will take each of us participating to make it happen.

So, go into the new millennium with head held high, knowing that while your problems will not disappear overnight, you can hold a positive vision and contribute to a positive future and a better life for yourself, your loved ones, the current world and future generations.

Creative Tip

The new year is a good time to think about change. When you make your new year's resolutions, keep your list short. Pick out one, two or three things you can really commit to, and focus on those for the coming year.

Wise Words

"As we rise to the waves of crisis, change and choice in our personal and professional lives, perhaps we need a periscope – that instrument whose mirrors and prisms permit observation through uncharted territory. Let's raise our periscopes and look at what we cannot yet fully see." ~ Marilynne Anderson

"Until you make peace with who you are, you'll never be content with what you have." ~ Doris Mortman

Bookshelf



Millennium 2000: A Positive Approach ... Louise L. Hay



PosiTrends or Negatrends?: Dealing Positively with the Third Millennium ... Eric Butterworth



Awakening: The Upside of Y2K ... Judy Laddon, Tom Atlee, Larry Shook, editors



Megatrends 2000: New Directions for Tomorrow ... John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene

Issue 23

Channeling Your Creativity into Money-Making Inventions

As creative people, we're always looking for ways to finance our creativity. One way we can do that is by channeling our creative imagination into the invention of new products. While you may not have the degree of creative freedom you do in producing your own work, working within the demands of a commercial market can be a creative challenge in itself.

According to James Laughren, a consultant who advises inventors (or product developers) on the viability of their concepts and how to develop them for the market, inventing a product usually means solving a problem or filling a need. Some inventors stumble on their creations, but for most, invention is a combination of observation and imagination.

So, how does one go about creating a new product?

- 1) Begin by seeking out a need or problem. The best way is to keep your eyes open. Pay attention to the world around you. Watch the media. Look around your environment. Laughren suggests that your best bet is an existing, expanding target market, such as pet owners or home gardeners. Become familiar with your market – their needs, preferences, idiosyncrasies. Talk to people in the market. Ask them what they wish they had. Go through stores and see what's there – and isn't there.

You may even discover that need or problem in your own backyard and come up with a product that would make your own life easier. One Colorado camper had trouble fumbling through his backpack while trying to hold a flashlight during nights in his tent. He went home and designed a simple headband that would hold a small Maglite and, with good marketing, was able to make \$150-200,000 a year for about 5 years before competitive products showed up.

- 2) Next, set your imagination to work. Laughren recommends a technique he calls "seeding your creative mind." Each night before you go to sleep, bring your problem to mind and tell yourself that you'll come up with a solution. (This sounds very much like the incubation period of the creative process!) State the problem, but don't be too specific about the resolution. For example, if your gardeners have a problem lifting heavy terra cotta pots, rather than asking specifically for a piece of machinery to help, be open to a more imaginative idea, like simulating the terra cotta with light-weight plastic.

Once you come up with your idea, see what you can do to keep it simple. An item that consists of 3 parts of the same material is much less

complex than one of 16 parts involving 4 different materials, and a lot cheaper to produce. If the cost of the product is greater than the value it brings, the consumer won't buy it – if you can even get it produced and distributed in the first place.

- 3) Once you have your idea, determine who would want your product and why. This will involve market research. While it's tempting to say that everyone would want your product, it's more realistic to find your specific niche. For example, if you're developing a product for fishermen, what appeals to the guy with the rod and reel fishing for trout in the local stream will not interest the serious fisherman with the 80-foot boat pursuing blue marlin in the Gulf. And you need to make the product useful and attractive enough that your target audience would actually buy it, and not just admire it on the shelf. Being cute and clever is not enough to create a substantial market. (Yes, we have the Pet Rock and Beanie Babies, but those markets were created with a lot of luck and piles of marketing money.)
- 4) The way your product will best be distributed can affect its design. If your main market is retail stores, you'll want a product that looks and feels good. If your marketing budget is small, you may want to invest in an attractive package design that will catch people's eye in the store. On the other hand, if your target is catalogs and mail order, packaging may not be that important, but you may want your product to have impressive features and benefits, and design it to be light in weight and without details that may break easily in shipping.

Laughren shared three wonderful stories of creative solutions and observations that led to lucrative inventions. In the 1950s, Bette Nesmith, a divorced secretary, feared for her job when the speed of her new electric typewriter caused her to make more mistakes than usual. Finding an eraser an inadequate solution, she emptied a bottle of nail polish and filled it with white tempera paint to cover her typing mistakes. Her colleagues began to ask for it, and she and her son, Michael (of The Monkees fame), filled bottles with an eyedropper at the kitchen table. A home business was born that she eventually sold for \$48 million as Liquid Paper.

In another case, a man in Europe was wandering through the fields and arrived home with his clothes covered with burrs. His curiosity led him to look at them under a microscope, where he saw what looked like little hooks and loops. He thought it would be a great way to fasten things, and Velcro was born. And a chemist at 3M used some papers affixed with a failed adhesive that pulled apart too easily to mark his place in his hymn book for the church choir. You guessed it: Post-It Notes.

There are several steps beyond the creative process, of course, but you'll most likely seek legal and professional help for those. While the process of invention may sound technically difficult, there are books and consultants like James Laughren to help you find your way through the maze. If you can come up with a practical, innovative idea, you're on your way!

James Laughren was President of KPJ Associates, a consulting firm, and author of Patents, Products and Profits: An Inventor's Guide to Success and Reality. His theory is that "people can and should pursue their creativity; it's a matter of being persistent and learning what it takes. The steps are not difficult, you just have to learn what they are."

Creative Tip

Benjamin Franklin said that he became an inventor because he was lazy. What tasks in your life do you hate doing or take too much time or energy? Is there a system you can develop or a product you can make or buy that would make those tasks easier?

Wise Words

"... imagine ... as vividly as you can, for in imagination lies the key to discovery." ~ Jean Houston, *A Passion for the Possible*

"My formula for success? Rise early, work late, strike oil." ~ John Paul Getty

Bookshelf



Inventing Made Easy: The Entrepreneur's Indispensable Guide to Creating, Patenting & Profiting from Inventions ... Tom and Roger Bellavance



New Product Success Stories: Lessons from Leading Innovators ... Robert J. Thomas



The Greatest Inventions of the Past 2000 Years ... John Brockman, editor



Top 101 Inventions of All Time!: Intriguing Facts & Trivia About History's Greatest Inventions! ... Scott Matthews



The PDMA Handbook of Innovation and New Product Development ... Ludwig Bstieler and Charles H. Noble, editors



Successful Product Development: Speeding from Opportunity to Profit
... Milton D. Rosenau, Jr.



Develop and Market Your Creative Ideas ... Dale A. Davis



Accidents May Happen: Fifty Inventions Discovered by Mistake ...
Charlotte Foltz Jones

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Issue 24

Overcoming Procrastination

Procrastination is something that plagues all of us at one time or another. It can range from putting off household chores to major avoidance of your creative work. It may be about something you hate doing or something you really want to do, but just can't bring yourself to get to it. And it may run the gamut from mildly frustrating to debilitating.

There are many reasons why we procrastinate, and therefore, an array of remedies.

The Reason: We may procrastinate because we've let a job pile up to the point where it's overwhelming. This may be housework, cleaning out files, a term paper, or any project that's up against a deadline.

The Remedy: Stay on top of the job. Do a little every day, rather than letting it accumulate to overwhelming proportions. If it's a job you hate, like doing dishes, commit to washing them after every meal, rather than leaving them for a day or more. If you're facing a deadline, don't wait till the last minute. Break the project down into small, manageable pieces. Set a timeline to accomplish each step, and stick to it.

The Reason: Sometimes we procrastinate because we're not adequately prepared. We may not have the tools, skills or information to do the job.

The Remedy: If you lack tools or skills, find a way to acquire them. Take classes, read books, and most of all, practice. Your skill level may not be up to your vision, but be patient with yourself and keep going. The more you practice, the better you'll get.

If you already have the appropriate skill level, it may be that you need to get more information or allow your ideas to germinate a bit more. Formulate your ideas the best you can and get them down on paper. Once you see where the holes are, go out and complete your research or work out the missing pieces.

The Reason: It may be hard to focus, because you haven't given yourself enough time.

The Remedy: Set aside a big enough block of time to allow yourself to "get into" the project without feeling pressured. Sometimes it takes time to get warmed up, and if you don't stick through that period, you'll never get to the productive stage.

The Reason: Whenever you start to work, there are endless distractions that eat away at your time, until little or nothing gets done.

The Remedy: Eliminate the distractions. Get a babysitter, close the door, turn off the phone ringer, resolve to check e-mail only once or twice a day. If something is nagging at you that needs to get done, do it first and get it out of the way, or set another specific time when you will do it, so you can get it off your mind. Use a daily planner or time management system to help you prioritize tasks. If the distractions become more important than your work, it may be time to look at why you're avoiding the work that's supposed to be important to you. Keep reading . . .

The Reason: It's hard to get started.

The Remedy: Start with "mindless," nonthreatening tasks, like setting up your workspace, preparing your tools, eliminating distractions. Create a kind of ritual to get your focus away from other things and onto the job you want to do. You'll start thinking about the project and soon find yourself eager to begin.

The Reason: We may feel overwhelmed by the size or scope of the job or what it may require of us. Or we may feel confused and overwhelmed by the chaos that's part of the early stages of the creative process.

The Remedy: Take it a step at a time. Just jump in. Start. Get some of your ideas down, however random. Do an outline, some sketches. Don't worry about beginning at the beginning and working in a linear fashion. Put down whatever comes to you, however disjointed or sketchy. As you get deeper into the process, your ideas will begin to gel, and you'll get a clearer direction of where you want to go. If you just concern yourself with the next step, and then the next, you'll get there, rather than thinking you have to take the whole thing in one big leap.

The Reason: Often with creative projects, we procrastinate because we fear what will follow if we complete it. We're afraid of rejection, criticism, feeling not good enough – patterns that often began in childhood.

The Remedy: Understand that in procrastinating, you're trying to protect yourself from a perceived painful outcome. Reframe the future you expect. Rather than expecting rejection, criticism or failure, start visualizing the personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment you'll get from finishing the work, as well as seeing other people enjoying your work, getting published or seen, or getting good reviews.

Stay focused in the moment, on what you're doing, rather than the outcome. Enjoy the creative process, rather than worrying about the

result. Do it for yourself, instead of being concerned about what others will think. Keep shifting your focus back to the work itself and the joy it brings you. If you're stuck on getting other people's approval, you may need to do some work on that to build your own self-confidence and self-esteem, so that your gauge for success comes from within.

The Reason: For many of us, nothing less than perfect is acceptable. Since we can't attain that, why even begin?

The Remedy: As with fear of criticism and rejection, perfectionism may also result from a childhood need to please the overly-demanding authorities in our lives. But perfection is a pretty hard goal to obtain, if not impossible. And the need to be perfect can stifle the creative process.

Set reasonable standards for yourself. It's enough to go for your personal best, knowing that you'll get better with practice, rather than feeling like you have to compete with the masters. It's a great ideal to hold, but be gentle enough with yourself to know that ideals are there to stimulate your performance, not to be reached.

By giving yourself permission to be less than the best, you can also create an environment for your special and unique qualities to emerge. I used to be a big fan of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. The lead dancer at the time, Judith Jamison, didn't have the best technique in the company, but she brought passion and a grand presence to her dancing. There were better dancers technically, but she was the one that I – and many others – came to see.

The Reason: We may have a picture of how great we can be, and secretly fear that we never will be.

The Remedy: It's easier to hold the fantasy than face the reality. Fantasies are fun. You can imagine being a famous actor or writer, winning the Nobel Prize or getting rave reviews in the *New York Times*. But if you actually sit down and do your work, you have to face the fact that you may not be the next Hemingway or Picasso. In a world where only the best is acceptable, that can be tough. Fantasies can be emotionally gratifying, but in the end, you have nothing to show for them.

Again, set reasonable standards for yourself. Know that if you're writing your first novel, it's probably not going to be a masterpiece. Give yourself time to learn your craft and develop your artistry. Aim to be the best you can be, and be persistent. The level of greatness is a very thin layer, and there's plenty of room for good, solid work.

Procrastination can be challenging, but it can be overcome. It takes action, and you need to be committed to taking that action and following through.

- ~ Discover your reason for procrastinating.
- ~ Develop a strategy or game plan for moving through it.
- ~ Get support. It's easier to follow through when you have encouragement and perhaps someone to be accountable to.
- ~ Motivate yourself by setting up a reward system. Fear of punishment has not proven to be a good motivator. Instead, plan positive incentives for yourself. In some cases, the accomplishment of the work itself will be reward enough.
- ~ Keep going. Often, procrastination is the result of a long-standing emotional habit, and you will have to renew both your commitment and your action on a daily basis to break that habit.

If you continue to procrastinate despite your best efforts, you may need to take a deeper look. Perhaps there are some issues that could be handled more effectively with the help of a counselor or therapist. Or you may simply need the support of a friend, family member or coach to keep you on track. Perhaps you're trying to force yourself to do something you really don't want to do in order to please somebody else or live up to an externally-imposed standard, and you need to reconsider whether you want to continue down that path. If it's something you have to do, like your taxes, get support or help, perhaps hiring someone.

Facing up to procrastination may be tough. It may take a concerted effort, and you still may never live up to your imagined level of success. But there are rewards – isn't it better to be a 5 for real than a 10 in your dreams?

Creative Tip

While it's important to deal with recurring resistances, sometimes in the moment, a pragmatic approach works best. Several years ago, I was doing busy work to try to dissipate the anxiety I was feeling about sending out job résumés. A good friend called and asked what I was doing. I told him I was trying to motivate myself to send out résumés. He suggested that I stop trying to motivate myself and just do it. It worked!

Wise Words

"Aim for success, not perfection. Never give up your right to be wrong, because then you will lose the ability to learn new things and move forward

with your life. Remember that fear always lurks behind perfectionism. Confronting your fears and allowing yourself the right to be human can, paradoxically, make you a far happier and more productive person." ~ Dr. David M. Burns

"Mind organizes and creates patterns. A good mind is one that is particularly perceptive of patterns. A creative mind can see unusual patterns that others ignore. An alert mind is aware, awake and present in a situation, ready to recognize old patterns and create new ones." ~ Henry Reed, *Mysteries of the Mind*

Bookshelf



The Tomorrow Trap: Unlocking the Secrets of the Procrastination-Protection Syndrome ... Karen E. Peterson



"I'll Do It Tomorrow" Ends Today: Proven Strategies for Overcoming Procrastination and Taking Charge of Your Life ... Rohit Rohila



It's About Time!: The 6 Styles of Procrastination and How to Overcome Them ... Linda Sapadin with Jack Maguire



Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It NOW ... Jane B. Burka, PhD and Lenora M. Yuen, PhD



The Now Habit: A Strategic Program for Overcoming Procrastination and Enjoying Guilt-Free Play ... Neil A. Fiore



Living Without Procrastination: How to Stop Postponing Your Life ... M. Susan Roberts, PhD



When Perfect Isn't Good Enough: Strategies for Coping With Perfectionism ... Martin M. Antony, PhD and Richard P. Swinson, MD



The Care and Feeding of Perfectionists ... Cynthia Cuman

Issue 25

Social Responsibility and the Arts

There is an old saying that much is expected of those to whom much is given. As artists, each of us is given a special gift, and it is our joy, as well as our responsibility, to express that gift. It may be expressed in the privacy of our room, or in a way that impacts our community, our country or the world.

Throughout history, artists have been on the cutting edge of society. One of the by-products of creativity is the ability to see things in a new and different way – to put the pieces together in a way that no one has before. Artists are often the first to see cultural trends and may – intentionally or as a natural outcome of their work – find themselves on the front lines of those trends as a result of the self-expression that they are compelled to and that is so much a part of them. Art has the ability to move societies forward by presenting new ideas in a creative and palatable way, as well as bringing forth beauty and the expression of human emotions. In some cases, artists are in a position to reach multitudes of people and open their minds through the power of their celebrity.

Having a voice is a privilege as well as a responsibility. Artists like Rudolf Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov, who were forced to leave their homeland in order to practice their art, can tell you just how much of a privilege it is. And many artists use their celebrity status to bring attention to a worthwhile cause, as a way of giving back to the society that gave them their success. When actress Helen Mirren visited South Africa on behalf of Oxfam in early 1999, she told *The Express* that, "This is the first time I've done a celebrity trip like this and while in some ways I feel awkward, I realise that all the fantastic work organisations such as Oxfam do wouldn't get half the publicity without a face to promote them."

Along with the vision that comes with creativity, artists have the ability to open people's minds with their words, sounds and images. In a recent address to the International Federation of Actors, John Kani, Chairman of the National Arts Council in South Africa, said, "It is a miracle I can act. I am an activist. I am a fighter for decency, for humanity and for freedom and democracy. I am not an army person. I will not pick up arms. My arms are the words of great writers, of great dramatists. My bullets are the words I put on the paper and my spear is me in front of an audience when I say, 'I've got something to say to you. You've got to know something is happening in this community, something is happening in this country that needs your attention, that needs your participation.' I scream when the audience does

not hear me, does not participate, because this is a God-given, one time opportunity to communicate with the audience and say, 'we have some work to do.'"

Sometimes this responsibility requires courage. When actress/comedienne Ellen DeGeneres agreed to have her character "come out" on her sitcom, she received a tremendous amount of controversial media coverage. Her show was cancelled, but Ellen's sacrifice created a new level of acceptance for the portrayal of gay relationships on TV. When *Will & Grace* debuted two seasons later, nobody even blinked. Shirley MacLaine put herself on the line by coming out in another way, by speaking openly about her spirituality and opening the door for the New Age spiritual movement to come into the mainstream. And these acts of courage pale in comparison to John Kani's experience of being detained for six weeks by the Secret Police for starting a black actors' union in 1970.

The US government recognized the importance of the arts during the Depression, with its Works Projects Administration (WPA). The Federal Arts, Writers' and Theater Projects hired unemployed musicians, actors, directors, painters and writers to work on various government-funded projects. Many accomplished artists, including Orson Welles, Eugene O'Neill, John Cheever and Zora Neale Hurston, got their start through these projects.

With WPA funding, artists provided thousands of paintings, sculptures and murals for public buildings. The Federal Writers' Project employed writers to preserve massive amounts of American culture that would otherwise have been lost, by recording the life stories of over 10,000 people from a variety of regions, occupations and ethnic groups. The "American Guide" included a rich collection of rural and urban folklore that described the feelings of people coping with life and the Depression, studies of social customs of various ethnic and occupational groups, and authentic narratives of ex-slaves about life during the period of slavery. A vast storehouse of material, published and unpublished, is housed in the Library of Congress.

Benjamin A. Botkin, the folklore editor of the Writers' Project, hoped that the histories would help foster tolerance and stem the rising tide of fascism he was seeing in Europe. And while writers were not supposed to do their own creative work on Project time, their assignments provided a good training ground and a wealth of material. Passages from Nelson Algren's *A Walk on the Wild Side* were drawn from an interview he did with a Chicago prostitute. Without tape recorders to assist them, writers learned to capture dialect when transcribing interviews. Ralph Ellison used this skill, along with specific phrases he picked up, for his novel, *Invisible Man*.

The theatre of the late 1960s and early 1970s was very much a part of the political scene. Shows such as *Hair* and the satires of the San Francisco Mime Troupe reflected the antiwar sentiments expressed earlier by Greek dramatist Aristophanes in his play, *Lysistrata*. The Mission Statement of the San Francisco Mime Troupe states that: "We do plays that make sense out of the headlines by identifying the forces that shape our lives and dramatize the operation of these giant forces in small, close-up stories that make our audience feel the impact of political events on personal life."

In earlier times, painters such as Francisco de Goya and Pablo Picasso expressed these same views. From 1808 to 1814, during the Napoleonic invasion and the Spanish war of independence, Goya served as court painter to the French. He expressed his horror of armed conflict in *The Disasters of War*, a series of starkly realistic etchings that were not published until 1863, long after his death. Picasso's *Guernica* portrayed the horrors of the bombing of Guernica, the most ancient town of the Basques, during the Spanish Civil War.

Artists' contributions can be on a basic human level as well. The purpose of early Greek drama was to provide an emotional catharsis for its audience by portraying universal emotions. Modern books and films continue to provide that catharsis, along with much-needed rest and relaxation in these busy, stressful times. They stimulate our imagination and sense of adventure, expanding our view of what is possible. And what would the world be like without the beauty of art, music and poetry to soothe our senses?

To quote John Kani once again: "We have been able to sway opinions of politicians and decision makers by bringing them into our work. That responsibility will always be ours. The performing arts from ballet, to opera, to poetry reading, to oratory in Africa, to drama on stage, to workshops and all that, will always be the most powerful tool that we have in making people change their minds, change their attitudes, take in what is surrounding them."

So, if you have a strong feeling or vision that you feel compelled to express, know that you're not alone, but part of a proud, honored and powerful tradition. You can take courage from that.

Creative Tip

Being socially responsible doesn't mean you have to join the Peace Corps or move to South Sudan. You can contribute in a way that feels right for you. That may mean volunteering at the local soup kitchen or working with children, contributing money or praying for those in distress.

Wise Words

"More important than a work of art itself is what it will sow. Art can die, a painting can disappear. What counts is the seed." ~ Joan Miro

"It is only by introducing the young to great literature, drama and music, and to the excitement of great science, that we open to them the possibilities that lie within the human spirit – enable them to see visions and dream dreams."
~ Eric Anderson

Bookshelf



The Dream and the Deal: The Federal Writers' Project, 1935-1943 ...
Jerre Mangione



Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America ... Jonathan Harris



Go Gator and Muddy the Water: Writings by Zora Neale Hurston from the Federal Writers' Project ... Pamela Bordelon, editor



All of This Music Belongs to the Nation: The WPA's Federal Music Project and American Society ... Kenneth J. Bindas



First Impressions: Francisco Goya ... Ann Waldron



The Genesis of a Painting: Picasso's Guernica ... Rudolf Arnheim



Orson Welles, Volume 1: The Road to Xanadu ... Simon Callow

Issue 26

Perseverance

There's a myth that once you've found your "right path" and are doing work you love, that opportunities will fall into your lap and everything will evolve effortlessly. Certainly, there are times when it happens that way, but in the long run, success in any endeavor takes hard work and persistence. While talent, skill, connections and luck will help get you where you're going, it's perseverance that will ultimately get you there.

We live in a time when we expect to take a pill or take a course and find ourselves healed or enlightened in an instant. But both artists and sages know that mastery doesn't happen in a weekend workshop. It takes years of persistently applying yourself to your craft or your studies, as well as developing the will and discipline to see you through the tough times.

Watching Olympic champions has been a great lesson to me. I remember watching gymnast Julianne McNamara in the 1984 Olympics, as she fell off the balance beam. While I sat there feeling sorry for her, McNamara hoisted herself back on the beam without missing a beat and completed her routine. She won a gold and a silver in those Olympics. She may have felt sorry for herself later, but I learned that champions stay focused on their goal and don't quit because of a setback.

In the classic *Think and Grow Rich*, Napoleon Hill states that having a clear vision, along with a strong conviction that you can achieve it, and then holding fast to your vision is an important factor in achieving your goals. Writers Sara Caldwell and Marie-Eve Kielson, in their book, *So You Want to be a Screenwriter*, gives several examples of screenwriters who went through years of discouragement and finally achieved success because they weren't willing to quit. They stuck it out and believed in themselves, despite evidence to the contrary, as well as friends and relatives urging them to give it up and do something more practical.

The catch is, you never know when success may be right around the corner. A favorite teacher of mine gives this example: A single unit of algae lies on the surface of a pond. Each day, the amount of algae on the surface of the pond doubles. So, on the second day, you have two units, four on the third, eight on the fourth, and so on. At first, coverage of the pond surface increases slowly. But then one day, half the pond is covered. The following day, the entire pond is covered. The tricky part in life is that you never know when that half-covered day has come and success is only one step away.

Here are a few steps you can take to help you stick it out:

- ~ Have a clear vision of where you want to go. Thoughts are the first step toward manifestation, and the clearer they are, the more quickly and easily you can make them real.
- ~ Formulate an action plan – concrete steps you can take toward your goal. Include both short-term and long-term plans.
- ~ Create a schedule. Practice discipline by sticking to that schedule, even when you don't feel like it. That way, you develop the strength of will to push through days of discouragement or creative blocks.
- ~ Take baby steps. Trying to accomplish the whole thing in one leap can throw you into overwhelm by making the task seem insurmountable. Breaking it down makes it feel more doable.
- ~ Practice patience. Be realistic about how long it will take to achieve your vision. Remember that life doesn't always provide a clear, linear path toward your goal. You may run into obstacles and emotional blocks along the way, so be prepared to tackle them.
- ~ Create options. Have one or more backup plans, so that you don't get thrown when step 4 of plan A doesn't happen. Your backup plan may include ways to support yourself while you're working toward a new career path.
- ~ Hold an image of yourself having reached your goal successfully. See yourself standing beside your completed work, or see the person you've become (perhaps in new surroundings) having accomplished it. Some people like to build a "treasure map" collage that includes pictures or items representing their goals and keep it on their bulletin board or refrigerator. You might include a picture of yourself as the centerpiece.
- ~ Don't believe everything you hear. There are people who will try to discourage you "for your own good" or tell you you're not good enough or the odds are against you, and we tend to believe that if someone tells us something, it must be true. What really matters is your own truth and your belief in yourself, and holding onto that with conviction. There are dozens of stories of famous people who were discouraged by their teachers who went on to fabulous success because they wouldn't be stopped.
- ~ Get support. Surround yourself with people who believe in and encourage you. Have someone who's willing to listen to you when you feel stuck and frustrated – if you can vent your feelings, you can let them go and move on.
- ~ Work with a network. Napoleon Hill talks of Mastermind groups, consisting of several people with varied talents and a unified goal. Along

with giving you access to skills and resources that you don't personally possess, a group like this can provide you with someone you can be accountable to, who won't let you off the hook because something didn't work out and you got discouraged.

- ~ Keep your spirits up. Hope and expectation are powerful forces that can draw success to you. Give yourself rewards as you accomplish each step of your action plan, and give yourself periodic breaks to rejuvenate when the going gets particularly rough.
- ~ Hold onto your vision. As you work toward your goal on a day-to-day basis, things will happen (or not happen) that will make it seem like your goal is unreachable or not meant to be. Holding the bigger picture can help you move through each day, knowing that in the long run, you can get where you want to go.
- ~ Stay in touch with your passion. Spend time with people who share your passion. Explore new aspects of it through classes and experimentation. Be careful that the quest to earn money doesn't dull your passion, and find ways to breathe new life into it.

Setting your sights high can require a good deal of stamina and endurance. By facing each challenge, you can develop discipline and a strength of will that will give you the fortitude to face each subsequent step. And holding onto your passion and conviction that your goal is worthwhile will keep you moving forward. Be patient and keep putting one foot in front of another, and one day you'll turn around and be amazed at how far you've come.

Creative Tip

When I'm tired, I've found that it's easy for my negative, discouraging inner voices to creep in. When that happens, I put my work aside and get some rest or do something to pamper myself. Where do your negative voices show up? Begin to notice when and how so you can be aware, protect yourself and not take their messages seriously.

Wise Words

"All the performances of human art, at which we look with praise or wonder, are instances of the resistless force of perseverance." ~ Samuel Johnson

"Genius is only the power of making continuous efforts. The line between failure and success is so fine that we scarcely know when we pass it: so fine that we are often on the line and do not know it. How many a man has

thrown up his hands at a time when a little more effort, a little more patience, would have achieved success.

"As the tide goes out, so it comes clear in. In business, sometimes, prospects may seem darkest when really they are on the turn. A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn to glorious success. There is no failure except in no longer trying. There is no defeat except from within, no really insurmountable barrier save our own inherent weakness of purpose." ~ Elbert Hubbard

"If you want to get somewhere you have to know where you want to go and how to get there. Then never, never, never give up." ~ Norman Vincent Peale

Bookshelf



Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You ... Cynthia Kersey (see also Issue 79)



Staying With It: Role Models of Perseverance ... Emerson Klees



The "Keep on Going" Spirit ... Ted Lewis



Think and Grow Rich ... Napoleon Hill



So You Want to Be A Screenwriter: How To Face the Fears and Take the Risks ... Sara Caldwell and Marie-Eve Kielson



Perseverance!: The Story of Thomas Alva Edison ... Peter Murray

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Issue 27

Creativity in Everyday Life

When you're living your day-to-day life, it's easy to fall into a rut. Your day is filled with repetitive tasks. We're all busy people, and in order to save time and wear-and-tear on our already-stressed energy systems, we tend to tune out and go on automatic pilot just to get things done. We can perk up our lives and even find better, more efficient ways of functioning by adding a little creativity to those day-to-day tasks.

When we think of creativity, we tend to relate it to artists and inventors. But creativity is about more than art; it's an integral part of life. Life itself is a creation, and everything we do and think is creative. Rather than relegating creativity only to the artistic parts of our lives, like our crafts and hobbies, we can be creative in everything we do.

In truth, we're all much more creative than we realize. As children, we see things in our own, unique way. But each time we're told it doesn't make sense or to "get real," we shut down a little part of our creativity. We're taught to conform, to see things as everyone else does, and end up invalidating our own sense of invention.

We can bring some creativity back to our lives by doing our daily tasks a little more consciously. Start observing what you're doing. Is there a way you can do it that would be more efficient? More effective? More fun! How would you approach it if you were doing it for the first time? Can you add someone else's input or point of view?

Look at your problem or task in different ways. Get in touch with the child in you, who sees things with new eyes and is willing to try. Use your own children as models. As adults, we have years of experience against which we measure new ideas. If they don't seem practical, we eliminate them, sometimes without giving them much consideration at all. But life changes and we change, and what didn't work a decade ago might work beautifully now.

Recently, due to a shift in my work schedule, I was forced to reorder my daily routine. At first, I was perturbed that my smooth routine was being uprooted. But before long, I found the change refreshing. I discovered places where I was wasting time. I started to get my work done earlier in the evening and began to find more time for the things that nurture me, like reading, music and talking to friends.

Another place I found to break my routine is in the kitchen. I'm not an accomplished cook, but I enjoy good food and variety. I also don't like to

spend a lot of time cooking (not to mention washing dishes), and I tend to revert to the same well-worn menus. I've begun mixing and matching what's in the refrigerator, supplementing with packaged foods from the supermarket, and have been coming up with some new and interesting dishes. The added bonus is that less gets thrown away as a result of sitting in the refrigerator unused.

How can we be more creative in our relationships? When you know someone, or are living with them, for a long time, you tend to fall into the same old patterns of behavior. You may find yourself taking your old friends for granted and looking for new pastures. While new friends are fun and valuable, you can also find ways to breathe new life into long-term relationships. Find new things you can do together. Share new books and discoveries. Open up new lines of conversation and activities.

Housework is certainly not an area we relate to creativity. While some people find it relaxing, most of us don't and would prefer to find a way to complete it more efficiently. Are there better tools you could get that would make it go faster? Would it be more efficient to clean one room each day of the week? Do you need to clean as often as you do? Can you play energetic music and dance around as you clean? By seeing the task in a different way, you can make it more manageable and pleasurable for yourself, and less of a burden. And there's always room for creativity in business. While some managers are afraid to try something new for fear of not meeting deadlines or living up to client expectations, if you have an idea for a better approach, it doesn't hurt to ask.

A little imagination can also help when you're feeling stuck or in a rut. Let your imagination go, or brainstorm with a friend or colleague. Experiment with doing things in a different way. It may take you a little longer at first, but you'll discover new things about the task and about yourself. You may find in the long run that the old way works just fine, but you may also discover a new and better way, or simply a minor adjustment that improves on the old method. If you don't try, you'll never know.

Creativity is a life skill that must be continually cultivated. Remember, you always have choice, and the trick is to keep that choice conscious. See how many options you can create for yourself. Go to extremes and include options that seem fantastical, and even ones that would be undesirable. The more options you can create for yourself, the greater your range of choice. Challenge your old beliefs and habits about how things should be done, and look at them with new eyes. Keep an open mind, and be willing to try. It may shake up your daily routine for awhile, but it will revitalize your days.

Creative Tip

Pause several times a day to think about what you're doing, especially if you're feeling harried or stressed. Take a deep breath, then stop and think: Is there another way I could approach this task that would accomplish it more creatively and efficiently?

Wise Words

"If you want to be creative in your company, your career, your life, all it takes is one easy step ... the extra one. When you encounter a familiar plan, you just ask one question: 'What ELSE could we do?'" ~ Dale Dauten

"... geniuses get novel and original ideas by incorporating chance or randomness into the creative process in order to destabilize their existing patterns of thought so they may reorganize their thoughts in new ways."

~ Michael Michalko, *Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius*

"Adding fun, joy and play into your life – and business – will certainly give you more perspectives when looking at the same problem situation." ~ Lee Say Keng

Bookshelf



How to Think Like Leonardo Da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day ... Michael Gelb



Aha!: 10 Ways to Free Your Creative Spirit and Find Your Great Ideas ... Jordan Ayan



Broken Crayons: Break Your Crayons and Draw Outside the Lines ... Robert Alan Black



Creative Problem Solver's Toolbox: A Complete Course in the Art of Creating Solutions to Problems of Any Kind ... Richard Fobes



Creativity: How to Catch Lightning in a Bottle ... George Gamez, PhD

Issue 28

The Interplay of Confidence, Ego and Arrogance

I'm going to share some personal thoughts here. Perhaps yours run along the same lines.

As far back as I can remember, I've grappled with the fear of being, or at least appearing, egotistical. As a child, I happened to be gifted academically and was also very shy. The combination seemed to lead some people to feel I was conceited, or so a sixth-grade friend told me. At that age, being liked and belonging are so important, and this bit of information devastated me. As a result, I hid my light for many years, for fear that people would dislike me and I would be left out.

Each of us has gifts that we're meant to enjoy and to contribute to the world. Unfortunately, these gifts can engender jealousy in other people who feel they don't possess those same gifts. We live in a society that champions the underdog until they become successful, and then tries to tear them down. We're left with a choice of being true to who we are and running the risk of being labeled as egotistical or arrogant, or worse, or hiding or denying our gifts and cheating ourselves of the pleasure and benefit they can bring us and others.

This dilemma has led me over the years to contemplate the difference between confidence and arrogance. The old fear of appearing conceited has tainted my self-confidence in a way that when I really feel good about myself and my work, I feel like I'm slipping into arrogance and that I will offend others. Perhaps at times I do cross the line into arrogance, but most of the time, it's the old fear tugging at me, and I have to make a conscious effort not to allow it to deter me from my path, but to hold steady.

One of the best antidotes I've found is to balance my feeling of triumph with a sense of humility. Not by humbling myself in a self-denigrating, Uriah Heep kind of way or denying my accomplishments, but in feeling grateful that such talents and abilities were given to me, taking pleasure in them and understanding that it doesn't make me better than anyone else, as we all have our unique gifts and one is not better than another.

I also find it helpful to ensure that I'm living in line with my integrity and code of ethics. That in pursuing my gifts, I'm not hurting anyone else or hiding *their* light. When I'm feeling arrogant or I perceive that someone is jealous of me, I can stop, go inside, and take an honest look at my motives. Am I trying to appear superior to bolster my own self-esteem at others' expense? Or am I simply pursuing my passion for the joy of it? In asking

myself questions such as these, I can discern where I am on the confidence-arrogance continuum and adjust accordingly.

As artists, we may have a vision that is completely different from anything that's come before; we may be ahead of our time. We need to have the inner strength and courage to stand up for our vision, to continue pursuing it despite others urging us to give it up or modify it. Think of all the great artists who never received recognition in their lifetime. If they had caved in to social pressure or criticism, our culture would have been deprived of so much beauty and insight. And even if we're not great artists, our work contributes on a smaller level that may be just as meaningful to those who are drawn to it as a Picasso or Beethoven or Hemingway is to the multitudes.

Even when we do our best to be true to our vision, to maintain confidence in our work, with humility and integrity, there will still be people who will be jealous and critical. There's nothing we can do about that but to hold firm to our center and be true to our authentic self. It takes strength and courage, but as we learn to trust ourselves, we'll be more capable of suffering the slings and arrows that come our way, both from our outer world and our inner, and feel good about ourselves and our work without worrying about what other people are thinking.

Creative Tip

When you have a new inspiration, don't share it with anyone, at least at first. Wait until you feel secure enough in your vision that it can withstand opposition, and then begin by sharing it only with those you trust to encourage and nurture it.

Wise Words

"I think it can be dangerous for young writers to be modest when they're young. I've known a number of truly talented writers who did less than they could have done because they weren't vain and unpleasant enough about their talent. You have to take it seriously." ~ Norman Mailer

"Many people believe that humility is the opposite of pride, when, in fact, it is a point of equilibrium. The opposite of pride is actually a lack of self-esteem. A humble person is totally different from a person who cannot recognize and appreciate himself as part of this world's marvels." ~ Rabino Nilton Bonder

"I'm not sure a bad person can write a good book. If art doesn't make us better, then what on earth is it for?" ~ Alice Walker

Bookshelf



The Confidence Connection: Staying Off the Slippery Slope from Confidence to Arrogance ... Sharon Good



Ending the Struggle Against Yourself: A Workbook for Developing Deep Confidence and Self-Acceptance ... Stan Taubman



The Art of Trust: Healing Your Heart and Opening Your Mind ... Lee Jampolsky, PhD



Believing in Yourself: A Practical to Building Self-Confidence ... Erik Blumenthal



Honoring the Self: Self-Esteem and Personal Transformation Nathaniel Branden



Standing in Your Own Way: Talks on the Nature of Ego ... Anthony Damiani



The Confidence Course: Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment ... Walter Anderson



The Ultimate Secrets of Total Self-Confidence ... Robert Anthony

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Issue 29

Making a Living With Your Creativity

It's lovely to have free rein with your creativity, and for many people, their artistic pursuits are their personal outlet. But what happens when your creativity is what pays the rent? How do you keep the juices flowing on the creative process and still function within the bounds of your job?

When you think of creativity, you think of expansiveness of expression. Even the best artist needs the freedom to produce a lot of garbage in order to come up with a handful of great works. How many sketches did Leonardo da Vinci do before he created his masterpieces? How many frames does a photographer shoot to glean two or three outstanding ones? How many of a songwriter's songs hit the charts?

The creative process is not always predictable; it often takes a lot of trial and error. But when you're creating within the confines of a job, you have to be productive as well as creative, and you have to perform "on command" to boot. You don't always have the luxury of allowing creativity to happen at its own pace and without limitations.

You may wonder just how creative you can be in a business setting. When money is involved, you're expected to produce results. While it's the original idea that gets attention and makes the big bucks, once a concept "hits," everyone wants to copy it and achieve the same level of success. The media is a perfect example: How often do we see a myriad of imitations of a successful film or TV show? The goal is to have maximum results with minimal risk. That can be the antithesis of creativity.

Maintaining a level of creativity while trying to fulfill the requirements of a job can leave us feeling stuck, fenced-in and frustrated. And there are other issues we may face:

- ~ Creativity waxes and wanes. In a commercial job, you have to produce on demand, and you have to find ways to stimulate your creativity even when you're not feeling like it.
- ~ Creativity is, by nature, risky, and it's hard to take risks when you're in fear of failure or losing your job. You may be fortunate enough to work in an environment that values and encourages creativity and risk, but often, your boss is also afraid of risk and, in turn, limits you.
- ~ Some "creative" jobs are downright repetitive. While your artistic skills are involved, you're repeating some form of the same task over and over again, with little innovation. Some people like this, as it's less demanding

and conserves their energy for their own creative work. For others, it's stifling, especially when the job is your primary creative focus.

- ~ In some companies, creativity is discouraged or limited. For several years, I worked at an ad agency that specialized in pharmaceuticals. The clients simply didn't want anything too flashy, and often, the more creative ideas were shot down in favor of the same-old-same-old. It was disheartening for the designers.
- ~ In many jobs, you have to produce on a schedule. You need to be able to pull out your creativity even when you don't feel inspired. Graphic designers and writers, among others, may find themselves working well into the night to meet a deadline, trying their best to be creative when they're exhausted and bleary-eyed and can't come up with a new idea to save their life.

Staying fresh and inspired can be a challenge. As an artist, you want to do your best work. But when you're working in less than optimal conditions, you may not be able to achieve your ideal. There are a few things you can do to enhance your creativity when it seems to be hiding out and help make the experience more pleasurable.

- ~ Create a productive, inspiring environment. Set up your space so it operates efficiently. (It also helps when your equipment is functioning properly!) Bring in personal items that nurture your spirit. Surround yourself with great art or music. If you need solitude to think and create, close your office door. If you're in an open space or cubicle, play music through noise-cancelling headphones and let that create the solitude for you. Or if you can, work somewhere else, perhaps in a library or at home, or take your laptop to Starbuck's or the park.

With the explosion of technology in recent years, and especially since the pandemic, telecommuting has become a viable way to work, and more employers are willing to allow it.

- ~ Create a routine or ritual to get you started. (This is particularly helpful if you're not a morning person!) Perhaps begin your day with your bagel and coffee, check the news or stock market on the Internet, peruse your favorite section of the newspaper, set up your tools, do a warm-up such as practicing scales or journal writing, take a deep breath and go!
- ~ Discover what inspires you. If you get your best ideas walking in nature, then it's to your employer's benefit to let you do that. Go to an art museum, or read something that stimulates your mind. Take a few moments to meditate and quiet your mind. Sometimes even doing

something like crossword puzzles or computer games can relax you and make it easier to get into the creative flow.

- ~ Find new ways to free your creativity. Create new avenues of expression for yourself. If you're a graphic designer, taking a painting, drawing or sculpting class may be the breath of fresh air you need to free your creativity at work. If you're a journalist, doing some writing exercises (there are several good books with writing prompts) or taking a creative writing class can bring the joy back into your writing and open up new pathways to creativity.
- ~ Learn about the creative processes of other types of artists. Talk with them or read some of the many wonderful books available. See how their process can translate into yours.
- ~ Use the limitations as a motivator. In the ad agency I mentioned, the designers challenged themselves to see how creative they could be within the strictures that were placed upon them. While it's great to have complete freedom, having a problem to solve can also stretch your creativity.
- ~ Be willing to experiment. When you're afraid to make a mistake, you limit the range of your creativity. If a gymnast was afraid to fall, she would never be able to develop the big skills. Be willing to take the risk, and see what comes out of it. It's always fun when you surprise yourself!
- ~ At times, you may just have to get your inspiration from others. While it's preferable to be original and innovative, there are occasions when it's expedient to borrow ideas from industry greats. You certainly don't want to copy entire compositions, but you can use them to jump-start your own imagination. Don't be too hard on yourself that you can't create something completely original every time. Sometimes you just have to produce any way you can.

Update: Use ChatGPT or other AI apps to get ideas, but be sure to make them your own and not copy them wholesale.

- ~ Brainstorm with your colleagues. While you may feel afraid that admitting you don't have all the answers will cost you your job, doing so can give you great freedom and the opportunity to learn from your coworkers. They may feel as stuck as you do, and tossing around ideas can reveal new directions to explore. If that's not comfortable, brainstorm with trusted industry colleagues outside your own company or other creative friends.
- ~ Keep an idea file. When you're in the midst of a project, you don't always have time to go digging. As you go about your day, keep your

eyes open for an interesting design, an intriguing face, a pleasing melody, a catchy phrase, an engaging personality, a topic that captures your imagination. Then keep notes or sketches. When you're under pressure, you can turn to your repository and find just the fresh touch that you need.

- ~ If you feel blocked, just start. Sometimes, you can get good ideas by realizing what's bad about what you've got!
- ~ Learn to compromise. One of the realities of the commercial world is that whoever pays is right. There are times when you won't be able to do a project the way you want, and sometimes what the client wants will be downright awful. Do your best and let go. If you insist on holding to your artistic integrity against the wishes of your boss or client, you'll soon find yourself without them.

Standards are important, and you can still adhere to them on your own projects. But if you want to keep your job, you may need to ease up a bit. I've seen people who clung to their ideals to the point where no one ever saw their work. And isn't the point of creativity to communicate and touch people with your art?

- ~ Trust the process. There's a part of you that knows how to create, but when you're tense and nervous, you block that. Put the judging voice in the background, and allow the artist to come forth.
- ~ Remind yourself what you loved about this work in the first place. Remember how you related to it when you were a child or in college, how it made you feel. Get back in touch with that essence that's so meaningful to you and infuse that into your work. If compromising that for your job has become too hard for you, you can choose to make your living another way and keep your art for yourself.

Maintaining your creativity at work takes courage. There's no pat answer on how to deal with it. In some cases, the best route may be finding another job in a less restrictive environment. For others, it's breathing new life into your current job and your creative process. And for some, it's finding a new profession. Even if you're fortunate enough to be doing work you love, there will be times when you need to compromise.

Find ways that work for you, to give you the maximum amount of artistry and enjoyment and still be able to function within the parameters of your job. Remember, even when your job forces you to "crank out" the work and you begin to doubt your abilities, you're still an artist, and no one can take that away from you.

A special thanks to Lynn O in Virginia for inspiring this article.

Creative Tip

Carry a notepad or voice recorder with you at all times. When you get a flash of an idea, write or record it immediately, then collect your ideas in a folder or computer file.

Wise Words

"If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play." ~ John Cleese

"Creative geniuses are geniuses because they taught themselves *how* to think instead of *what* to think." ~ Michael Michalko, *Cracking Creativity*

"To solve problems successfully, you must believe you can, must feel capable enough to improvise. Yet too many adults have been schooled away from their ability to experiment freely." ~ Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*

"The biggest moneymakers in any organization are always the people who know how to be different." ~ Tom Turpin, President & CEO, Will Vinton Studios

Bookshelf



A Writer's Book of Days: A Spirited Companion and Lively Muse for the Writing Life ... Judy Reeves



Copywriting by Design: Bringing Ideas to Life With Words and Images ... David Herzbrun



Design for Response: Creative Direct Marketing That Works ... Leslie H. Sherr and David J. Katz



Strategic Creativity: A Business Field Guide to Advertising, Branding, and Design ... Robin Landa



Creativity for Graphic Designers ... Mark Oldach



The Muse That Sings: Composers Speak About the Creative Process ... Ann McCutchan



Effortless Mastery: Liberating the Master Musician Within ... Kenny Werner

Issue 30

The Inner Critic

One of the greatest deterrents to creativity is the inner voice that constantly whispers in our ear that we're not good enough, that nobody will approve of what we're doing, and that they don't really like us anyway. This "inner critic" becomes our constant companion, not only in our work, but in everything we do.

The inner critic begins as a survival mechanism. When we're children, part of our parents' job is to teach us socially acceptable behavior. In doing so, even the best parents inevitably curb our natural instincts. This makes us feel that there must be something innately wrong with us, and it hurts or shames us. In order to avoid future pain, we start telling ourselves what's wrong with us before others in our world get around to it.

As we grow up, we internalize all those outer voices, the criticisms and limiters on our natural behavior. This becomes our "inner critic," whose job is to store all the rules and then chastise us for not following them. Ironically, our inner voice can become harsher and more persistent than the outer ones ever were. We punish ourselves emotionally, and sometimes physically with such things as addictions. What began as a protector becomes a destroyer.

The inner critic will show up at different times and in different ways. One minute, it will tell us how hopeless we are, and the next, how much better we are than everyone else. It will appear more commonly in some areas of our lives – usually the ones we feel less secure about – than others. It will often speak up when we're feeling tired or threatened, and when things are going well and we feel good about ourselves, it'll remind us that we'll never be able to sustain it. When we're in the throes of creating, the vulnerability we feel is an open door for the critic to step in and judge us and our work.

~ **The first step in dealing with the inner critic is to recognize it as a separate entity from yourself.**

It is a voice within you, but it's not you. This voice has been your constant companion since childhood, and it's likely so much a part of you, like the air you breathe, that you hardly even notice it.

Realize that these are the combined voices of all the authority figures you grew up with – parents, teachers, religious leaders or just about any adult. When you were small, not heeding these voices could result in physical or emotional pain or humiliation.

Your inner critic may even reflect the voices of childhood friends. We all wanted so desperately to belong, yet most of us are not strangers to being hurt or humiliated because we were different. When I was about 10 years old, a “caring” friend told me that other kids thought I was conceited. It took me many years to let go of that voice, and it certainly kept me from being and doing my best for fear of losing friends if I allowed myself to shine.

~ **Next, begin to listen to what the voice says.**

Make note of the repetitive messages you hear. How does your critic speak to you? What names does it call you? Does it speak to you in a demeaning way, calling you “stupid” or worse? How does it find fault with you? Are there particular issues it tends to pick on?

Notice if there is a particular voice that dominates. Do you constantly hear your mother saying that men don’t like smart women, or your father saying that art is for sissies? Sometimes, merely identifying the voice, and understanding that you’re now old enough to make your own choices, will dissipate it.

Also, step back and look objectively at what the voice is saying. Is it true? If not, acknowledge what is true. If it is, what action can you take? Is there a skill you need to acquire? A discipline you need to institute? Are you setting impossible standards for yourself that need to be more realistic? Whose approval are you looking for? Is it worth sacrificing your creativity to get it? Will you ever really get it anyway?

~ **How is your critic trying to protect you from pain?**

Remember, your critic came into being to prevent you from behaving in a way that would bring you shame or humiliation. It’s not likely that you need the same degree of policing you needed as a small child, yet the voice keeps up the tirade. Perhaps it’s time to tell the voice to leave you alone and find it a new focus, like pointing out your strengths!

~ **Once you’ve begun to recognize the patterns, begin to change them.**

As you become more conscious of what the voice is saying, you can “reprogram” it. How would you talk to a child in this situation? If you often tell yourself that you’re stupid, find a more caring and encouraging way to address yourself. If you do make a mistake, acknowledge it, but support yourself in doing it better next time rather than berating yourself – not a great motivator for self-improvement.

If your voice continually points up your weaknesses, look instead for your strengths. Tell the voice that while you may never live up to your

sister's artistic abilities, you have a talent all your own that's worthwhile and valuable. That while you couldn't make it into Harvard, you have great people skills that make a difference in many lives, or you're a wiz at fixing computers. Or you may need to admit to yourself that you have an extraordinary gift, even though it might make people jealous.

~ **Identify the underlying fear.**

What's the worst thing that could happen if you didn't listen to your critic? As a child, you might not have had the resources to handle that. As an adult, you do. Or you can develop them. And if you really look at the fears and test them, in many cases, the child's fears are no longer a threat to the adult, or they no longer need to be.

~ **Talk to your inner critics.**

Find out what they have to say about you. In most cases, when you hear how extreme and absurd their criticisms are, it will be easier to dismiss them. Notice how contradictory they are – they'll find something wrong no matter what you do! On one day, they'll criticize you for not being talented enough. On another, they'll criticize you for looking too good and making others jealous.

Drs. Hal and Sidra Stone have developed a technology called Voice Dialogue, in which they work with clients to interact with numerous inner voices, one of which is the Inner Critic. You can also do this using meditation, journaling or opposite-hand writing, in which you write your questions with your dominant hand and respond to them using the hand you don't usually write with.

~ **When doing your creative work, keep the critic in its place.**

There's a time to create and a time to evaluate. When you're in the midst of the creative process, you don't want this judging presence looking over your shoulder, stopping the flow of creativity. Later, you do want to be able to discern what works, what doesn't, what improvements are needed. That's when the judging voice becomes useful.

~ **Build your self-esteem.**

Seek out and remind yourself what's good about you and what you do well. When you do that, you become less vulnerable to outside "attacks." Ironically, the more we give our inner critic free rein, the more outer critics seem to show up around us.

~ **Become your own authority.**

By listening to inner and outer critics, you give them power over you. Whose approval are you always looking to get? What gives their opinions more weight than yours? When you were a child, it could be devastating, a seeming threat to your survival, to lose the approval of parents and teachers. But you're an adult now with a much wider range of choices and capabilities. It might hurt to lose outside approval, but you don't need it to survive.

While you can learn technique and skills, true creativity is unique to you, and you need to follow your own muse. That's how we achieve innovation of expression in the arts. Caroline Myss, in her work, talks about our "tribe." This can be our family, our colleagues or some other peer group. In order to be part of the group, certain behavior is expected. But in order to individuate, to live your life by your own ideas and values, you need to break away from the tribe, at least for a time. That can be painful, but it can also afford you tremendous freedom.

~ **Keep things in perspective.**

Even if you have an incredible teacher whose judgments you value, don't allow them to diminish your self-trust. Mentoring is great, but not at the expense of your self-esteem and creativity. Your opinion matters, too. Remember, Freud didn't approve of the direction his student Karl Jung took. What a loss it would have been had Jung limited himself in order to please his teacher!

~ **Be more gentle with yourself.**

Instead of listening to your inner critic, give yourself the love and approval you want. True, some of what it says may be true. Do what you can about it, then let it go. Remember how annoying it was when your mother constantly nagged you about standing up straight or being like your cousin? Why do that to yourself?

The inner critic emerged to help you learn social behavior and avoid pain by curbing your natural instincts. But you need those instincts to create. As an adult, you know when and how you need to control yourself and when you can let loose. You have the maturity to discern that for yourself and no longer need arbitrary rules. There are still many places where you need to control your behavior, but your creativity can be one place where you can safely express yourself without limits – as long as you keep your inner critic in check.

There's one more thing you need to know. The voice of the inner critic is not going to go away. Not completely. And you don't want to force it to go away – as they say, what you resist persists. But the good news is, you can teach it to speak to you in a more positive, constructive way. Listen to it if you choose, but make your own judgments as the adult you are.

A special thanks to Roberta W. of New Hampshire for inspiring this article.

Creative Tip

When you want to bypass your inner critic, try writing or drawing with crayons on big sheets of construction paper to tap into the innocence of the child within you.

Wise Words

"Be yourself and think for yourself; and while your conclusions may not be infallible, they will be nearer right than the conclusions forced upon you."

~ Elbert Hubbard

"Self-worth cannot be verified by others. You are worthy because YOU say it is so. If you depend on others for your value, it is 'other-worth'." ~ Dr.

Wayne Dyer

"Many of us grow up with the idea that mistakes are bad, linking our self-esteem with continued success. We become afraid of making mistakes. So, in order to achieve success, we tend to steer clear of areas that may lie outside the apparent realm of our natural talent. In this perverse equation, the secret of success becomes avoiding failure, leaving much of our potential untapped.

"In order to reach our full potential to learn, we must accept and then transform anxiety and fear, relentlessly seeking accurate information on our performance. What used to be perceived as criticism now becomes a gift for constructive growth." ~ Michael Gelb and Tony Buzan, *Lessons from the Art of Juggling; How to Achieve Your Full Potential in Business, Learning and Life*

Bookshelf



Embracing Your Inner Critic: Turning Self-Criticism into a Creative Asset ... Hal Stone and Sidra Stone



Disarming Your Inner Critic ... James Elliott, PhD with Katherine Elliot, PhD



Taming Your Gremlin: A Surprisingly Simple Method for Getting Out of Your Own Way ... Rick Carson



Soul Without Shame: A Guide to Liberating Yourself from the Judge Within ... Byron Brown



Be Full of Yourself: The Journey from Self-Criticism to Self-Celebration ... Patricia Lynn Reilly



When Words Hurt: How to Keep Criticism from Undermining Your Self-Esteem ... Mary Lynne Heldmann



The Power of Your Other Hand: Unlock Creativity and Inner Wisdom Through the Right Side of Your Brain ... Lucia Capacchione, PhD



How to Be an Adult: A Handbook on Psychological and Spiritual Integration ... David Richo

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Issue 31

Be Sensible or Follow Your Bliss?

One of the biggest career dilemmas today is whether to do what seems practical – to pursue what you're good at and make as much money as you can – or, as Joseph Campbell said, to follow your bliss. Sometimes we're fortunate enough that the two overlap, but that's not always the case. And to complicate matters, creative people tend to have a myriad of interests and talents to choose from.

When you're young, you may find yourself facing thousands of dollars in school loans, rent to pay or perhaps a family to support, and you do what's expedient to make money. Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do.

But later in life, you may come to a point where you've become an expert at your job – you can do it in your sleep and you've got a great income ... and you're bored or stressed out. And there's this thing lurking in the background that you've always wanted to do – to write; to act; to close up the big house, move to the country and live a simpler life doing crafts. But there's that great income and professional status that's so hard to give up.

Or you're on the verge of choosing a career, trying to decide between a big-money job and one that makes your heart sing, but that will probably mean living on a budget for some time to come.

How do you choose?

While I can't tell you unequivocally that you should do one thing or the other – that's a complex personal decision – I can offer you some questions to contemplate:

- ~ Do you have a driving need or desire to follow your passion? How would it change your life to do that?
- ~ Do you have a need to make a lot of money at this time? Can you set a goal of doing that job for a certain amount of time, saving your money and then doing what you really love?
- ~ Is your current job adversely affecting your health and well-being? Are you finding it harder to drag yourself out of bed in the morning? Are you depressed, frustrated, anxious, angry or sick a lot?
- ~ Doing what you're good at can make your life easier, but following your heart can be more fun. Are you willing to work harder or make sacrifices to achieve the emotional gratification of doing what you love?
- ~ Is there something you love that, if you never get around to doing it, will cause you pain and regret in the long run?

- ~ Doing what you love doesn't preclude making a good income. How could you turn your passion into a viable career? Use your imagination and come up with ways you can make your passion work for you.
- ~ Can you pursue your passion in a more commercial form? For example, could you be a graphic artist by day and a fine artist by night? A jingle writer by trade and a songwriter for your own pleasure?
- ~ If you can't afford to "quit your day job," how else can you incorporate your passion into your life? Could you have two part-time careers, one for love and one for money? Could you have an avocation that might even bring in a little extra income or turn into a career somewhere down the road?
- ~ How could you reduce your expenses and save more money so you could afford to live on less if you choose to make a change? Can you create a financial reserve – the equivalent of 6 to 12 months' income in a savings account – that would give you money to live on while you find a new job or start a business?
- ~ If you have a spouse or partner, have you told them what you want to do? How about your kids? Can you make this a family project and work something out together?

While we all want to live prosperous lives, not pursuing something you love can have its consequences. Back in the 1950s, psychologist Abraham Maslow stated that when our basic survival needs are met, it's imperative that we move to our higher, or meta-needs, to "self-actualize." He warned about what could happen when we ignore these needs: "If the essential core of the person is denied or suppressed, he gets sick sometimes in obvious ways, sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes immediately, sometimes later." We see this all around us in the form of depression or stress-related illness. How you choose to structure your life to include your talents and passions will vary according to your distinct needs and desires. But when you make your choices, be sure to measure both the inner and outer demands. Be honest with yourself, and be imaginative in working out ways to have what you want. There's no better place to use your creativity than in crafting your own life!

Maslow's List of Meta-Needs

- * Wholeness (unity)
- * Perfection (balance and harmony)
- * Completion (ending)

- * Justice (fairness)
- * Richness (complexity)
- * Simplicity (essence)
- * Aliveness (spontaneity)
- * Beauty (rightness of form)
- * Goodness (benevolence)
- * Uniqueness (individuality)
- * Playfulness (ease)
- * Truth (reality)
- * Autonomy (self-sufficiency)
- * Meaningfulness (values)

Creative Tip

If there's something you love doing but can't find the time for, start doing it 10 or 20 minutes a day, or an hour on the weekend. Once you begin and become absorbed in the activity, you'll find the allotted time expanding effortlessly.

Wise Words

"Let the beauty of what you love be what you do." ~ Rumi

"To find in ourselves what makes life worth living is risky business, for it means that once we know we must seek it. It also means that without it, life will be valueless." ~ Marsha Sinetar

"The best career advice given to the young is: 'Find out what you like doing best and get someone to pay you for doing it.' " ~ Katherine Whitehorn

Bookshelf



Follow Your Career Star: A Career Quest Based on Inner Values ...
Jon Snodgrass, PhD



Find Your Calling, Love Your Life: Paths to Your Truest Self in Life and Work ... Martha Finney and Deborah Dasch



Where Do I Go From Here?: An Inspirational Guide to Making Authentic Career and Life Choices ... Kenneth C. Ruge



SoulWork: Finding the Work You Love, Loving the Work You Have ...
Deborah P. Bloch and Lee J. Richmond



Dare to Change Your Job and Your Life ... Carole Kanchier, PhD



The Pathfinder: How to Choose or Change Your Career for a Lifetime of Satisfaction and Success ... Nicholas Lore



Are You Ready to Love Your Job?: Make a Great Living Through Soul Search, Research and Job Search ... Maggie Mistal

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Issue 32

Starting Fresh

As the year comes to a close, it's time once again to think of endings and new beginnings. While it can be sad to let go of what's been, it's also a perfect time to clean the slate and make a fresh start. Just as you rid your closets of the old to make room for the new, you can do the same with the thoughts and feelings that clutter your mind and heart.

During the holidays, things often slow down, making it a natural time for introspection, a time to evaluate and reassess your priorities. This year, instead of looking at a better way to do resolutions, let's restrategize our goals, stopping to reflect on the past year and shine a light on the one to come.

~ **Acknowledge your successes.**

Write them down or share them with friends and family. Remember to acknowledge the inner successes, such as the ways you've grown as a person, along with the outer, more tangible accomplishments. At one time, I would get together with a group of friends each New Year's Day to share our achievements of the past year, and in every case, the successes that were most meaningful to each of us were the inner ones.

Take time to celebrate your successes. Depending on your style and the caliber of the success, that may mean throwing a party, having dinner with a good friend, buying yourself something special, lighting a candle, making a note in your gratitude journal or simply giving a few words of thanks.

Begin the new year by starting a Success List, and add your successes throughout the year, so you don't have to scramble to remember them all at the end of the year. (Reading your list is also a great way to get a lift when you're feeling down.)

~ **Next, look at the goals you made for the past year that you didn't achieve.**

Reevaluate them. Are they goals you want to renew for the coming year or ones that you want to let go of? Objectively assess what got in your way of achieving them this past year. Was something stopping you? Are there obstacles you can clear or conflicts (inner or outer) you need to resolve? Were you doing it to please someone else rather than yourself? Did you set the bar too high? Is it simply a matter of time and persistence? Or is it a goal that no longer has any heart for you and you're just going through the motions?

And just as you celebrated your successes, you may need to grieve your losses and outdated dreams in order to let them go. Take time to deal with your feelings. Talk about it with someone, or write, sing or paint about it. You might want to create a “letting go” ritual – one way is to write on a piece of paper what you want to release and burn the paper, perhaps scattering the ashes to the wind or water.

- ~ **Third, look at the big picture of your life – where you want to go in the long run, and not just in the immediate future.**

Are you happy with the track you’re on? Are the dreams you’re pursuing still exciting you? Are there others that have been waiting on the back burner too long? Which ones have outlived their usefulness? What shifts in direction need to be made? What needs to be added, changed or relinquished?

- ~ **Finally, create a fresh list of goals and priorities for the coming year.** Get rid of the goals that are no longer serving you and recommit to the ones that are – by recommitting, you can approach that goal with a new enthusiasm, rather than just dragging it along from year to year. Add new ones – what are the next goals that will stand on the shoulders of your current successes? Create short- and long-term plans for achieving those goals – the steps you’ll take in the coming year and beyond. And you may want to list or group your goals in order of importance.

Along with achievements, look also at your **life strategies**. Which ones empower you, and which ones are based on old habits, fears or beliefs? For example, my life strategy used to be “work harder.” That strategy was based on a fear that I was never good enough or did enough, and even though the physical evidence showed that working harder – sometimes to the point of exhaustion – didn’t really make a difference, I kept doing it anyway out of fear. As I’ve learned to trust myself more and changed my beliefs, my strategy has become “work smart, not hard.”

To discover your life strategies, or “world views,” look at the way you explain how things happen in your life, as well as the excuses or justifications you often use for the way your life is going. They will generally fall into certain consistent patterns or statements that either enhance or limit your ability to create success, happiness and abundance. Once you see what they are, you can make an informed choice about whether a strategy serves you or not, and then renew it or replace it with something better.

Some examples of disempowering strategies that you might have:

- ~ It’s a dog-eat-dog world, so get all you can for yourself, and the heck with the next guy.

- ~ I can't count on anyone but myself.
- ~ It's you and me against the world.
- ~ Nothing I do is good enough, so I always have to work harder.
- ~ Nothing I do is good enough, so why bother.
- ~ If it's fun or feels good, it must be bad for me (or I don't deserve it).
- ~ Everyone depends on me, so I have to come through for them, even if it's at my own expense. (Variation: Other people's needs are more important than mine; taking care of myself is selfish.)
- ~ Everyone else can make money and have things, but I'll always be poor.

And some examples of positive world views:

- ~ The world is a safe and friendly place.
- ~ There's always someone I can count on.
- ~ I am abundant and always have enough to meet my needs.
- ~ My efforts get results and are rewarded.
- ~ What I do matters.
- ~ I deserve good things.

You can use this process individually or with your family and in various areas of your life, such as:

- ~ Relationships/family/community
- ~ Career/job
- ~ Money/finance
- ~ Hobbies and leisure pursuits
- ~ Personal growth and spirituality

So, start the new year with a clean slate. Let go of both your successes and your failures and start from ground zero. Doing so can give you a fresh outlook on life and set you off with a renewed sense of energy and enthusiasm.

Creative Tip

Write down your goals and priorities for the year and put them on your wall or bulletin board as an inspirational reminder. Put the most important, or elusive, ones on colorful post-it notes and place them around your home where you'll see them often.

Wise Words

"Finish each day and be done with it...You have done what you could; some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; you shall begin it well and serenely." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some." ~ Charles Dickens

"One can never change the past, only the hold it has on you, and while nothing in your life is reversible, you can reverse it nevertheless." ~ Merle Shain

Bookshelf



The Art of the Fresh Start: How to Make and Keep Your New Year's Resolutions for a Lifetime ... Glenna Salsbury



The Little Book of Letting Go: A Revolutionary 30-Day Program to Cleanse Your Mind, Lift Your Spirit and Replenish Your Soul ... Hugh Prather



The Art of Letting Go ... Damon Zahariadis



Life Makeovers ... Cheryl Richardson



Soul Mapping: An Imaginative Way to Self-Discovery ... Nina H. Frost, Dr. Kenneth C. Ruge and Dr. Richard W. Shoup



Shaving the Inside of Your Skull: Crazy Wisdom for Discovering Who You Really Are ... Mel Ash



The Book of Self-Acquaintance ... Margaret Tiberio

Issue 33

Planning Ahead: A Life Map

Many of us float through life without a plan. We kind of know what we'd like to happen, but we don't have any clear goals or a strategy for getting there. As a result, we never quite get where we want to go, or we end up taking the long way around. Imagine that you want to drive from New York to Los Angeles, but you refuse to consult a map; you just take whichever road looks good to you at the time. You might end up in California, but you also might end up in the Yukon! Maybe that's more exciting for you, but it's a risk you take.

Certainly, there are times when you want the freedom to be spontaneous and follow your heart. Maybe that even works for you as a lifestyle. But if you have specific goals you want to achieve, having a "life map" can help you get where you want to go faster and more efficiently. With a basic structure in place, you can then find a lot of freedom within the boundaries of your map and catch yourself if you stray too far from your intended path. Creating a map can be particularly useful if you have a life goal that isn't feasible for you right now. You can decide where you want to be in, say, 5 or 10 years and plan a strategy to get you there over that time. The steps you take might include cutting back on your extravagances or even moving to a less expensive home to save money so you have a cushion to fall back on during an anticipated career change. It might mean acquiring or honing skills, or slowly accumulating credits toward an advanced degree. Then, when the time is right, all the pieces will be in place, and you can make your move elegantly.

As artists, it's often against our nature to create a rigid structure for ourselves. It makes us feel trapped and stifled. Or we may be afraid of setting goals because we fear we'll be disappointed if they don't happen, or not be able to live up to the demands if they do. Being right-brainers, it's our tendency to follow our muse and let the chips fall where they may. But if we wait for inspiration to show up, it often doesn't, and we never accomplish much.

The structure you create doesn't have to be a rigid one – in fact, flexibility is crucial in withstanding the twists and turns that life throws at us – and having an organized plan can help you achieve more with less effort. As a writer, sure, I want creative freedom, but if I don't schedule time to write and set a deadline for completing a project, I'll never do it. The distractions of life can be much more compelling than a finicky muse that doesn't want to

show up without a lot of coaxing! And if you want to use your creativity in a business, planning is crucial.

~ **Begin by creating a vision for yourself.**

Allow yourself to dream. What would you ultimately like to accomplish with your work? With your life? Make sure these are things that *you* truly want, not what someone else wants for you or what you think is expected by some societal standard, and that they're aligned with your values. Keep in mind the person you want to become; don't limit yourself by who you are now. You're going to grow!

~ **Write a mission statement or do a treasure map.**

A mission statement includes the essence of what you want stated in words. For example: "I want to inspire young people with my music," "I want to be innovative and create new forms with my art," or "I want to live a life that embodies my values of love, compassion and beauty." (If you're not sure how to go about this, try the Mission Statement Bulder at Franklin Covey.)

A treasure map captures the same essence in images as well as words. Go through magazines and cut out pictures and phrases that represent your vision. Create a collage on poster board.

~ **Next, pull apart the vision.**

What are the specific components? Is there a particular job you would like? Certain people or types of people you want to be around? Do you envision living in a specific place? What do you see yourself accomplishing? What new things do you want to learn or explore? How do you want to grow and change as a person?

Now, take each component. What do you need to do to make it happen? What do you need to change about yourself? What skills do you need to acquire? What other changes need to be made? Break it down into small, doable steps. Is there anything here that you're unwilling or unable to do? If so, go back and modify that component. Then, break down the steps again.

~ **Place your steps in a timeline.**

You might have a detailed one-year timeline, with specific steps and goals, and a less-detailed five- or ten-year timeline for long-term goals. Place your timelines where you can check them easily, and copy the steps for the coming year into your day planner.

When you fill in your timeline, keep in mind how you're motivated. If you work best with deadlines, set specific dates by which to accomplish each

step. If you work better without pressure, then set a time frame, such as, "I'll finish 3 paintings within the year." However tight or loose the deadlines, though, be sure to define clear, specific goals.

~ **Do financials.**

Plan for the future you envision or for retirement. (For creatives, retirement often means being able to spend *all* of your time doing what you love instead of only a small portion of it.) If your vision includes your own business, start working up a business plan, so you have an idea of how much capital it will require (undercapitalization is the biggest cause of small business failure). Work with a financial planner to see how much you need to save to have the financial cushion you're going to want when it's time to make your move.

~ **Deal with your fears.**

Define what you're really afraid of (often, it comes down to money issues or fear of losing loved ones). You may have a goal that you're not capable of achieving now, but that's perfectly doable as a ten-year plan. Prepare yourself for success. Build your courage and confidence by honing and expanding your skills and facing your fears. Remember, you don't have to do it all in one leap; you're very capable of taking one step at a time.

~ **Create interim pictures.**

As you follow your plan, what will your life look like one year from now? In five years? Ten? Twenty? The trick is to hold both the big picture and the details at the same time. Keep your eye on the road ahead, while maneuvering past the potholes that lie right in front of you. And even when your plans go awry, keep your sights on your vision. The universe works in mysterious ways, and you'll reach your goal in a much richer way than you could have orchestrated by yourself.

~ **As you work with your plan, reevaluate it periodically.**

Cross off the steps that have been accomplished. (Some people prefer to use a yellow highlighter to show themselves how much they've accomplished.) As things change and you gain more insight, rework your timeline to keep it realistic. You may find you're moving faster or slower than you originally intended, or in a different direction. Redo your one-year timeline every 6 or 12 months. You may even want to make changes in your original vision or mission statement as your self-awareness and experience grow.

~ **Keep it simple.**

Don't overload yourself with a lot of heavy-duty goals. Like New Year's resolutions, you'll do it for 2 months and stop. Better to define 3 - 5 choice goals and focus on those over the long-term. And find a way to keep yourself motivated. With long-term goals in particular, make sure you have interim gratification or rewards along the way to keep you going.

~ **Put it down on paper.**

Even if you have a great memory, there's power in the process of writing, and seeing it in black and white makes it more real.

By taking these steps, you're creating a life map that will get you where you want to go. Little steps add up, and you may find yourself getting there faster than you thought you could. Wanting things to happen is not enough. You need to have a clear intention, and then take actions to support that intention. By being clear, you invite the universe to bring you what you need to move toward your goal.

Having a plan will help you stay focused on your goals and dreams. You'll be able to work more efficiently and avoid wasting precious time and energy worrying, trying to figure out what to do next and beating yourself up for not living up to your potential. You've got better things to do with your time than that!

Creative Tip

If you have a particular goal you want to achieve, write it 15 times a day. Write it in present tense in a positive form. For example, say, "I am now in perfect health," rather than, "I am not going to get sick anymore."

Wise Words

"Some people regard discipline as a chore. For me, it is a kind of order that sets me free to fly." ~ Julie Andrews

"Setting goals for significant accomplishments you want to achieve in your life, both personal and professional accomplishments, costs you nothing. Failure to set them can cost you plenty. You are smack in the middle of the only life you're going to have. You can choose to succeed, or choose to drift; having goals makes the difference." ~ Alec Mackenzie, *The Time Trap*

"Four steps to achievement: Plan purposefully. Prepare prayerfully. Proceed positively. Pursue persistently." ~ William A. Ward

"It is more important to know where you are going than to get there quickly.
Do not mistake activity for achievement." ~ Mabel Newcomber

Bookshelf



Energy, Peace, Purpose: A Step by Step Guide to Optimal Living ...
G. Ken Goodrick



*The Practical Dreamer's Handbook: Finding the Time, Money, and
Energy to Live the Life You Want to Live ...* Paul and Sarah Edwards



The Magic Lamp: Goal Setting for People Who Hate Setting Goals ...
Keith Ellis



*Motivation and Goal Setting: How to Set and Achieve Goals and
Inspire Others ...* Jim Cairo



*The 15 Second Principle: Short, Simple Steps to Achieving Long-Term
Goals ...* Al Secunda



Goal Setting 101: How to Set and Achieve a Goal! ... Gary Ryan Blair

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Issue 34

Increasing Your Creativity Flow

Those of us who are in creative professions, as well as those who depend on their creativity in other aspects of their lives, have learned that creativity is not constant; it ebbs and flows. While creativity can't be forced, there are ways to enhance body, mind and spirit to increase the flow.

"Creativity catalyst" Linda Naiman, an expert on bringing creativity into the workplace, offers us a number of ways to do this.

~ **Feed your brain**

While we know that creativity comes from beyond the brain, the brain is the "receiver" through which your creativity is channeled. You want to find foods that nourish it and avoid those that "sedate" or tranquilize it. Since the brain runs on glucose, which is best produced from complex carbohydrates, foods such as mashed potatoes and barley can help improve memory.

Over the long term, Naiman suggests nourishing the brain with foods high in vitamin B, such as peas, beans, liver, kidney, chicken and eggs. The mineral boron is excellent for memory and attention; sources include apples, pears and green leafy vegetables. Other foods that are good for the brain include blueberries, fish and shellfish (for the protein). Caffeine can stimulate the brain (although you may choose to avoid it or use it selectively for other reasons). Avoid sugar and fat – that yummy chocolate bar will give you quick energy, and just as quickly put you to sleep!

Let's not forget those popular herbs, ginkgo biloba and gotu kola, available in most health food stores and many pharmacies. (Do check with your health care practitioner before taking these.)

And don't forget to drink lots of water!

~ **Exercise**

Exercise can heal a multitude of ills, as well as stimulating stuck creativity. When we're sedentary, our minds also tend to be sluggish or undisciplined. Naiman recommends rhythmic activities like running, walking, swimming, scrubbing and chopping to quiet mindful chatter and allow imagination to flow.

For others, activities like yoga, tai chi or chi gong can help you get relaxed, centered and focused. There are several excellent 15 - 20 minute exercise videos, or keep a little stepper machine close by for a quick, easy

workout. Or combine exercise and play with a good game of tennis or pickleball.

~ **Music**

A great deal of research has been done recently on the effect of music on brain function. Students who sing or play an instrument have been found to score significantly higher on their SAT scores than the national average. Along with reducing stress, classical music, from the Mozart era in particular, contributes to the improvement of higher brain functions, including the ability to deal with logical and mathematical concepts.

According to Don Campbell, author of *The Mozart Effect*, "The music of Mozart, Gregorian chant, and some jazz, New Age, Latin, pop and even rock music can strengthen the mind, unlock the creative spirit, and, miraculously, even heal the body." Different people hear and process music in different ways, so choose the style that works best for you.

Conversely, do your best to avoid noise. It can fatigue and distract you. And don't hesitate to combine music with exercise. Doing exercise to stimulating music can lessen fatigue and release endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

~ **Daydream**

Most of us have been taught from an early age that daydreaming is a waste of time. But many creative breakthroughs have come from both day and night dreams. Daydreaming is a way to incubate the components of a problem and uncover solutions. In daydreaming, you temporarily dissolve the boundaries of rational thought and look for new perspectives that may come to you through images, thoughts and metaphors.

According to authors Willis Harman and Howard Rheingold, "Many of the greatest scientific insights, discoveries and revolutionary inventions appeared first to their creators as fantasies, dreams, trances, lightning-flash insights, and other non-ordinary states of consciousness." Their book, *Higher Creativity: Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights*, describes scientific breakthroughs that have come about from daydreams and accessing the unconscious.

~ **Play**

"I think most of us work too hard and we don't take enough time to play," Naiman says. "Play generates joy and replenishes and revitalizes our human spirit. It clears the mental cobwebs that keep us from thinking clearly. Play frees us from worry and stress, relaxing the brain and making it easier to be more creative."

We live in a society that promotes work, work, work. We put in 60 – 80 hour weeks and constantly strive for more achievement. But you can't do great work without personal fulfillment. Play is crucial to attaining a work/life balance, and the quality of our work suffers if we don't take the time to play. Remember, creativity is predominantly a right-brain activity, and it's harder to stimulate that when you're dwelling permanently in your left brain. Like daydreaming, play is pivotal to creation.

And don't forget to laugh! Doug Hall, in his book, *Jump Start Your Brain*, reminds us that, "You can increase your brain power three- to fivefold simply by laughing and having fun before working on a problem."

~ **Breathe**

This may seem like a no-brainer, but if you take the time to observe your breathing, you may discover that your breathing is shallow or strained. Breath is the life force and essential to stimulating the mind. Seek out one of numerous books and audios available to help you deepen and relax your breathing. Several traditions, such as yoga, offer instruction on breathing technique.

One such exercise from the yoga tradition is called Kapala Bhati. This practice purifies the head area, clears mental cobwebs, calms the mind and the breath. Naiman describes it as "a series of forced exhalations: exhale quickly and lightly through the nose, letting the inhalation occur as a natural reflex. Do this for up to one minute, then rest and breathe normally. Repeat exhalations. Begin with 3 rounds of 30 exhalations and gradually increase to 10 rounds of 60."

IMPORTANT: Persons with high blood pressure or lung disease should not practice this exercise.

~ **Aromatherapy**

Aromatherapy is the use of essential oils to produce a particular effect. For the purpose of creativity, Naiman recommends peppermint, cypress or lemon to energize, or ylang ylang, geranium or rose to relax.

Essential oils can be used individually or in combination. In *The Complete Book of Essential Oils & Aromatherapy*, author Valerie Ann Worwood suggests a combination of basil, cardamom, ginger and black pepper for concentration. To stimulate the right brain, you might choose bergamot, neroli, grapefruit, geranium, birch or coriander.

Essential oils can be prepared and used in various ways. Naiman suggests putting 10 – 15 drops in the bath with a little almond oil. You can also put a few drops on a disk (available at an aromatherapy outlet)

and put it on a light bulb; the heat from the light disperses the scent. Consult a book such as Worwood's for additional uses.

~ **Feed your soul**

Constantly driving yourself or spending hours behind office walls eventually becomes counterproductive. Just as you need to nourish your body, you need to nourish your soul. Naiman says, "When people are growing through learning and creativity, they are much more fulfilled ... Remember what you loved to do as a child and bring the essence of that activity into your work." She cites a January 1998 *Fortunate Magazine* article, stating that "research shows that highly motivated employees are up to 127% more productive than averagely motivated employees in high complexity jobs."

Along with daydreaming, play and exercise, take time to pursue hobbies you enjoy. Find ways to bring beauty into your home, your office and your life. Spend time with people you find enjoyable and stimulating. Make feeding your soul as important as feeding your body.

~ **Build a brain trust**

Prime your creative pump by reading magazines on number of topics. Surround yourself with bright and inspiring people from a wide variety of fields who encourage you and stimulate your creativity. The added benefit is that you will begin to see yourself as bright and inspiring, too!

~ **Follow your intuition**

Very often, we have creative insights, but dismiss them as too far out or impractical. Naiman encourages us to "follow the path that gives you the most joy. Learn to trust and listen to your inner guidance. Developing and following your intuition keeps you a few steps ahead of the pack."

So, eat well, exercise, breathe, lighten up and enjoy life, and your creativity will benefit as well!

Thanks, Linda Naiman, for a wealth of great ideas!

Linda Naiman, BFA, is founder of Linda Naiman & Associates Inc. (Vancouver, BC), a consulting and training group at the forefront of transformational change through creativity and innovation. Linda works with corporate and public sector organizations to develop their skill sets in applying creativity, innovation and visionary thinking to business strategy.

Linda is a lifelong artist, whose paintings are part of private collections and film productions. Her writings on creativity and innovation have appeared in numerous business publications, including "Perspectives on Global Change," published by The World Business Academy. Visit her website at <http://www.creativityatwork.com>.

Creative Tip

If you're feeling particularly stuck and uninspired, take a "creativity day." Spend the day pampering and nourishing body and soul. You may feel like you're losing precious work time, but when you do go back to work, you'll find yourself accomplishing your tasks with greater ease.

Wise Words

"Humor and creativity are kissing cousins. If you want to develop your sense of humor, invite more creativity into your life – and vice versa. In the presence of humor, new creative perspectives naturally occur. You can't stop them." ~ Joel Goodman, founder and director of The Humor Project

"Brain cells create ideas. Stress kills brain cells. Stress is not a good idea."
~ Doug Hall, *Jump Start Your Brain*

"I don't really feel your brainpower needs boosting. If anything, it needs celebrating, for you already have enough active brain cells inside you to accomplish many great things in your life." ~ Thomas Armstrong, PhD, *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Many Intelligences*

Bookshelf



Your Miracle Brain ... Jean Carper



Mind Boosters: A Guide to Natural Supplements That Enhance Your Mind, Memory, and Mood ... Ray Sahelian



12-Minute Total Body Workout ... Joyce L. Vedral



The Mozart Effect: Tapping the Power of Music to Heal the Body, Strengthen the Mind and Unlock the Creative Spirit ... Don G. Campbell



Higher Creativity: Liberating the Unconscious for Breakthrough Insights ... Willis Harman, PhD and Howard Rheingold



The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity ... Julia Cameron



Jump Start Your Brain: How Everyone at Every Age Can Be Smarter and More Productive ... Doug Hall with David Wecker



Conscious Breathing: Breathwork for Health, Stress Release, and Personal Mastery ... Gay Hendricks



Breathing: The Master Key to Self Healing ... Andrew Weil



The Daydream Workbook: Learning the Art of Decoding Your Daydreams ... Robert Langs, MD



The Complete Book of Essential Oils and Aromatherapy ... Valerie Ann Worwood



Aromatherapy Blends and Remedies: Over 800 Recipes for Everyday Use ... Franzisca Watson

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Issue 35

Coping with Anxiety

A common malady that creatives – and just about everyone, for that matter – face is anxiety. As artists, we're continually up against the uncertainty of our muse showing up, and the possibility of being judged and rejected when it does. Even the potential of imminent success can make us apprehensive. To add to that, the world in general is changing at an accelerating pace, forcing us to deal with something new on an almost-daily basis. It can leave us feeling unsteady or ungrounded.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines anxiety as "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by ... doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it."

Anxiety is a natural human reaction to life's stressful events, whether happy or unhappy. We may feel anxious before an exam as well as an opening night. Unlike fear, which has a definite focus, anxiety lacks a definable source; it's hard to put your finger on it. It may show up as agitation, nervous energy or the inability to focus.

But vague though it may be, anxiety can paralyze us into inaction. And for some, it can exacerbate into anxiety disorder or panic attacks. If that's the case, professional help is in order. For most of us, though, it's just "garden variety" anxiety from the normal stresses and challenges of daily life. But that "simple" anxiety is probably responsible for more of us falling short of our potential than anything else. Anxiety can be debilitating at worst and keep us frustrated at not achieving our goals at the least.

Anxiety may be a behavioral pattern learned from our parents. Many of us have been trained to use worry as a talisman to keep "evil spirits" away, and when we're feeling carefree, we may feel as though we've abandoned the sentry posts and something bad will happen. It may also result from being a people pleaser and fearing the loss of approval, from a desire to control our world, a fear of failure, or from feeling too much pressure and perhaps the inability to produce to the level expected of us.

Many of us have found ways to deal with our anxiety that are detrimental.

- ~ We may convince ourselves that we're incompetent, and then wallow in self-pity.
- ~ We may procrastinate.
- ~ We may take out our agitation by picking a fight with a loved one or the cashier at the supermarket.

- ~ We may worry about all the possible calamities that could occur.
- ~ We may find release in an addiction to food, drugs, alcohol, tobacco, sex or even my favorite, computer games.

These may temporarily alleviate the anxiety, but they don't get you any closer to your goals, and some are downright self-destructive. And to further compound the problem, anxiety may lead to headaches, insomnia and other physical symptoms that make it even harder for us to cope, resulting in a downward spiral.

But the good news is, there are lots of positive, healthful ways to alleviate anxiety.

- ~ **Use relaxation techniques to calm and focus yourself.**

Meditate. Take a walk in nature. Play classical or New Age music, recordings of nature sounds or relaxation tapes. Practice yoga, tai chi or chi gong. Precede your work session, or begin each day, with one of these to set new physical and emotional patterns.

- ~ **Breathe.**

Use one of many available techniques, or just simply stop and focus on your inhale and exhale, ensuring that you breathe deeply into your belly. Scan your body for tension areas and breathe into them.

- ~ **Take care of your body.**

Exercise produces mood-enhancing endorphins, curing a multitude of ills. Get a massage to relieve the buildup of daily tension and the resulting stiffness or pain. Take a warm bubble bath. Watch your diet. Make sure you're getting adequate nutrition, and eliminate or reduce caffeine and sugar. Take vitamins and mineral supplements, particularly minerals with a calming effect, like calcium and magnesium. Take time to relax.

- ~ **Use affirmations or a mantra.**

My computer monitor is covered with stickies containing positive affirmations that counter the negative thoughts that make me anxious. Add to that by monitoring and changing your self-talk. Anxiety can result from a running commentary in our heads about all the disasters that could happen or how inadequate we are to the task at hand. Shift the inner conversation to a positive, self-supportive one.

- ~ **Write out what's going on in your mind.**

Spill it out in stream-of-consciousness to quiet that persistent inner voice. Keep a journal to vent your feelings. Like Julia Cameron's morning

pages, you can dump your anxieties onto the page, rather than carrying them around with you all day.

~ **Use visualization.**

A favorite technique of mine is to imagine a screen, like a screen door, and see myself walking through it, screening out the anxiety. Or visualize your completed project. You may even want to have a visual representation, such as a graphic of the cover of your book, a good review of previous work or a picture of yourself at a strong, confident moment.

~ **If you're an addictive type, replace the negative addiction with a positive one...**

... such as exercise, meditation or keeping your workspace meticulously organized.

~ **Stay focused in the present and on your objective.**

Anxiety often comes from worrying about what will happen when we do what we're avoiding doing. Get back in touch with your love for what you're doing (or at least the advantages of getting it done), and focus on doing it, rather than on the future outcome. Keep in mind that most of our worries *never* manifest.

~ **Prepare for whatever is making you anxious.**

When I first started teaching, I would overprepare to alleviate the anxiety that I might not have enough material or not anticipate all the questions about the material I was teaching. It helped. If you feel anxious when facing a project, you may need additional skills or preparation to build your self-confidence. Or simply take small steps and build. If you're afraid of speaking in front of a large group, start speaking in front of a mirror, then with one person, then a small group and so on.

~ **See if there's a physical or outside cause, and alleviate it as best you can.**

Some possible causes are: noise, sensitivity to food or chemicals, caffeine, sugar and TV violence. Watching cop shows or the news first or last thing in the day can leave you feeling agitated.

~ **Make a distinction between fear and excitement.**

They feel very much alike, and we tend to assume it's fear out of habit. Stop a minute and tune in to what you're feeling. Feel the excitement, enjoy it and ride the wave!

~ **Deal with it physiologically.**

Use herbs and herbal teas such as chamomile, kava kava, motherwort or valerian; Bach Flower Remedies; homeopathics like Hyland's Calms Forte; self-hypnosis or biofeedback; "tapping" techniques such as Thought Field Therapy (TFT), Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) or the Tapping Solution; or even hold a calming touchstone, stuffed animal or furry pet.

~ **Push yourself through and take action.**

Often, when I sit down to write, I feel a little anxious and resistant. I start with simple tasks, such as setting up computer files or doing some research on the Internet. Once I get into it, I begin to enjoy the process, and the anxiety lifts.

~ **Give yourself structure.**

This is particularly important if you work at home. It's easy to get caught up in distractions and avoid getting down to business, or to be faced with so many options that you don't know what to do first. Schedule specific time for your project, and put it in your day planner. Then treat it like a real appointment and do it!

~ **Get support.**

Find a partner who you can call or text. A number of years ago, producing my first show was a terrifying experience. I made an arrangement with a mentor that I could call and leave a message on her answering machine when I was feeling scared or anxious. When I did, it alleviated some of the anxiety, and I was able to move forward with the tasks I needed to accomplish, rather than being paralyzed by it.

Remember, anxiety can have power over you only if you let it. Redirect the energy into your work. Use the adrenaline in a positive way. And keep your eye on the ball – the goals you want to achieve. Let them empower you to move through the anxiety to completion of your projects and success!

Creative Tip

If you tend to be a worrier, write your worries down on pieces of paper, then release them by ripping them up and burning or flushing them. Let them go. Repeat this ritual daily until you feel your worries no longer have a grip on you.

Wise Words

"You don't have to control your thoughts, you just have to stop letting them control you." ~ Dan Millman

"When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened." ~ Winston Churchill

"You can't expect to prevent negative feelings altogether. And you can't expect to experience positive feelings all the time... The Law of Emotional Choice directs us to acknowledge our feelings but also to refuse to get stuck in the negative ones." ~ Greg Anderson, *The 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness*

Bookshelf



Stress-Free: Peaceful Affirmations to Relieve Anxiety and Help You Relax ... Louise Hay (CD)



You Can Choose To Be Happy: "Rise Above" Anxiety, Anger and Depression ... Tom G. Stevens



The Encyclopedia of Bach Flower Therapy ... Mechthild Scheffer



The Tapping Solution: A Revolutionary System for Stress-Free Living ... Nick Ortner



Tapping the Healer Within: Using Thought Field Therapy to Instantly Conquer Your Fears, Anxieties and Emotional Distress ... Roger J. Callahan, PhD



The Relaxation Response ... Herbert Benson, MD with Miriam Z. Klipper



The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook ... Martha Davis, PhD, Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, MSW and Matthew McKay, PhD



Deep Relaxation . . Nischala Joy Devi (CD)



Deep Relaxation ... Robert Griswold (audiobook)



Desktop Yoga: For office slaves, Internet addicts, and stressed-out students ... Julie T. Lusk, MEd, LPC



Pocket Guide to Self-Hypnosis ... Adam Burke



Calm app

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Issue 36

Success, Fame and Visibility

“Success is far more perilous than failure.” So said Noel Coward in his play, *Design for Living*. We all strive fervently for success, but when we actually get there, it can challenge as well as reward us. Success changes your life irrevocably. You receive more attention, opportunities and privileges, as well as financial rewards, but the increased visibility can also limit your privacy, make demands on you and inhibit your creativity.

Certainly, fame has its benefits. I believe it was George Carlin who said that the best part of fame was not having to wait on lines anymore. Our culture needs heroes, so we put celebrities on pedestals. You may find yourself being offered artistic opportunities that would never have come your way before, along with personal privileges. You may make more money in one week than in the previous five years. But we also live in a society that sets impossible standards for our heroes, and then turns on them when they can't maintain, or even reach, those standards.

As artists, we're often sensitive people, and visibility opens us up to people's projections and criticisms. They may idolize us and expect us to be flawless human beings, the ideal mother or father they never had, or confuse us with the characters we play or our public image, and then become angry when they see our human imperfections or our reluctance to fill that role for them. We've seen how theatre and other critics make an art of skewering performers and artists, to the delight of their readers, insensitive to the hurt they may be causing the object of their criticism. Sadly, the public feeds on this type of press, epitomized by the tabloids, and perpetuates it.

Fame is a double-edged sword, and we may find ourselves ambivalent about our newfound notoriety. We crave attention, but when we get it, we may feel exposed and vulnerable. An acting teacher of mine once commented (to a student whose hair was covering her face during a scene) on how we become actors because we want to be seen, then we get up on stage and do everything to hide ourselves. While fame brings with it certain freedoms, the ones that come with anonymity may become limited. On the TV show, *Entertainment Tonight*, one teen celebrity commented that being famous made it embarrassing to go shopping for underwear.

Despite these negatives, it's against our nature to strive for anything less than our best, and many of us do want the opportunities that come with success and fame. If you feel – or hope – that some level of celebrity is on the horizon for you, the best thing you can do for yourself is prepare for this event the best you can – physically, mentally and emotionally.

~ **Get to know who you are – your values, your needs, what really matters to you.**

Spend time getting to know yourself, perhaps journaling or talking with close friends. One successful author who has achieved some fame said that the best thing she did to prepare herself was therapy. She got very clear on who she was and what she really wanted from her life, so that when fame arrived, she had a solid foundation on which to stand, and it didn't throw her.

Know why you're doing what you're doing. If it's for the fame, fine, acknowledge that. But be aware that goals like fame and money, on their own, often don't stand the test of time. Consider striving for fame and money as a means to a greater end, such as more fulfilling or exciting artistic opportunities or to reach a larger audience with your work. In *What Price Fame?*, Tyler Cowen questions whether fame doesn't "goad artists, scientists and politicians to reach higher and take the kinds of risks that ultimately enrich all our lives." Now, there's a goal you can sink your teeth into!

~ **Develop trust with the people in your life.**

Once you achieve some level of success or fame, you'll encounter people who will want to be around you for ulterior motives, and even some of your friends will expect to benefit from the bounty of your success. Begin to develop your "trust antenna," and surround yourself with people who continue to support and be honest with you as your success grows.

~ **Be prepared for your relationships to be tested.**

People will receive your success differently. Some will come forth and celebrate with you; others will be jealous or expect something of you. When my publishing company published its first book, some of our friends bought the book to help us out, while others got angry they didn't get a freebie.

~ **Learn to set boundaries.**

You need to know how much you can handle and take care of yourself. For example, I attended a workshop with a famous teacher/author who was inundated with questions during the breaks, but made it clear that once the workshop was over, she would leave immediately. If you get mail or e-mail that upsets you, have someone screen it for you. Screen your phone calls. Fame has its demands, and you need to preserve your time, health and sanity in order to continue your success. Learn to say "no" kindly, but firmly.

~ **Be careful about getting caught up in the trappings of success.**

Your new privileges can be fun, but they can also distract you from the work that got you there in the first place. Again, remember what matters to you. Sure, enjoy your success, but keep one foot on the ground.

~ **Stay in touch with what you love about your work, so as success waxes and wanes, you still get and retain the gratification.**

The thrill of success is fleeting. Connect with the joy you get from your work, rather than getting addicted to the high of fame and feeling pressured to keep it up. Also, stay in touch with your artistic vision, however it evolves. The adoration of your public can be compelling, and it can be easy to stray from your own vision to please them. There's nothing wrong with responding to your fans, but be sure that it's aligned with what you want for yourself and that you're not compromising your values or integrity.

~ **Create a solid foundation for yourself, both emotionally and financially.**

Success can challenge your creativity, your privacy and even your morality. You may receive some extremely tempting offers that ask you to compromise your principles. When you have a good emotional support system and financial assets, you give yourself the freedom to make choices from a solid, grounded place, rather than selling out because you need the money or emotional gratification.

~ **Be prepared for the negatives.**

Take your reviews and criticisms in stride, and don't give them more weight than they deserve. If there's a criticism you feel is valid, then take it into account. But keep in mind that both positive and negative reviews are simply opinions, and people love to express them freely and, often, carelessly. You're still the ultimate authority on your work. Remember that many accomplished artists had visions that were controversial in their time.

~ **Stay humble.**

Your talents are a gift given to you to share with the world. Be proud of them, enjoy them, but stay grounded. It can become very seductive for the part of us that loves power to see others as inferior. Even as a small press owner, I found that some writers began treating me deferentially, and it would have been very easy to treat them as "underlings." Remember to be grateful for all that comes to you, and when the time is right, give back to your audience and to those coming up in your field who can benefit from your experience.

~ **With fame comes power, and with power comes responsibility.**

Whether you like it or not, your image and behavior become a model for your fans, some of whom may be kids. You can wield your power for the greater good. Many celebrities have used their visibility to start or become a spokesperson for a charity, or to support a political candidate or cause they believe in.

~ **If you know someone who has achieved a level of celebrity, be compassionate and trustworthy.**

You may feel jealous, but remember that fame doesn't erase personal challenges, and your friend may need your support more than ever. You'll want the same compassion and trust when you reach their position.

So, if you're fortunate enough to find success and fame, enjoy it and make the most of it. There's no question that it will change you, as any life experience does, but you can choose how you will change. You can continue to live and make choices from your values and principles, rather than being tossed about by the temptations. Remember why you chose to do your work in the first place, and stay in touch with your love for it. Be prepared for the pitfalls, and you'll enjoy the ride that much more!

Creative Tip

Prepare for success by choosing the image you want to convey, and begin dressing and behaving in a way that supports the successful image you see for yourself. Act "as if" you're already there, and other people will also start to see you as the successful person you intend to be.

Wise Words

"Our dreams, goals, and ideas come from our values... If what we are doing does not come from what we care about most in life, it is meaningless."

~ G. Lynne Snead and Joyce Wycoff

"What we must decide is how we are valuable rather than how valuable we are." ~ Edgar Z. Friedenberg

"It took me fifteen years to discover I had no talent for writing, but I couldn't give it up because by that time I was too famous." ~ Robert Benchley

Bookshelf



Power, Money, Fame, Sex: A User's Guide ... Gretchen Craft Rubin



Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture ... P. David Marshall



The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History ... Leo Braudy



What Price Fame? ... Tyler Cowen



Claims to Fame: Celebrity in Contemporary America ... Joshua Gamson



A Massive Swelling: Celebrity Re-Examined as a Grotesque, Crippling Disease and Other Cultural Revelations ... Cintra Wilson



Illusions of Immortality: A Psychology of Fame and Celebrity ... David Giles



Philosophy of Fame and Celebrity ... edited by Catherine M. Robb, et al

Issue 37

Breaking It Down

Very often, when we consider taking on a new project, we feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the magnitude of it. We look at what seems like a monolith and feel inadequate to the task. Just the thought of facing it can stop us in our tracks. And even if we choose to move forward, we may find ourselves procrastinating, not knowing what to do first.

One of the greatest deterrents to a new dream or goal is confronting the enormity of it and feeling it has to be accomplished in one grand leap; this is rarely true. Or we see it as a huge, amorphous mass, like an overstuffed sandwich, and we don't know where to take the first bite. We can make our new projects more manageable by breaking them down into small, doable steps. And we can take those steps over time.

The tasks involved in achieving a goal may be challenging to you. You may be doing a creative project around a full-time job and a family, and finding time may be difficult. Your goal may involve emotional challenges, like putting your creative vision out to the world for the first time. Or it may require skills or other resources that you don't currently have.

Let's look at these three situations.

If time is your challenge, the solution is to start small. In the beginning, you may only be able to afford 15 minutes a day or an hour on the weekend. Take what you can get, and go from there. If you wait until you can find a big chunk of time, it may never happen. As you get involved in your project, you'll be motivated to find or make more time for it. And you'll be amazed at how much you can accomplish with small, consistent pockets of time.

If your challenge is emotional, approach it gradually. Face the small challenges first to build your courage. If you want to write a book, but find the prospect daunting, begin by journaling or writing an essay, article or short story. Read books about writing for their advice and inspiration. If you've done the work, but are afraid of making it public, begin by showing it to a trusted friend or two. From there, you might advance to a support or critique group, then to a small publication or local exhibit, a website and so on.

If you lack the skills you need, make moves to get them. When I coach beginning writers, they're often discouraged that their first work isn't all that inspiring. I remind them that writing is a skill that needs to be developed through practice, and often a writer's first published novel is actually the third or sixth they've written. Writing the "bad stuff" is part of the process.

Classes can also be helpful in acquiring skills and receiving encouragement and feedback. Some goals may require a certificate or degree that takes time to complete, and planning ahead can be helpful. A great example of this is a psychotherapist I met who had been a professional ballet dancer. She knew her career had a short life, so while she was still dancing, she went to graduate school. When her dancing career ended, she had her degree and was ready to “glissade” easily into her new career.

If you’re facing big dreams and feel inadequate to achieve them, try this exercise: Look at some of the things you’re doing now or that you’ve accomplished in your life. Would you have been capable of doing that 10 or 20 years before? Probably not. There’s a reason CEOs are not 20 years old (except in Silicon Valley, perhaps!). Short of being a Mozart, most people’s work, along with their life skills, confidence and wisdom, grows and improves with time.

If money is the issue, start putting some away now. Say you want to start a business in 5 years. Do some research to determine what will be required for start-up, and write an estimated budget. Divide that amount by 60 (12 months x 5 years), and put that amount into a money market account every month. If you can’t afford the full amount, put away whatever you can. Even putting away \$25 a week for 5 years will give you \$6,500, not including interest! And once you make a habit of saving, you won’t miss the money.

Make your life easier by doing long- and short-term planning. Break your project into phases and steps. Create a timeline and mark out the steps, either starting from the present and working forward or, if you have a projected start or completion date, starting from that date and working back. Then, break each step into the smaller tasks involved.

If you want to get creative with this, get a bulletin board and stretch a string or strip of paper across it as your timeline. Write your tasks on small pieces of paper (perhaps even color-code them) and tack them to the board in the appropriate place. Projects rarely go exactly as scheduled, and this method allows you to move the tasks around as needed. Support your timeline with pictures and words that represent your goal to inspire you and keep you focused.

As you work on each leg of your timeline, highlight the relevant tasks (and perhaps those from the next leg) on your bulletin board or transfer them into your day planner or a to-do list. From time to time, look ahead on your timeline to see what tasks you might begin implementing. This allows you to integrate the tasks into your life and make more efficient and productive use of your time, rather than waiting until the last minute and scrambling to catch up.

If your challenge is the “overstuffed sandwich” and you don’t know where to begin, sit down with someone and talk through the project, or get it down on paper to help you think it through. Use lists, timelines or bubbles (mindmaps) to map out the components or phases of the project. Start pulling out specific steps, and break down those steps into a task list.

If the thought process itself is overwhelming, you can even take that in steps. The first session, you may only be able to come up with the ultimate goal and one or two big steps. If that’s all your psyche can handle that day, let it be. Schedule another time to flesh it out further, and then another, until your timeline is filled in. You may also find that the more immediate tasks are clearer, while your later steps don’t come into focus until you get closer to them.

As you move through the process, your goal may shift as you discover new things about it. Go with the flow. The creative process, whether a work of art or a business, is not predictable. Many writers sit down to write a book, and what they end up with is the result of a discovery process that the writing took them through, bearing little resemblance to their original idea. A waitress I knew 20 years ago, who dreamed of opening a little dessert shop, met a wonderful chili chef, and they now own 2 successful chili restaurants.

While you may feel eager to accomplish your goal and frustrated when obstacles keep it from happening right away, remember that time is your friend. Just keep taking small steps forward, stay focused, and one day you’ll turn around to find your goal has been accomplished or is well on its way.

Creative Tip

If you find yourself putting off a project, take it in steps. For example, say you need to organize your taxes, but your receipts are in one big pile in a drawer. Begin by making a list of the categories into which your receipts fall. The next day, buy some envelopes.

Another time, write the categories on the envelopes. Next, take a handful of receipts and file them in the correct envelopes; do this until all the receipts are filed. Then, run a total for one or more categories – you might do this by setting up an Excel spreadsheet. Keep taking steps until your taxes are completed or ready for your accountant.

Wise Words

“Don’t wait for your ‘ship to come in’ and feel angry and cheated when it doesn’t. Get going with something small.” ~ Irene Kassorla

"Looking back, I imagine I was always writing. Twaddle it was too. But better far write twaddle or anything, anything, than nothing at all." ~ Katherine Mansfield

"Water is patient; it can stagnate and let itself be coated with scum if need be. It is as gentle as the morning's dew. It is non-confrontational, even respectful, in circumventing the rocks in a stream. It makes room for everything that enters its pools. It accommodates by assuming the shape of any vessel it is poured into. And it is humble, seeking always the lowest level. Yet along with – or rather because of – these adaptive, yielding properties, it is ultimately irresistible; it carves canyons out of stone." ~ Huston Smith

"I've been writing a book. I've got the page numbers done." ~ Stephen Wright

Bookshelf



Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity ... David Allen



Take Time for Your Life: A Complete Program for Getting Your Life into Balance and Honoring Your True Priorities ... Cheryl Richardson (audiobook)



Life Strategies: Doing What Works, Doing What Matters ... Phillip C. McGraw, PhD



Wishcraft: How to Get What You Really Want ... Barbara Sher with Annie Gottlieb



Simplify Your Work Life: Ways to Change the Way You Work So You Have More Time to Live ... Elaine St. James



Getting Out From Under: Redefining Your Priorities in an Overwhelming World ... Stephanie Winston

Issue 38

Action and Faith: Honoring Natural Rhythms

One of the recurring dilemmas we face in our creative process is when to act and when not to. We've all had times where we've set an action in motion – we've planted the seeds, so to speak – and we need to wait to allow them to grow. But we become impatient and feel like we want to tug at the seedlings to make them grow faster. We're eager to see our creations blossom (and perhaps feel an urgency to generate income from them), and waiting is the hardest thing to do.

Writer/speaker Louise Hay has illustrated this using the analogy of going to a restaurant. Once you place your order, you wait. You don't follow the waiter into the kitchen to make sure the food is prepared and served. You trust that it will arrive when it's ready. But in life, we become impatient or panicky when we don't see results immediately, and we feel we need to continually do something to make it happen.

We've been taught that the way to accomplish things is to take action, and when our actions seem ineffectual, we feel out of control. We need to remember that life has natural rhythms and cycles: The sun rises and sets. The tides ebb and flow. The seasons come and go. And no matter how much we resist those cycles, they will go on. If we fight them, it is we who will suffer.

There are also rhythms and cycles in our lives. There are times when the smallest action brings results and other times when all the effort in the world yields nothing. Sometimes our ideas manifest results quickly, and other times they seem to take forever to unfold, and there's no logical explanation for either.

So, what can you do when there's nothing you can do?

- ~ One powerful way to act without acting is to hold your vision. When your activity reaches a lull, there's a tendency to feel like it's no longer working, that it's lost momentum. By holding the intention for a successful project, you keep the momentum going and still honor the rhythm of the process. And it lets you feel like you're doing something!
- ~ The creative process itself has its own rhythms, and each of us has our own, which can vary from day to day. By becoming familiar with your creative pattern, you can work with it instead of against it. Today, in writing this article, my creativity comes in spurts. I write a few words, stop to file some papers, write a little more, head into the kitchen to wash dishes, jot down another idea, open the mail. But all the time, my

mind is working on the article. On days like this, the ideas flow more readily when I'm doing busy work, and if I can honor that, I can be more productive than when I'm forcing myself to sit restlessly at the computer.

- ~ Sometimes, you just need to let go. One client of mine decided that writing was an important part of his life, but he kept bumping into closed doors. He put it down, and a year later, a door opened and he stepped into an opportunity to write a magazine column.
- ~ Put aside a project that's not moving and do something else. I find it useful to have several projects going at once. That way, if I'm stopped with one, I shift to another.
- ~ Learning to be receptive is another powerful skill. We all have both masculine and feminine energies within us, and we need to use both. The masculine is the active, "warrior" energy; it feels powerful. But the feminine energy is just as powerful in its own way; we need to receive the fruits of our actions to complete the cycle. Once you've done your work, have an active willingness and expectation for positive results to show up in their own right time.
- ~ Notice if you're throwing any obstacles in your way. Learn to distinguish, for example, between a need to let your ideas germinate as part of the creative process and an avoidance of taking action out of fear. Watch out for excuses and rationalizations.
- ~ Let yourself take breaks. Discipline is a good thing, but some days, the most productive thing you can do is blow off work and give your psyche a rest.
- ~ Learn to live with unresolved questions. When a new vision is emerging, it rarely comes out fully formed, and trying to force an answer can short-circuit the creative process. It may take months, years or even a lifetime for your questions to be answered. While uncertainty is uncomfortable, developing the capacity to live with your questions can lead to powerful results.
- ~ Begin to build a sense of faith that things will work out. Look back and notice how things worked out in the past, despite your doubts and fears. Keep a journal detailing the progress of your projects and refer to it when you need encouragement.
- ~ Continue taking appropriate actions, knowing you may not get immediate results, but are planting seeds for the future.

In his book, *Power vs. Force*, Dr. David Hawkins says, "We think we live by forces we can control, but in fact we are governed by power from unrevealed sources, power over which we have no control." If we can learn

to live in harmony with these forces instead of fighting them, riding the wave when it's going in our direction and surrendering when it's not, we can make the most of our efforts and reduce our level of frustration.

Ultimately, knowing when to act and when not to is a personal judgment call. The best advice I can give you is to tune into your own rhythms and develop strategies for dealing with the slow times as well as the active ones. To everything there is a season, and if we flow with that, our creations will unfold more elegantly with less struggle.

Creative Tip

When you begin a project, create an image of your vision in words or pictures. That way, if things get slow, you can renew your intention and your enthusiasm by revisiting your vision.

Wise Words

"There is a time to let things happen and a time to make things happen."
~ Hugh Prather, *Notes on Love and Courage*

"Not every one of our desires can be immediately gratified. We've got to learn to wait patiently for our dreams to come true, especially on the path we've chosen. But while we wait, we need to prepare symbolically a place for our hopes and dreams... The delay of our dreams does not mean that they have been denied." ~ Sarah Ban Breathnach, *Simple Abundance: A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*

"The creative person is willing to live with ambiguity. He doesn't need problems solved immediately and can afford to wait for the right idea."
~ Abe Tannenbaum

"Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. Do not now seek the answers which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now." ~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Bookshelf



Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior ...
David R. Hawkins, MD, PhD



12 Secrets for Manifesting Your Vision, Inspiration & Purpose: How to Make Your Dreams Come True ... Dr. D. Richard Bellamy



Manifesting Your Heart's Desire ... Fred Fengler, PhD and Todd Varnum



Your Heart's Desire: Instructions for Creating the Life You Really Want ... Sonia Choquette, PhD



The Ultimate Secret to Getting Absolutely Everything You Want ... Mike Hernacki



Manifest Your Destiny: The Nine Spiritual Principles for Getting Everything You Want ... Wayne W. Dyer



The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success: A Practical Guide to the Fulfillment of Your Dreams ... Deepak Chopra



Don't Sweat the Small Stuff ... and It's All Small Stuff ... Richard Carlson, PhD

Issue 39

The Value of Our Work

In the wake of the World Trade Center event, I've been hearing people say that in light of what happened, their work suddenly seems meaningless and trivial, their goals empty and hollow. This is understandable. Anything that doesn't contribute directly to the relief effort just doesn't seem to matter right now. Even those who haven't been personally affected are stunned, and those on the front lines have been finding it difficult to focus on work at all.

For those of us in the arts, in a country where our work has been treated as a luxury item anyway, this feeling may be compounded. We feel that we should be doing something that more directly helps humanity, especially in this time of crisis. But where is it that we turn for comfort and beauty at a time like this? Aside from our loved ones, we find solace in art, in music, in books, in entertainment.

In a recent e-mail to subscribers, Victoria Bailey, Executive Director of the Theatre Development Fund, spoke eloquently on the value of theatre: "As I searched my own soul last week for the relevance of what I do, I came to the realization, one shared by many, that the theatre has a vital role to play in our lives and our recovery. Coming together in a theatre allows us to join with other people for a few hours and share a common experience. We are less alone. The work of our artists provides us with insights into the human condition and illuminates things we do not understand. We may find answers to questions. Being entertained and, yes, laughing allows us to forget for a few hours the challenges and sadness that may seem overwhelming. We are refreshed and reinvigorated."

During the Balkan crisis in 1999, movie producer Caroline Baron heard that the greatest problem in the makeshift refugee camps in Kosovo was the sheer monotony of daily life. Inspired by the Preston Sturges film, *Sullivan's Travels*, in which a disillusioned Hollywood director concludes that creating comedies and making people laugh is a high calling, Baron decided that her greatest contribution would be to provide films to alleviate the boredom.

With the support of several film companies, the United Nations and actor Robert DeNiro, she created FilmAid and set about bringing films with strong visual story lines, including cartoons and Charlie Chaplin silents, to Macedonia. Robin Graves, senior external relations officer of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, recalled the families in the camps laughing together and commented that FilmAid was an example of the good American film can do.

Our president has encouraged a return to normalcy. What better way to do that than to enjoy our favorite TV programs. Some of these may seem frivolous at this time, and these events are certainly nothing to joke about, but they can give us a sense of stability and an escape from the hourly bombardment of horrific news and images we've seen these recent weeks. The Miss America pageant aired this past Saturday, and it attained its highest ratings ever.

Aldous Huxley said that: "After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music." Last Friday, the theme of the Oprah Winfrey show was "Music to Heal Our Hearts." That evening, a concert was aired on almost every channel to raise money for the cause and help us heal. The music was indeed healing, and it was heartening to see how many celebrities gave of their time and money. It was Canadian Celine Dion who offered a heartfelt rendition of "God Bless America."

Art is a way we can connect and communicate across cultures. We look at the same images, listen to the same music, watch the same movies and TV shows. During the crisis, seeing pictures of others grieving throughout the world gave us a sense of worldwide unity that I doubt we've ever experienced before. Professional and amateur photographers and videographers have caught this historic event on film and tape, and many of their beautiful and touching images will stay with us forever.

Healing can be achieved by creating as well as experiencing art. Michael Samuels and Mary Rockwood Lane, authors of *Creative Healing*, remind us that "prayer, art, and healing come from the same source – the human soul." Art is a way we can express emotions we're not yet ready to let into our consciousness or that we just don't have words for. Art therapy has been recommended as a particularly effective way for children to handle crisis. We can express through drawing, painting, writing, dancing, making music, putting our hands in some clay or even baking bread. We may feel a need now to nurture our families, to let them know we love them, and creatively preparing a meal can be a gratifying way of doing that.

The experts have encouraged us to keep talking about our experience as part of the healing process – to express our feelings and connect with other people. We can also use writing and journaling as an outlet for our thoughts and feelings or as a way to record our experience. Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel said that whoever survives the test must tell the story. By doing so, we keep the memory alive and prevent history from repeating itself. We build compassion by hearing of the suffering of others. We learn that while we may be of a different race or religion, we all feel the same pain and joy. And we heal ourselves in the process.

Life will never be the same for any of us, but we can connect to continuity and safety through the arts. Events happen. People change. The terrorism and destruction will one day be a faint memory, a record in the history books. But art endures and will continue to bring joy and beauty to us and a connection to history for future generations.

Creative Tip

Be patient as you deal with the effects of the crisis. Each of us processes differently. Some will heal quickly, others will take more time. If you're having unusual physical or emotional symptoms, they're probably a result of the trauma. Be patient and give yourself time to heal. Get whatever help you need. Reconnect with your community and with whatever form of art heals and comforts you. Many have found healing in nature and animals.

Wise Words

"Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable."
~ George Bernard Shaw

"Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose or paint can manage to escape the madness, the melancholia, the panic fear which is inherent in a human situation."
~ Graham Greene

"When someone is wounded, first give sympathy, then first aid, then combat negativity and loss of hope with assertions of creativity." ~ Anais Nin

"Write hard and clear about what hurts." ~ Ernest Hemingway

Bookshelf



Writing to Save Your Life: How to Honor Your Story Through Journaling ... Michele Weldon



Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal Your Body, Mind, and Spirit ... Barbara Ganim



Poetry Therapy: Interface of the Arts and Psychology ... Nicholas Mazza



Playing Boal: Theatre, Therapy, Activism ... Mady Schutzman and Jan Cohen-Cruz, editors



Creative Healing: How to Heal Yourself by Tapping Your Hidden Creativity ... Michael Samuels and Mary Rockwood Lane



Art Is a Way of Knowing: A Guide to Self-Knowledge and Spiritual Fulfillment Through Creativity ... Pat B. Allen



Art Across Time ... Laurie Schneider Adams



I Hope You Dance ... Mark D. Sanders and Tia Sillers



Twin Towers: The Life of New York City's World Trade Center ...
Angus Kress Gillespie

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Issue 40

The Momentum of Change

Change is something that happens all the time, whether we want it or not. Recently, we had some rather major changes thrust upon us. While many of us suffered painful losses and heightened fears to one degree or another, we also had incredible insights about our lives and our priorities. We saw new directions based on deeper values and made internal changes.

As artists, we came to a new awareness that our work is significant, both to ourselves and to others, a way that we can bring beauty and healing to the world. We want to grow as artists, infuse new life into our work and perhaps dedicate it to the service of those who suffered. We found a new boldness in pursuing and promoting our work.

But the chaos and confusion of the time led us to crave a return to normalcy and stability. And in that return, we can easily lose sight of the changes we made, or vowed to make, and return to old habits. Our day-to-day concerns begin to creep back into our consciousness and crowd out the new inspiration. The old fears and limiting beliefs set in again, and our new goals begin to drift farther away. The glow of our epiphany of insight wears off, and we fall back into habitual feelings and behaviors.

In order to sustain the positive changes we envisioned, we need to keep up the momentum. In the early stages of change, our excitement carries us through. But the nature of momentum is such that it needs a push every now and then to keep it going, or it will grind to a halt.

As we face the real-life requirements of implementing and sustaining change, the challenges, fears and discouragement that may arise put "speed bumps" in the road and slow us down. We need to consciously reinforce the change we desire, or the daily demands of our lives will push it further and further back on the burner, until it becomes a wistful dream.

- ~ When ideas come to you, write them down and speak them to a supportive person or group. Hold onto the insights and keep them alive. Remember how they made you feel and why they were important to you.
- ~ Inner changes and insights need to be made manifest in your life, or they'll remain just good ideas. The way to do that is to begin to take actions, even small ones. Some changes you'll be able to institute immediately; others will take time. Once you get the momentum going, it will be easier to follow through.

- ~ When you find yourself settling back into your old ways of thinking and acting, consciously choose to act in accordance with your new choices. Reinforce the new thoughts, and shore them up with new behaviors.
- ~ Ride the wave, and then give it a push. While the impetus is there, go with it. If the speed of change feels scary, hang on and get support, but try not to put the brakes on. And then when the wave ebbs, find ways to add momentum to the change yourself. Motivate yourself by taking actions and finding ways to renew your excitement. Keep your eye on your goal.
- ~ Be clear about the values your change reflects. If you remember what you're going toward and the benefits it will bring you, it will be easier to navigate the bumps along the way.
- ~ Give it time. We get ideas a lot faster than we can implement them. Some of the changes you envisioned may be long-term pursuits. You may have changed internally in an instant, but it can take longer for the physical world to catch up. Persevere, and continue to follow through.
- ~ Deal with change that you choose as you would change that was imposed upon you. Every change means a loss, a giving up of something else, so give yourself time to let go of the old and grieve, if that feels appropriate. Then, you can turn to the future with an open heart.
- ~ Realize that the changes you want to make may take courage. In the wake of a disaster, a personal change may have seemed a small thing to accomplish. Over time, it may require more of your courage to stick with it.
- ~ Update your self-image. When we go through a change, we become a different person. The change you're making may be a fundamental shift of who you are. Create a vision of the person you want to be – in words, pictures or a mental image – and hold that out there as your beacon.
- ~ Periodically reevaluate your choices. In the time of crisis, you may have vowed to make a change. Is that choice still valid for you? Was it a choice you made in a moment of fear that no longer holds up? Just because it didn't "take" the first time or your enthusiasm seems to be fading doesn't mean it wasn't a good choice. Take a look at the long-term benefits and decide for yourself. If it still looks good, renew your commitment.

While the events of September 11 were tragic, we can use them to move us to a better place. Look at the changes you vowed to make, reevaluate them and then find ways to follow through. The best gift we can give to those

who gave their lives, and the best way we can thwart the terrorists, is to make our lives better.

Creative Tip

If there's a change you want to make, plan a strategy. Start with your goal and work backwards, breaking it down into smaller, more doable steps that you can take over time. Then, take the first step.

Wise Words

"... gradual change is usually more fruitful in the long run than is forced, ultra-aggressive upheaval. Undertaken wisely, steady transitions cultivate authenticity, groundedness, and virtues – like patience, compassion (for self and others), and perseverance. All these qualities improve your probability of success when, ultimately, you do figure out how to actualize your personal vision." ~ Marsha Sinetar

"Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster."

~ William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*

"Painful as it may be, a significant emotional event can be the catalyst for choosing a direction that serves us – and those around us – more effectively. Look for the learning." ~ Eric Allenbaugh, *Wake-Up Calls: You Don't Have to Sleepwalk Through Your Life, Love, or Career!*

Bookshelf



Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes ... William Bridges



The Anatomy of Change: A Way to Move Through Life's Transitions ... Richard Strozzi-Heckler



Riding the Waves of Change: Ways to Summon Perseverance, Passion, and Wisdom During Times of Transition ... Laurie Shiparski



Thriving in Transition: Effective Living in Times of Change ... Marcia Perkins-Reed



Change and Transition: Moving from a State of Fear into a State of Love ... Louise Hay (audiobook)



The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change ... Stephen R. Covey (audiobook)



Our World in Transition: Making Sense of a Changing World ...
Diarmuid O'Murchu

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Issue 41

Taking Risks

There come times in everyone's life when you're faced with a choice that involves risk. Perhaps you want to change careers, move to a different place, quit your job and start a business, begin a new relationship, have a child. Creatively, you may be faced with a choice of doing what you know is marketable or going out on a limb with your own vision, or giving up a steady job to follow your creative pursuits full-time.

Risk is, by nature, scary. It's uncertain and unpredictable. You're heading off into uncharted territory. You may lose your life savings or lose face. You risk criticism and humiliation, or having to pick up the pieces and start all over again. You're giving up what you know for what might be. The rewards can be great, but so can the cost.

So, why would anybody want to take a risk?

- ~ Risk gives you an opportunity to open up to your talents, interests, abilities and dreams.
- ~ Risk teaches you to set clear goals and follow through.
- ~ Risk allows you to feel powerful and proactive, making things happen rather than waiting for them to happen to you.
- ~ Risk opens you up to new ideas, skills, opportunities and experiences.
- ~ Risk allows you to grow and discover new things about yourself and the world, to develop your strengths and talents.
- ~ Risk allows you to conquer your fears.
- ~ Risk is exhilarating. It makes you come alive.

When it comes to risk-taking, there are two extremes. Some people are afraid to take even reasonable risks, wanting guaranteed results. This can result in a life that's flat and lackluster. Others take risks easily, believing that their willingness to leap makes them courageous. But taking major risks without thinking them through is foolish, and such people often find themselves picking up the pieces of shattered dreams.

According to Dan Borge, in *The Book of Risk*, risk means being exposed to the possibility of a bad outcome, and risk management means taking deliberate action to shift the odds in your favor. He says that we are already risk managers, since we make risk decisions every day, often without thinking about it – things as simple as getting out of bed, lighting up a cigarette, getting in your car or putting money in the stock market.

While you don't need to agonize over every decision, it's the big, life-changing risks that we face only a handful of times in our lives that can stop us in our tracks. But if we don't step up to the challenge, we may find ourselves living a life that bores us, that has no dynamics or color. By avoiding any kind of risk, we systematically shut down our world, making it smaller, flatter and grayer.

There's no magic formula for managing risk, but with careful preparation and forethought, you can minimize risk and maximize the odds that you'll succeed.

- ~ Take calculated risks rather than foolish ones. Sure, they both take courage, but closing your eyes and jumping without looking where you're going is simply reckless. You need to plan and go in with your eyes open.
- ~ Project forward. In your mind or on paper, play out your plan. What are the potential risks? How can you prepare for them? Is there a Plan B that would give you the desired results with less risk?
- ~ Analyze the risk. What are the specific risks involved, and how can you minimize them? What information can you gather that will help you be better prepared? If it's a financial risk (and it always seems to boil down to that somehow, doesn't it), how can you create a buffer for yourself, such as having a year's income in the bank to fall back on?
- ~ Consider the timing. Your risk may be less risky with 1, 5 or even 10 years of preparation. Save money, learn skills, research, set the stage for your eventual leap. You can relieve the frustration of not actively pursuing your goal (yet) by taking steps toward it on an ongoing basis.
- ~ Look at the worst-case scenario. What is the worst thing that could happen if you take this risk? Is it likely to happen? If so, is there a way to modify your plan or acquire additional knowledge or resources to minimize the risk? If not, are you willing (and does it make sense) to go for it knowing the worst?
- ~ Look at what it's costing you to not take this risk. You may be protecting your security and maintaining the status quo, but it may be costing you your health, your relationships, your creativity, your happiness and fulfillment, your sense of aliveness.
- ~ There are times when you need to take a risk to be true to who you are. Is taking this risk in line with your highest values and priorities? Is not taking this risk a threat to your integrity? There are also times in your life when security or other responsibilities take precedence, such as when you need to provide for your family. In a case like that, you may

postpone the risk and prepare for the time when you're ready to make your break.

- ~ Look before you leap. Do your research, and gather all the information you can before jumping in. Do a trial run (for example, do a "virtual portfolio" for a potential investment to see how it does over time) and see how you handle the ups and downs. Talk to others who have taken this or a similar risk. How did they do? What mistakes did they make? What did they do right?
- ~ Honor your level of risk tolerance. You need to have some sense that you can handle the challenges you're giving yourself. Some people can tolerate more risk than others. If you bite off too much, you're likely to end up sabotaging yourself. Start small, and build up your risk "muscle." Be honest with yourself about how much you can handle, and don't try to compete with your colleagues who have a higher tolerance. Do what *you* can do, and make peace with that.
- ~ What would this risk be worth to you even if you fail? Your risk may be an opportunity to explore your creativity, acquire new artistic and personal skills, build credentials and prestige, make new contacts, broaden your horizons and learn a lot. And there's a certain satisfaction in knowing that you went for your dream, whether you achieve it or not. Regret at never trying can be harder to live with than trying and failing. And what you learn may lead to an even bigger dream that you couldn't even see before.
- ~ Stay awake and keep your eye on the progress of your endeavor. When things get difficult, when your plans don't go as expected, when the bills start piling up or your investment starts losing money, there's a strong temptation to bury your head in the sand and just focus on the fun parts. By doing this, you may create even greater problems for yourself when you might have bailed yourself out by taking action sooner.
- ~ Don't risk everything unless you know can handle it. Trading stocks on the Internet, for example, has become an intriguing pastime. It's exciting to make a killer day trade, but it also makes it easier to lose a lot of money quickly. Since you're not actually handling cash, it feels unreal, like Monopoly money. You can lose it all in the blink of an eye. Are you prepared to do that?
- ~ Learn what you need to learn. Many artists striking out on their own know a lot about their craft, but little or nothing about financing and running a business. Read books. Hire experienced professionals to help you.

- ~ Don't feel you have to go it alone. Get help. Find partners, supporters and "strategic alliances." You may find someone else with a similar goal who's willing to pool skills and resources. You may have fans or supporters of your work who are willing to help with promotion or offer other services pro bono to help you get started. You may know a friend or colleague with a compatible, but noncompetitive business who's willing to share office or studio space and do cooperative advertising.
- ~ Don't let past mistakes or failures stop you. You're not the same person. You've learned from those mistakes and have greater strength and resources than you did in the past.
- ~ Don't make excuses. When you're up against a challenge, you're going to find lots of reasons not to do it. Evaluate which ones are real and handle them, and which ones are excuses and eliminate them.
- ~ Even with the "rightest" risk, be prepared to face challenges. And give it time. Staying excited about your goal will give you the impetus to plunge through the obstacles.
- ~ Don't overlook the obvious. If there's an obstacle staring you in the face, address it. It's likely that you can overcome it, but if you ignore it, it'll undoubtedly show up to haunt you later.
- ~ Be clear on your objectives, the results you want. What would be a good outcome for you? A bad one? An unacceptable risk? Temper the risk accordingly. Don't throw all your eggs in the basket, at least not all at once, if you can help it.
- ~ Ultimately, does it feel right to take this risk? Sometimes, your "gut" leads you into doing something that doesn't seem to make sense, but succeeds smashingly, or something that seems to be an end in itself, but turns out to be a stepping stone to a bigger goal that you couldn't foresee. Even a failure in the short-term can lead to a greater success in the long-term. Many successful entrepreneurs are veterans of failed businesses.

Whether you succeed or fail, taking a risk will stretch you and give you faith in your strength and abilities and the confidence to do even more. The risks I took 15 years ago are a walk in the park for me now, as I take on even bigger goals with their even greater risks.

Life doesn't come with guarantees. That can make it risky and perhaps scary, but it's also what makes it interesting and fun. Even if you're not a gambler by nature, there's something exhilarating about taking a risk and winning. As you go through your life, the parts that are going to stand out are not the ones where you plodded along safely and did what was expected of you.

The shining memories will be the times when you took a leap of faith, whether you won or not.

In her book, *Instant Guts!*, Joan Gale Frank says, "Even though you can come up with a dozen good excuses for why you shouldn't take a risk, there's one great big reason why you should. And that is, until you do, your heart is going to hunger. If you don't take risks, you'll never feel quite complete. Right up until the day your story ends.

"So, are you going to just sit there wondering what your life could have been like if only you took a couple of risks? Or are you going to do something about it while you still have the chance? Because when your story closes, you're going to find out that it's not what you *did* that you regret the most, it's what you didn't do!"

So, think it through, be prepared, and go for it!

Creative Tip

If you're facing a difficult choice, do a Cost/Benefit Analysis. In one column, list what it's costing you to *not* take the risk. In the other, list all the benefits of taking the plunge. And remember, it's not just the quantity of items in each column. A particularly significant item in one column may outweigh all the items in the other.

Wise Words

"Before you can be creative, you must be courageous. Creativity is the destination, but courage is the journey." ~ Joey Reiman

"A ship in harbor is safe – but that is not what ships are for." ~ John A. Shedd

"It seems to me that people have vast potential. Most people can do extraordinary things if they have the confidence or take the risks. Yet most people don't. They sit in front of the telly and treat life as if it goes on forever." ~ Philip Adams

"The most rewarding things you do in life are often the ones that look like they cannot be done. ~ Arnold Palmer

"First you jump off the cliff and you build wings on the way down." ~ Ray Bradbury

Bookshelf



Instant Guts!: How to Take a Risk and Win in Every Area of Your Life
... Joan Gale Frank



The Book of Risk ... Dan Borge



Risk Your Self: Listmaking, the Ultimate Path for Personal Change ...
Ilene Segalove and Paul Bob Velick



Ready, Willing and Terrified: A Coward's Guide to Risk-Taking ...
Casey Chaney



Joy Is My Compass: Taking the Risk to Follow Your Bliss ... Alan
Cohen



*Ahead of Their Time: A Biographical Dictionary of Risk-Taking
Women* ... Joyce Duncan



What Do I Do Now?: Dr. Foster's 30 Laws of Great Decision Making
... Dr. Charles Foster



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 42

Hope

At the turning of the new year – and this year in particular – it seems fitting to speak about hope. It's a word we've heard a lot in the last few months. Hope can be something we cling to in desperate times, a way to pull ourselves out of a pit of despair. It may be the single light that gets us through a very dark tunnel. But it's so much more.

We may see hope as something passive, something we're at the mercy of. We wish for something to happen, but then we must sit and wait for it to come to us. Or not. It may feel out of our control. But hope is also a positive, creative force and an energy that we can actively contribute to.

In Greek mythology, when Pandora's box was opened, it unleashed a swarm of evils into the world. And while it was too late to corral the evils back in, one thing remained in the box: hope. The question is, Is hope the last evil or the antidote to those already unleashed?

Certainly, there are times when hope can lead to frustration and disappointment. But hope can also empower us to dream and create beyond what may logically seem possible. According to C. R. Snyder, in *The Psychology of Hope*, "Hope is the essential process of linking oneself to potential success." When we have real hope of a positive outcome, it can give us the impetus to take a leap of faith into the future we dream of. When we live in hope, we expect and anticipate success, and we take steps to pave the way for that success.

So, how does hope fit into a creative process? Creation begins with a desire, some object or goal that you want. You have some level of expectation that this desire is attainable – a realistic expectation. Hope is not pie-in-the-sky, but needs to be grounded in reality, even if it's a long shot. If your goal is pretty much impossible – or "hope-less" – then pursuing it is a fool's errand, a form of self-delusion, and not a true object of hope.

Once you've determined that your hope is based in some degree of realistic expectation, the next step is to anticipate its achievement by taking steps that will bring you closer to it and that will prepare you for when it happens. You may take some classes, change the way you dress, print a new business card, change your lifestyle, change your attitude, start acting the part. This does not mean buying the new house or car before you know the money is a sure thing! That's self-sabotage. Remember, even though we're dreaming, we want to stay grounded in reality here.

Even if your hope is for something as big and intangible as world peace, there are numerous options for actively contributing. You can donate money to or volunteer in an organization, write articles, travel to distant locations and experience cultures that are strange to you, or even make efforts to bring peace to your own family or community.

The last step may seem passive because it's an internal one. It's to have a receptive willingness for your hope to come true. In *Fire in the Soul*, Joan Borysenko, says that "to hope is to create a sacred space, a space of possibility, in which the goodness of the Universe can express itself. The stance we adopt in that sacred space is one of readiness, openness and non-attachment to a particular outcome."

But so many times, we envision something we want and then, with our self-talk and our talk with others, convince ourselves that we can't have it, we're not worthy of it, the statistics are against us and so on. Our hope turns into anxiety and doubt.

Once in while, you'll set a goal and it will happen magically. But more often than not, you'll hit a few snags and detours along the way, and sometimes big ones. The trick is to keep your eye on the goal and not let what's happening deter you. Yes, I know I said a few paragraphs ago that your hope should be grounded in reality. That's still true. But that doesn't mean you won't be thrown a few curve balls along the way that make you wonder if you're doing the right thing.

The sisters to hope are persistence and commitment. Certainly, you need to deal with the obstacles that show up. And you may need to reevaluate your goal along the way. If your level of realistic expectation has diminished significantly, perhaps due to changed circumstances, you may choose to relinquish your goal. If it continues to be valid for you, keep going, allowing hope to be your driving force.

Hope is a state of mind supported by action. It is an optimistic stance, a sense that what you hope for is possible, grounded in reality, and not just positive thinking or a repetition of affirmations with no real substance. It is a powerful force that has been the impetus for so many achievements, great and small.

So, let us move into the new year with hope held high, a beacon to lead us into a better world, individually and collectively.

Creative Tip

If you find your hope flagging, listen to what you're saying to yourself, and turn the negative to positive. It may not be a reality yet, but it can, and perhaps will be, because of your commitment to it.

Wise Words

"Hope is born of participation in hopeful solutions." ~ Marianne Williamson
(New York City, 12/18/01)

"We love to expect, and when expectation is either disappointed or gratified, we want to be again expecting." ~ Samuel Johnson

"True hope dwells on the possible, even when life seems to be a plot written by someone who wants to see how much adversity we can overcome. True hope responds to the real world, to real life; it is an active effort." ~ Walter Anderson, *The Confidence Course: Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*

"Optimism is a kind of heart stimulus – the digitalis of failure." ~ Elbert Hubbard

Bookshelf



The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here ... C. R. Snyder



The Road to Optimism: Change Your Language – Change Your Life!
... J. Mitchell Perry



Spontaneous Optimism: Proven Strategies for Health, Prosperity & Happiness ... Dr. Michael Mercer and Dr. Maryann Troiani



Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life ...
Martin E. P. Seligman



A Handbook on Hope: Fusing Optimism and Action ... Gates McKibbin, PhD



Fire in the Soul: A New Psychology of Spiritual Optimism ... Joan Borysenko, PhD



Spirited Americans: A Commentary on America's Optimists – From the Puritans to the Cyber-Century ... A. E. Jeffcoat



The Obstacle Is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials Into Triumph ... Ryan Holiday

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Issue 43

Interview with an Artist: Sally Elliott

Have you wondered what the life of a working artist is like? New York artist/musician Sally Elliott graciously agreed to an interview to share her experiences and insights.

SHARON GOOD: Welcome, Sally. Living the Creative Life focuses on various topics, some directly related to artists and some more about bringing creativity to one's life and personal growth. It would be fascinating to hear how you began and how your work evolved.

SALLY ELLIOTT: There is a lot of personal growth very closely connected with my art, because it reflects my changing viewpoints throughout my life. For instance, as a young artist starting out, I was quite traditional and went to the École des Beaux-Arts, where I learned to paint in a very academic manner, and I thought, that's absolutely the correct outlook. Then, after two years there, I went to the Art Institute of Chicago and was exposed to different viewpoints on how to paint art. That was when Pop Art was coming in, and I thought it was the most trivial thing in the world. I was still painting figuratively, but getting more abstract-expressionist, a looser style. I also majored in printmaking, principally etching.

SG: So, you've been through a variety of styles.

SE: Yes, I have, and I keep changing all through my life. Then, I came to New York, and I was painting very expressionist-landscape-type things. I tried to get into a gallery, but really couldn't. I got some encouragement from some very good people, but at that time (this is in the '60s), they were telling artists to mature. Personally, I was sort of searching for the meaning of life and for a style in art. I would join book discussion groups and this and that.

I studied Japanese sumie ink painting. It was really fascinating to step into another culture. I think that it's a very good idea, for anybody who's developing an art, to get very closely involved in another culture, another world view, because it helps you triangulate into a broader view of the world.

And it was very freeing, because the method is to just paint without thinking. For instance, to look at a bunch of grapes on a table and then just savor the quality of the grapes and their texture and then just paint it, boom. And very, very often, it comes out much better than consciously thinking about the texture and the composition.

It's a Zen form of painting, closely based on the Zen art of meditation, which I was getting interested in. This is getting on toward the later '60s, and there were a lot of people meeting in groups for sensitivity training and meditating and seeking altered consciousness.

I was still doing landscapes and nature studies and things of that sort. And then one day, I had kind of a spiritual experience. I really can't describe it very well, but I felt like all of a sudden, the room I was working in had a feeling of being filled with light and love. I didn't see anything, I didn't hear anything, but it was an overwhelming experience, and I burst into tears ... with happiness, you know. And I just really felt like there is something that is great out there or around or all through everything.

I had a terrible time describing it to my dubious friends, so I thought, I'll try church. I found that a good structure to put this overwhelming feeling into. Then, I entered into my religious phase.

SG: And how did your artwork shift after that experience?

SE: It got religious! I was very challenged to do religious art that's not that sappy religious art that you see a lot. I did a lot of studying of art history, and I found the Byzantine style, and it was, wow, this is it! At the time, in my art, I had two trends going, and I was trying to reconcile them. One was the abstract, geometrical style that I was working in, and the other was a figurative style, with figures, people and whatnot, more realistic. And I wanted to find a way of reconciling these.

I saw on a Greek manuscript the Transfiguration of Christ. The way the Byzantine do it is quite geometrical, a very formal design, with Christ standing on top of a mountain, and I thought, wow, they really know how to combine the two worlds. I started doing woodcuts and paintings, and I got church and private commissions of a religious nature. That was all through the '70s.

In the '80s, there was a school of sacred art founded down in [Greenwich] Village, and they had courses on all sorts of sacred traditions and art from all over the world – Indian, Tibetan, Chinese, Japanese, Native American. I studied for more than three years with a Russian icon maker.

SG: That also speaks to what you said earlier about the multicultural influences expanding your viewpoint.

SE: Specifically with icon-making, they have a reverse perspective, where objects get larger in the background instead of smaller. It truly gives you a whole different sensation when you look at it. Your vision expands instead of contracting down to a point. And so, therefore, the whole system of

setting up an icon composition is opposite from the west. And it is really, truly more spiritual to me. I led a seminar a couple of years ago on that question of how different perspectives in different societies lead to different ways of thinking and to different spirituality. Studying different cultures, you just see that they have to see differently, because they have a different way of showing it in their art.

And having had the experience with the Japanese and then with the Russian Orthodox method, it got me to see that there are many ways of seeing the world instead of just by our traditional western way. When I went to art school, I took a lot of art history, and they had this theory that there was a continuous line of progress from ancient art to contemporary, and that's just not true. It was a very limited, culturally-bound viewpoint. When we were in the Dark Ages, for instance, the Chinese were at the epitome of their landscape painting, and they did their finest work. It was just totally unimaginable to us.

SG: How have all these influences changed your work as it is today?

SE: I did Christian art until about 1990, and then I became dissatisfied with that viewpoint. I got very interested in outer space, with the things that they were doing [at the time]. For instance, I think it was in '92 that they sent up the Colby satellite, which had a study of looking back into the beginning of the universe. They could see the radiation background, where there were slight variances in temperature, and from that, they concluded that the universe is lumpy.

And that just blew me away. I had had a love of cosmology and astronomy and physics. In fact, I started out majoring in that, but you had to be absolutely brilliant and fluent in math to get anywhere, and I just didn't feel that I had the qualification. And I really was basically an artist my whole life, so I went back to that.

But this reawakened this love of cosmology that I had had. In 1993, I got access to a large studio. Just being in a big space expanded my horizons, you might say, psychologically. And I started doing star landscapes – large nebula and galaxies and clouds and stars and things of that sort – on a large scale. And then, all of a sudden, I started seeing sort of heroic, mythological figures in it. So, I thought I would just put a wash over it and draw it and delineate it, and all sorts of different figures came out, semitransparent with the stars shining through them.

That was also another form of perspective, and I became intrigued with how to depict that. I would look at this speckled painting, and then figures would appear. I found it freed me up compositionally. Very interesting

compositions or poses [would emerge] that I never would have thought of in a more academic way. And so, I've been pursuing that in various ways ever since.

SG: How do you get your ideas?

SE: I put down a dark background, and then I drop light paint on it (I paint flat), and it makes lots of interesting shapes. Then, I let it dry, and I set it up and look at it, and then the idea comes: "Oh, there's a woman leading a lion."

SG: It's almost like looking at clouds and finding shapes in them.

SE: Yes! Even Leonardo da Vinci said that one could just gaze at a wall, with its irregular surface, and see ideas, and that that would lead to more interesting compositions than just thinking of the composition. And that's absolutely true. It gives you access to the unconscious, which is much more inventive than the conscious.

SG: You mentioned that you've done a couple of commissioned pieces. How has the creative process worked where you've had a deadline or a specific goal in mind?

SE: Oh, it's tough. Sometimes it's inspiring, sometimes it's really hard work. Back in the religious days, I had a commission to do carvings of the Stations of the Cross for a church. At first, I was going about it in a more conventional way. Then, as I got more into it, I carved deeper and found interesting problems – to depict both a two-dimensional design and a three-dimensional design posed problems. I got absorbed in the story of Christ's Passion. And about that time, my father died, and I put some of that sorrow into the carvings.

And ... well ... it inspired me. It pushed me to a place that I never knew I could do. I always had liked carving wood, but carving a high-bas-relief was a different thing altogether, and I really felt that I had a flair for it. And I don't think I would have ever found that without the commission.

SG: You're involved in music and enjoy books. Do you find that you get a lot of inspiration from other art forms?

SE: Oh, yes. I'm very fascinated by music. I particularly like old music, fifteenth-sixteenth century, mostly sacred stuff.

SG: And that correlates with doing sacred art.

SE: Yes, and it's transformative. I feel like art should take you to another place, and music does that. It's also the flow of the line, the flow of the

phrase, and I try to get that flow going around in the painting, too, all pulling together into a whole. Great music does that, and I think great art should, too.

I particularly like English Tudor polyphony. With these complex lines of music weaving, it takes the brain out of that nonlinear place into a bigger world, into a deeper place. It expands it into that place of that original religious experience, where you just feel you're one with the universe; it's indescribable. It takes you out of your little linear life into this place that's filled with light and energy, and it's beautiful. And I try to do that with my art. And so, I listen to that music to put myself into that state, and hopefully, some of that will transform into my art.

SG: Are you formally trained in music as well?

SE: I took five years of night courses at Mannes [College of Music]. Being interested in early music, I took up recorder to teach myself notes, and then I studied voice and ensemble playing. I sing in a couple of groups, and I play recorder.

SG: How is the experience of working solo as an artist or a musician different from working with an ensemble?

SE: I haven't worked ensemble as an artist very much, except occasionally, when my art club would meet, we would do something as a joke together. But I have done a lot of ensemble work with music and some solo playing. In fact, I lean toward ensemble work with music. It's interesting working with different people, because we come out with better ideas as a group than we do singly.

SG: Maybe art is more of an individual experience, where music is more of a synergy experience.

SE: That's what I've pretty much found. And I like that, because here, my life is lonely as a painter, and I need to get into group activities to have a little contrast.

SG: Have you always made a living as an artist, or have you done other things to supplement it?

SE: Oh, other things to supplement it. Bookkeeping, secretarial jobs, babysitting, the array of part-time jobs you pick up. No, I've never really made a living at it. There are very few artists, unless you're very famous, who can do that. I inherited some money, which helped out, too, so I don't have to work so much anymore.

SG: What advice would you give to somebody who was just starting out, following a similar path?

SE: One thing I would say is, each painting is entirely new. You can never work from formula if you're really being creative about it. Any true artist finds any painting a whole new thing, a whole new problem to solve, a whole new way of trying to depict something. Every time I do a painting, I don't know what's going to happen, and sometimes things just go in a wholly different way than I expected.

SG: So, let it be an exploration, rather than trying to recreate something you did before.

SE: Right. And just not to worry about that, because I just think the most interesting work comes out that way.

SG: Thank you so much, Sally! I really appreciate your sharing your experiences with us!

Creative Tip

If you feel stuck in your work, whether it be art or business, see how other artists, companies, cultures do what you're doing. Try an approach that's radically different in style or point of view from your own, and let it meld with your current approach to find a new ground.

Wise Words

"Individuality of expression is the beginning and end of all art." ~ Johannes Wolfgang von Goethe

"In a very real sense, the writer writes in order to teach himself, to understand himself, to satisfy himself; the publishing of his ideas, though it brings gratification, is a curious anticlimax." ~ Alfred Kazin

"Writing is an escape from a world that crowds me. I like being alone in a room. It's almost a form of meditation – an investigation of my own life. It has nothing to do with 'I've got to get another play.'" ~ Neil Simon

Bookshelf



Mastery: Interviews with 30 Remarkable People ... Joan Evelyn Ames



The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait ... Frida Kahlo



Talks With Great Composers: Candid Conversations with Brahms, Puccini, Strauss and Others ... Arthur M. Abell



The Ultimate Picasso ... Brigitte Leal, et al



Conversations With My Agent ... Rob Long



Rewrites: A Memoir ... Neil Simon



Bernstein: A Biography ... Joan Peyser



Adventures of a No Name Actor ... Marco Perella



Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years ... David Vaughan



Edward Weston: His Life ... Ben Maddow

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Issue 44

Working Within Limitations

While we all dream of having ultimate freedom to be and do anything and everything we want, the hard truth of the matter is that we all face some limitations, large or small. Limitations may be things you've dealt with all your life, or they may come upon you suddenly through an accident or change of circumstances.

But limitations don't have to be a jail sentence. In art, for example, while complete freedom can be glorious and expansive, sometimes the most innovative ideas come from solving a problem. Having boundaries forces you to use your resources in imaginative ways, and a limitation viewed as a challenge can inspire you to create something completely unexpected.

Limitations can take many different shapes. The most obvious are health or physical disabilities and limited financial means. Others are limited time or energy; lack of skills, knowledge or credentials; and reduced opportunities due to age, gender and/or racial bias or economic background. A change in status due to divorce or job loss can also be a limiting factor.

We also experience "perceived" limitations. Feelings such as fear, self-doubt, feeling you're not good enough live in our minds, but can stop us just as effectively as physical limitations. I would venture to say that every one of us had an experience in our childhood where someone told us we were a quitter or bad at math or would never amount to anything that imprinted itself on our psyche and kept us from achieving our potential, at least for awhile.

But limitations can be overcome, or at least stretched, and you can probably find numerous examples of people in your own life who have done so – maybe even yourself. Here are some of the more famous ones:

- ~ Jackie Joyner-Kersey, "the world's best female athlete," overcame poverty and asthma to become a three-time Olympic gold medalist, world record-holder and motivational speaker.
- ~ Russian skater Maria Butyrskaya was told by the Russian skating federation that she wasn't good enough and was dropped by her coach at the age of 15. Her determination and iron will have since made her the five-time Russian champion, the 1999 World Champion and a top competitor in the 2002 Olympics at the "advanced" age (for a skater) of 29.

- ~ Gymnast Kerri Strug pushed through the pain of an injured ankle to successfully complete her final vault at the 1996 Olympics, thereby clinching the gold medal for her team.
- ~ Irish painter Christy Brown, born with cerebral palsy, painted with the only limb over which he had control. His story is told in the film, *My Left Foot*.
- ~ In the midst of a successful acting career, Christopher Reeve suffered a broken neck in a riding accident, which left him a quadriplegic. Since the accident, he directed his first film, acted occasionally, wrote a book and did speaking engagements across the country on behalf the Christopher Reeve Foundation, which supports research to develop effective treatments and a cure for paralysis caused by spinal cord injury and other central nervous system disorders. Said Reeve, "I have my down days, but I haven't been incapacitated by them."
- ~ After being told that her blindness was permanent and tired of hearing "blind people can't ...," Lisa Fittipaldi, having never painted before, picked up the child's watercolor set her husband gave her to pull her out of her depression and completed her first painting. Her work is now in galleries and private collections throughout the world, and Lisa founded the Mind's Eye Foundation to advocate for visually- and hearing-impaired children.
- ~ Actor Michael J. Fox's Parkinson's disease finally became too severe to hide from the public. He withdrew from a successful TV series and has dedicated the Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research to finding a cure for Parkinson's within a decade.
- ~ Actress Marlee Matlin, deaf since the age of 18 months, won the Oscar and the Golden Globe Awards for her film debut in *Children of a Lesser God* at the age of 21. She has gone on to a successful film and TV career, both as actress and producer, and is affiliated with numerous charities.
- ~ Deborah Rosado Shaw, author of *Dream Big!: A Roadmap for Facing Life's Challenges and Creating the Life You Deserve*, was born in the South Bronx to a Puerto Rican family plagued by serious health problems and limited means. Inspired by an ambitious boyfriend who was determined to go to Harvard, she got herself a scholarship to Wellesley and went on to win an Avon Women of Enterprise Award and inspire other women to "dream big."
- ~ Oprah Winfrey, a woman of color who grew up with poverty and abuse, is one of the richest and most successful people in the world.

- ~ Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York, lost more status and privilege than most of us will ever experience when she and Prince Andrew divorced. In the aftermath, “Fergie” ran up a 7-figure debt. Unwilling to let her children down, she pulled herself together, began earning her own income and paid off her debts.
- ~ Grandma Moses began painting and was discovered when she was in her late 70s.
- ~ Beethoven was deaf when he wrote the *Ninth Symphony*, perhaps his masterpiece.
- ~ Helen Keller ... need I say more?

Stephen Covey said that “we are limited, but we can push back the borders of our limitations.” So, what can you do to push back your limitations?

- ~ Be realistic about who you are and what you can do. You can accomplish more by accepting your limitations and starting from there, rather than depleting your energy wishing you were somewhere else. Self-pity and giving up are the biggest obstacles you’ll face.
- ~ When you feel limited by your circumstances, come up with as many alternatives or options as possible. Be imaginative. In the brainstorming process, you’ll open up new possibilities for yourself that you wouldn’t have thought of otherwise.
- ~ Challenge your limiters. If you were given only 3 colors to paint with, what would you do with them? Keep pushing the envelope. Make it a game, not a reason to diminish yourself or your abilities. Boundaries give us something to push against. While those boundaries may sometimes be constricting, they can force you to be more focused and productive than you might be without them.
- ~ Change your expectations, or let them go altogether. Sometimes, when you try something you don’t think you’re good at, you can release your expectations and just go for it. I can attest to this one myself, as English was one of my weaker subjects in high school, and here I am a published writer and editor! (This is also a good exercise for perfectionists.)
- ~ Value the talents and abilities you do have, and leverage them. We all have different strengths and weaknesses. The gifts you have may not be the ones your family or friends value. Create your own set of values, rather than succumbing to other people’s expectations, and use your gifts fully.

- ~ Use your limitations to help you focus and use your resources efficiently. If you have \$20 to pay for groceries for the week, you'll think more carefully about what to buy than if you had an unlimited amount.
- ~ Do what you can when you can. Modify or adjust your dreams to suit your own parameters, not how it's "supposed" to be done. Every path to success is unique.
- ~ If your limitation came upon you suddenly, through accident or loss, be sure to deal with the grief, so that you can move on.

Challenging your limitations can be scary, and yes, you'll probably feel discouraged at times. But if you feel drawn to doing something despite the challenges, your successes will be that much more exhilarating, while giving up can lead to boredom or depression. I don't know anyone who's ever regretted trying.

We always have a choice: We can let our limitations stop us, or we can let them inspire us to greater heights of achievement and character. If someone like Christopher Reeve can accomplish so much from a wheelchair, and without self-pity, how can we do any less when we have so much.

Creative Tip

When you're dreaming, start big, as if there were no limitations, before you narrow it down. We often eliminate possibilities as they occur to us, without giving them a chance. Start with your ideal, figure out what parts of it are important to you and why, then see how you can achieve the "why" in ways that work for you. For example, if you have a dream to run the New York City marathon, but can't, what could you do that would give you that same sense of accomplishment?

Wise Words

"The more the means are limited, the stronger the expression: that, perhaps, explains the choice of a limited palette." ~ Pierre Soulages

"Whether we like it or not, each of us is constrained by limits on what we can do and feel. To ignore these limits leads to denial and eventually to failure. To achieve excellence, we must first understand the reality of the everyday, with all its demands and potential frustrations." ~ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life*

"Your only limitations are those you set up in your mind, or permit others to set up for you." ~ Og Mandino

"My friends have made the story of my life. In a thousand ways they have turned my limitations into beautiful privileges, and enabled me to walk serene and happy in the shadow cast by my deprivation." ~ Helen Keller

Bookshelf

-  *Dream Big!: A Roadmap for Facing Life's Challenges and Creating the Life You Deserve ...* Deborah Rosado Shaw
-  *Rising Above: How 11 Athletes Overcame Challenges in Their Youth to Become Stars ...* Gregory Zuckerman
-  *Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice: A Revolutionary Program to End Negative Self-Talk and Live Free from Imagined Limitations ...* Robert W. Firestone, PhD, Lisa Firestone, PhD and Joyce Catlett
-  *It's Only Too Late If You Don't Start Now: How to Create Your Second Life at Any Age ...* Barbara Sher
-  *The Added Dimension: Celebrating the Opportunities, Rewards, and Challenges of the ADD Experience ...* Kate Kelly and Peggy Ramundo with D. Steven Ledingham
-  *Nothing Is Impossible: Reflections on a New Life ...* Christopher Reeve
-  *Lucky Man: A Memoir ...* Michael J. Fox
-  *A Kind of Grace: The Autobiography of the World's Greatest Female Athlete ...* Jackie Joyner-Kersey with Sonja Steptoe
-  *I'll Scream Later ...* Marlee Matlin
-  *My Left Foot ...* Christy Brown

Issue 45

Inner Resistance

In the course of our busy lives, even though we may enjoy what we're doing, there come times when some part of us wants to put on the brakes. We suddenly feel sulky and resistant and don't want to do what we feel needs to be done. We may keep trying to force ourselves, but it becomes an inner tug-of-war. Even though we may complete our tasks, we resent that we had to make ourselves do them, much the way our parents and teachers forced us to do things when we were children.

This inner resistance most commonly occurs when you're physically, mentally and/or emotionally tired because: 1) you don't like what you're doing and continually force yourself, or 2) you like what you're doing, but tend to overschedule yourself. You cruise along for awhile, pushing yourself through, perhaps thriving on the adrenaline rush and feeling a sense of accomplishment, until you feel like you've hit a wall and just can't go another step. You feel trapped by your own life.

I've come to call the parts of myself that emerge at such times my Inner Brat and Inner Rebel. The Inner Brat is whiny and sullen and wants to kick and scream. The Outer Me may even take on her characteristics and become cranky and complaining, perhaps procrastinating and dawdling with unimportant tasks. The Inner Rebel, on the other hand, digs her heels in and refuses to go another step. I may feel angry and resentful, finding ways to avoid what I've set out to do or doing it grudgingly.

One way to deal with the Inner Brat or Rebel, initially, is to give in to them. Throw yourself a "pity party." Allow yourself to kick and scream and complain – for a brief time; you don't want this to become a habit. Give yourself time to do the thing you've been dying to do, but putting off because of all the "more responsible" things you have to do. Take a day, or a week, and totally indulge yourself. If you fall into category 2 above, you'll then be able to go back to your work and do it with renewed passion.

If the Inner Brat or Rebel tends to show up fairly regularly, though, it's a signal that you'll need to take stronger action, reworking habits and patterns that aren't serving you.

~ Look at your schedule to see where you can cut back. Are you taking on more than you can handle? Many creative people have so many passions and ambitions that we find it difficult to fit them all in, and we end up including too much in our lives. We love what we're doing, but may reach a point where the pressure of getting it all in takes away our

pleasure. Better to select what's most important to you now and hold the rest for the future or let some of it go.

- ~ Take a look at the tasks you need to do. Consciously choose that you will do them (or not). Own and take responsibility for your choices. This is important! As children, we're told what to do, and we may carry a pattern of resentment into our adult lives. But as an adult, even with a "have to" like filing your taxes, you always have a choice, albeit one with undesirable consequences. When you actively make your own choices and own them, you take yourself out of the victim role and disarm the Inner Brat.
- ~ Once you've narrowed down your choices, prioritize. What needs to be done today? This week? This month? Someday? Prioritize in terms of what's important to you, not just what's urgent. Put lower or later priorities on the back burner, so they're not drawing on your energy every day. Assign certain days or times for particular activities on a weekly basis, so that you're not spending time and energy agonizing over what you should be doing, and you can just get to it.
- ~ Pace yourself, so you're not starting something too far in advance or waiting till the last minute. On a horizontal calendar (you can also do this on an Excel spreadsheet), make timelines for the various projects you're working on, starting with each due date and working backwards, or starting from today and working forward, so you can see what truly needs to be handled at any given time. Even though you may be nervous about a future project, trust in your timeline to know when you really need to begin working on it in earnest (you can always write down ideas or do prep work ahead of time).
- ~ Be sure to include down time and breaks in your schedule. No matter how much you love your work, you need to have a balanced life that includes time with friends, family, hobbies, self-care and some couch potato time. Taking the time to restore will enable you to accomplish your tasks more easily and quickly than suffering through them exhausted.
- ~ Break your routine. Give yourself permission to take a day off now and then to do whatever you want. Better to take a couple of "well days" and enjoy them than to wait until you push yourself so hard that you're forced to spend a miserable week in bed. If you can, occasionally switch your work days, for example, taking off Thursday and Friday and catching up on work over the weekend. Take vacations, even if you just stay at home and read or pursue your hobbies. This is also a good time

to reflect and see what changes you might make to your life, so you're not "hitting the wall" on a regular basis.

- ~ If your Inner Brat is the one who shows up, use techniques on yourself that you might use on an actual child, such as "work first, play later." Schedule something fun after a task you're resisting, so you have an incentive to get the work done. Find ways to give yourself choices, even if it's which task you'll do first, to feel more in control.
- ~ The Inner Rebel is more like an angry teenager. Take the time to sit quietly and hear what's making that part of you angry. What can you do to remedy that?
- ~ If you hate what you're doing and all these remedies are just band-aids, get some books or seek out a life or career coach to help you design a life you enjoy.

Like the tides, our energies and emotions ebb and flow. There are times when we're enthused and involved and times when we need to back off a bit and renew. Allow for these, and find ways to bring more balance into your daily life, so it doesn't swing from one extreme to the other. It may be a challenge to let go of old patterns, but it's worth the effort. You'll still accomplish a lot and experience more pleasure in what you do.

Creative Tip

When you're feeling overwhelmed and resistant, stop. Put everything you don't absolutely have to do in the next few hours (or better yet, the next day or two) on hold. Screen your calls; let your e-mail sit in the in-box. Do something that calms and nurtures your spirit: take a walk or a drive, exercise, read, see an uplifting movie, listen to soft music. Once you're calmed and centered, you'll be able to determine your priorities more clearly than when you're in the midst of mental and emotional clutter.

Wise Words

"Sometimes we feel so worn down by our spirit-breaking, daily grind ... that we lack the energy and hope needed to reach our goals. The creative process makes demands on us. In and of itself, it can trigger anxiety, conflict, chronic fatigue, and even intense resistance (what I've called the Big R) – the recoil, or withdrawal of energy from obligations. When apathy or restlessness undercut our plans, the Big R is usually lurking close by." ~ Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*
"Abused patience turns to fury." ~ Thomas Fuller

"Priorities are not written in granite. They need to be flexible and change as we do... It takes peace of mind and clarity to recognize and reorder meaningful, personal priorities. Maybe that is why so many of us procrastinate." ~ Sarah Ban Breathnach

"To do nothing is sometimes a good remedy." ~ Hippocrates

Bookshelf



Meditations for Living in Balance: Daily Solutions for People Who Do Too Much ... Anne Wilson Schaef, PhD



The Dance: Moving to the Rhythms of Your True Self ... Oriah Mountain Dreamer



Living Your Best Life: Work, Home, Balance, Destiny: Ten Strategies for Getting from Where You Are to Where You're Meant to Be ...
Laura Berman Fortgang



The Superman Complex: Achieving the Balance That Leads to True Success ... Max L. Carey



Leverage Your Time, Balance Your Life: A Guide to Living Abundantly ...
John Ingram Walker, MD and Wendy Whitus



Repacking Your Bags: Lighten Your Load for the Rest of Your Life ...
Richard J. Leider and David A. Shapiro



The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life ... Robert Fritz

Issue 46

Recovering Lost Dreams

To me, one of the saddest things in life is to look back and regret that you never had the courage to live out your dreams. While we're in the day-to-day throes of living life, our dreams often fall by the wayside. They seem "out there," too hard to get to, an indulgence when we owe our time and allegiance to so many other people and things. We feel selfish and guilty rejecting a perfectly good, although less than satisfying life to pursue elusive dreams. But they continue to nag at us, demanding our attention.

There are many reasons we give up on our dreams.

- ~ We forget our dreams after college because we're pressured to pay the rent or support a family.
- ~ We're too tired after work to put in the time and effort.
- ~ Our dreams seem too hard to attain.
- ~ We're afraid we can't handle the criticism and rejection.
- ~ We're not willing to give up material comfort, even for awhile, to go after our dreams.
- ~ We want guarantees. What if we give up everything and it doesn't work?
- ~ We're not sure it's worth the sacrifice.
- ~ We're afraid people will either be jealous of us or think we're out of our mind.
- ~ We're afraid that if we're *too* successful and happy, we'll leave our friends and family behind.
- ~ We have other, "more important" responsibilities.
- ~ We don't know if we're good enough.
- ~ We're not sure we deserve to have everything we want.

We're given our dreams for a reason: to pursue them and fulfill our unique place in the world. And yes, to be happy. Sure, you may never become the astronaut or ballet dancer you dreamed of in childhood. But other dreams – adult dreams – emerge throughout life, and we can breathe life into those.

According to Suzanne Falter-Barns, author of *How Much Joy Can You Stand?: A Creative Guide to Facing Your Fears and Making Your Dreams Come True*, "the truth is that dreams can be both tantalizing and frightening. They call upon us to be our bigger selves, possibly bigger than we've ever been ... so we extend our reach out into the world and finally begin to touch our lives as we are meant to."

That *does* sound tantalizing, doesn't it? So, how do you do it?

To begin that process of reaching out, first you have to find out *why* you're holding back. Complete these lists to learn more about you and your dream. Falter-Barns suggests that you be brutally honest in responding to these questions.

- ~ What I'm Afraid of Finding Out about My Dream
- ~ What It Will Mean If I Succeed at My Dream
- ~ What Will Change If I Succeed at My Dream
- ~ People Who Support My Dream
- ~ People Who Do Not Support My Dream
- ~ What I Will Gain by Pursuing My Dream

(Excerpted from *How Much Joy Can You Stand?*, Suzanne Falter-Barns)

As you can see from this list, pursuing your dream will precipitate changes in your life, and that can be scary. You may move to a different place, learn new skills, lose friends and gain new ones, have an entirely different lifestyle. You can pace some of the changes, but once the momentum gets going, you may get caught up in the wave and feel out of control. You need to balance the inner longing that's driving you toward your dream with your need for others' love and approval that may draw you away from it. All of this may take some tinkering and negotiating, especially if you're in a committed relationship or have a family.

If fears or circumstances prevent you from diving into your dream full force right away, consider how you might modify your dream, so that you can at least begin pursuing it now. Think about your dream, and ask yourself these questions:

- ~ How does it make you feel? What else can you do that would give you that same feeling?
- ~ What are the material and emotional benefits it brings you? How else could you get those that would be satisfying to you?
- ~ What value(s) does it respond to? How can you shape your life so that those values are honored?
- ~ What piece of your dream can you initiate immediately that will lead to your full-blown dream sometime in the future?

But what if you can't even find or remember your dream? Try working with the following lists. Falter-Barns suggests that you take some time to complete them. Find a quiet spot and a chunk of time, and really dig into them as completely as you can.

- ~ People Whose Permission I Am Waiting For
- ~ Things I Loved to Make or Do as a Child
- ~ What I Daydream About When Waiting in Lines
- ~ Activities That Make Me Feel Connected
- ~ What I Think About When I'm Alone
- ~ Things in Life That Move or Irritate Me
- ~ Things That Intrigue Me or Strike My Fancy

(Excerpted from "What's Your Passion?", Suzanne Falter-Barns, *New Age* magazine, July/Aug 2000)

Give yourself permission to rediscover your dreams and put them into action, even if it's on a small scale. If it's not practical to dive into it right now, start taking steps. Find something that gives you the essence of your dream, and then build it brick by brick. Use the time to build confidence and skills and find direction for your dream.

In *Feng Shui and Money*, Eric Shaffert talks of unfulfilled dreams as a debt to yourself. You owe it to yourself to heed and pursue your dreams. Sure, it'll be a challenge, but the exhilaration of facing your fears is more energizing than the deadening feeling of unrealized potential. I've yet to hear anyone bemoan following their heart.

While you might not achieve your dream 100%, you'll learn from it, and it will lead you to something you couldn't have imagined when you started out. So, why not go for the gold and create a life that you can look back on with a sense of peace and satisfaction, one more exciting than you could ever dream right now.

My thanks to Suzanne Falter-Barns for contributing to this article.

Creative Tip

Pretend you're 80 or 90 years old looking back on your life. Write the story of your life as you would like it to be. Don't hold back. Allow yourself to feel the satisfaction and excitement of what you could accomplish. Review and update it from time to time as you grow and achieve pieces of it and see more possibilities for yourself.

Wise Words






"You are never given a wish or a dream without also being given the power to make it come true." ~ Richard Bach

"Creative expression is of vital importance. Artists must do what's in their heart, to dream and create outrageously." ~ Alex Grey, visionary artist

"There are always risks when you chase after a dream because growth requires that you leave your comfort zone and enter unknown territory. But without confronting those risks and facing your fears, you'll never, as Nike says, 'Just do it.' Now the truth is, you may fail in some of your efforts, but you will never succeed if you are not willing to risk failure. And even if you do fail, you can learn from the experience and try again. To do that, you will need courage, and you will also need to have faith in your ability to achieve your goals." ~ Stedman Graham

"If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours." ~ Henry David Thoreau

Bookshelf

-  *How Much Joy Can You Stand?: A Creative Guide to Facing Your Fears and Making Your Dreams Come True ...* Suzanne Falter-Barns
-  *Creating Extraordinary Joy: A Guide to Authenticity, Connection, and Self-Transformation ...* Chris Alexander
-  *Sark's Journal and Play!Book: A Place to Dream While Awake ...*
Sark
-  *The Practical Dreamer's Handbook: Finding the Time, Money, and Energy to Live the Life You Want to Live ...* Paul and Sarah Edwards
-  *Create A Life That Tickles Your Soul: Finding Peace, Passion, & Purpose ...* Suzanne Willis Zoglio, PhD
-  *Stand Up for Your Life: Develop the Courage, Confidence, and Character to Fulfill Your Greatest Potential ...* Cheryl Richardson
-  *Finding Your Passion ...* Cheryl Richardson (audiobook)
-  *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It ...* Barbara Sher with Barbara Smith



Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live ... Martha Beck



Feng Shui and Money: A Nine-Week Program for Developing Wealth and Prosperity ... Eric J. Shaffert

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Issue 47

Needing Outside Approval

In the process of creativity, as in most aspects of life, we're constantly challenged to choose between listening to our own inner voice or the key voices outside us that have a stake in what we do. As much as we're pulled to follow our hearts, the need for approval and belonging is just as compelling. Often, it becomes an inner battle of whether to listen to yourself or others.

Outside approval can be extremely seductive. Approval feels good. It makes us feel loved and accepted. True originality, on the other hand, can ruffle people's feathers. It upsets the status quo. Someone who is not using their own creativity will unconsciously try to stop you from using yours. Or they may feel their view is more valid than yours. Or they may want (seemingly with the best of intentions) to protect you from impending failure by discouraging you from taking a risk. It becomes easier to let other people set the standards for us rather than incur their jealousy, criticism or disapproval.

When we're young, our very survival and self-image depend on receiving the approval of others. You merely have to observe the social rituals of teenagers to see how vital belonging is to them. As we get older, we get bigger, our egos become stronger, and we're able to fend for ourselves. But old habits die hard. Even when being different and standing up for ourselves is no longer life-threatening, we still hesitate.

In our work, we're generally subject to some form of judgment. We rarely operate in a vacuum, and unless we're doing our work just for our own pleasure, sooner or later, we're going to have to face outside evaluation. If you're working for someone else or on commission, you have to produce work that pleases the person who's paying you. And even if you're working independently, and then selling your finished work, someone will be voting with their checkbook ... or not.

Creative work is very personal, and each person will see it differently. Give your piece to 5 different people, and you'll get 5 different opinions about how it should be done. We need to be careful to balance the feedback we get with our own vision for our work. If you need to make a sale, you may have to give in to some of those opinions. If your creative work is solely for your own pleasure, you have the luxury of doing as you please.

In life as well, particularly if you have a significant other, you may feel pressured to give in to their opinions to preserve your relationship. This is a tough one, as there may be a lot at stake, and following your personal or

creative vision can seem more expendable than your family life. While I would not suggest that anyone sacrifice their relationships, sooner or later, your inner voice must be heard, and not doing so can result in compromising your physical or emotional health.

There comes a point in life when, in order to individuate and make your unique contribution – to be truly creative and live your life authentically – you have to listen to your inner longings and creative urges. Ultimately, you need to find the balance between your own vision and the approval of others. Here are some guidelines:

- ~ Take it a step at a time. Practice taking on small creative risks and work your way up to the more challenging ones.
- ~ Choose who you're going to share your vision with. You may need to take the action first, before you tell anyone, so you don't get discouraged and lose heart. Remember, you don't need anyone else's approval or permission to make your own choices.
- ~ Set clear boundaries around your work. Don't show it to anyone until you're comfortable doing so, and if you do not want criticism or feedback, let it be known.
- ~ When you do seek feedback, prepare yourself for possible negative reactions. If you get them, don't make any decisions right away. Take time to consider whether these reactions are valid for you or not. Then, with that perspective, choose whether or not you will modify your work.
- ~ If you do creative work for a living (and you can be creative in writing a business plan or serving a customer, too), find employers or clients who appreciate your style and vision and give you some creative leeway.
- ~ If you have the time, create something within the given parameters, then offer something "outside the box," out of your own vision, as an alternative. While some buyers/employers will be afraid to take a risk (perhaps they're hampered by the limited vision of those that *they* answer to), you may find your creativity appreciated and encouraged.
- ~ If you're doing work for hire, be sure to set aside some time when you can do your own creative work with total freedom, without concern for whether you'll sell it, to keep your creativity fresh and alive.
- ~ Discuss your differences of opinion with your significant other. Enlist their support in taking a creative risk, and support them in doing so in their own life. This might even breathe new life into your relationship!
- ~ Find people who appreciate and understand your work and give constructive critique. Having your work "trashed" on a regular basis does not build your abilities or your confidence.

~ If you feel yourself dying inside, find another job or an outside creative outlet. It's not worth sacrificing yourself.

I've said before, and will probably say again, that true creation is an act of courage. We live in a society that encourages conformity and imitation. While we relish true creative work and it excites us, it also threatens us. Confronting genius can make us feel inadequate in our own work. But it also challenges us to dig deeper and find our own unique voice. We can all touch on our own bit of genius when we trust our spark of creativity.

We need to learn to weather the attacks of our critics, particularly the "well-meaning" ones who sneak up on us when our defenses are down. As we practice asserting our own voice, it will get stronger. We will feel more powerful in expressing our personal vision, and we will find those who appreciate our creative efforts.

It is classic that many artists never received critical acclaim during their lifetime. While this is difficult to endure on a personal level, how much poorer we would be if they had compromised to gain the approval of their contemporaries!

Creative Tip

To stretch your limits, do something outrageous (for you), either publicly or privately. Even if you don't tell anyone, you will delight in the freedom it gives you to express yourself in new ways.

Wise Words

"We often fear being rejected so very much that we reject ourselves first before anyone else has the chance." ~ Anonymous

"Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising which tempt you to believe that your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires ... courage." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"We must not allow other people's limited perceptions to define us." ~ Virginia Satir

"I can only take care of myself, though I'm occasionally disgusted at my tendency to abandon even *that* responsibility, to ignore my own instincts – to say no to the calls I hear – in order to safeguard the approval of others, which I imagine is essential to survival. It isn't." ~ Gregg Levoy, *Callings*

Bookshelf



If You Want to Write: A Book About Art, Independence and Spirit ...
Brenda Ueland



The Courage to Create ... Rollo May



Trust the Process: An Artist's Guide to Letting Go ... Shaun McNiff



Art & Fear: Observations on the Perils (and Rewards) of Artmaking ...
David Bayles and Ted Orland



Callings: Finding and Following an Authentic Life ... Gregg Levoy



*Awaken the Giant Within: How to Take Immediate Control of Your
Mental, Emotional, Physical & Financial Destiny! ...* Tony Robbins

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Issue 48

Working Through Pain

Pain is no fun. It's something that happens to all of us, and a daily occurrence for some. But despite it, we still have to live our lives – to do the work that we need to do and the work that calls us. It's hard to work when you're consumed with emotional or physical pain. You may feel distracted or unfocused or just want to curl up under the covers and forget it all.

The good news is, we're creative people. Creativity is not just something we use in our art; it impacts every area of our lives. We can use our creativity to discover ways to cope with our pain or as the antidote itself. To that end, I asked you, the readers of this newsletter, to share the ways you've discovered to help you get through those difficult times.

From ANDRENA BONTE . . .

First of all, I search for my center again. I know when I am out of alignment. I will do this via the breath, using various techniques: breathing into various parts of the body or allowing the breath to breathe various areas of the body. I walk in nature to breathe the expansiveness of what surrounds me. This allows for release and loosening of my attachment to the pain. The outdoors allows me to tap into the greater "all that is."

I will usually do yoga in a very free-flowing, meditative manner, allowing the full expression of the "pain" to express itself and be released through the rhythmic movement of my body. Working in my garden, talking to the plants. Again, the physical movement allows for release.

I have been known to have conversations with an area of my body or my emotional state, exploring what is attached to the pain and looking for energetic links to an event of some sort.

I will call friends of mine, two in particular who I consider mentors, so that I can get a different perspective. This usually takes the sting out of the pain or helps me to move into a different position, which eases things up.

From CAROLINE ANN MARTIN . . .

When feeling emotional pain, I use my art as a means of expressing whatever it is that I am feeling. Indeed, it is during times of pain that I find myself most creative. It is as though what is inside is expressed through my hands, whether it be through clay (sculpture) or through drawings or words (poetry).

My artwork actually grew out of dealing with pain. If it were not for the pain due to abuse I suffered from as a child, I would not have needed an outlet for it, and thus I would not have needed to turn to my sculpture or poetry as a way to cope. My art has truly “saved” me, having given a voice to my past.

From ALLISON CRAWFORD . . .

I am going through a divorce that I didn't want – in fact, it just became final this morning – and it isn't a case of how I manage my heartache so I can make art, it's more like making art is how I manage the pain. Being involved in a project, just for myself, both occupies me, so that I'm not focused on the bad stuff, and feels very indulgent, because it's all about me (unlike real life, where I have a child to consider). Plus, there is an actual thing when I'm done, so there is a sense of accomplishment about it.

The change in art for me is from representational stuff to more abstract – that is, I create fewer pictures of things, but explore color and relationships more. I imagine it's an attempt to capture my emotions. Letting them flow out of me into my art is amazingly cathartic. Look, there is “art” right in the middle of “cathARTic,” which is how it works for me.

From ROBERT E. BELL III . . .

I have found that one way to not only deal with creative blocks, but depression and emotional pain, is to take yourself to a nice restaurant. I have found that pasta acts as a natural relaxer, working far better than any medication that I have tried. Two glasses of red wine over the course of the meal also help.

I like to surround myself with candlelight and restaurants that play classical music. This helps to relieve stress and relax my inner moods. Sometimes, I take a special person along and buy them wine or a meal, but at other times, I go alone, seeking the solitude of a good book. Old Victorian novels help to set the mood, but I have found that reading a Jules Verne novel helps to take your mind off of problems. I try to pick books that will momentarily take me away from this world, so that when I come back, it has the feeling of going on a long trip.

After dinner, I like to take a long, relaxing walk at around dusk. Sometimes, I like to view the stars or the constellations. Something about connecting with nature and the cosmos helps to relieve the stress of the day. It can also give the artist ideas or creative spurts, helping to relieve writer's block.

From E.R. . . .

I have been in emotional distress over a severe illness in my family. I have learned to give myself permission to not work, to not “push myself through it,” but to honor my grief, to witness it, to grieve and allow healing to happen, to tune into my heart and follow my inner urgings. It requires faith that my energy will return and the pain will lessen and my creativity will inspire me again. It ebbs and flows. But if I block out the grief, I block out everything else. I cherish my creative energy when it returns, and the process deepens my trust in listening to my soul and taking precious care of myself.

From CAB CATALANO . . .

This is for me an ongoing story. Emotional pain and depression are semi-constant companions. However, I have noticed that after a particularly big dip, I wait for a huge creative wave to follow. These surges have at times proven very productive.

Dealing with the pain . . . for me, journaling helps immensely. So does using “creative imagery” or affirmation tapes. Practicing a brass instrument passionately for 45 minutes. Listening to my inner child and letting her out to play. Moving . . . going for a stroll in a park. Remembering to schedule down or alone time as well as playtime. And last but not least, learning to listen to what my body is saying . . . meeting my NEEDS and being sure that I take as good care of me as I do everyone else.

From RON LEMING . . .

I’m disabled, and without decent medical care, so not only am I in constant pain, but poor as well. And jobs have been few and far between. I don’t know that I have a strategy to deal with pain so I can do art, so much as that art is a major refuge for me. I can express myself and take my mind off what’s hurting, at least to an extent. It’s a matter of forcing myself to get up every day, to get on the computer and do SOMETHING, anything, rather than just stay in bed and suffer.

And once I get into what I’m doing, involved in the process, then my mind takes off, and I start to just create without worrying about anything else. I get fascinated by what I’m doing, and it all doesn’t hurt so much. Aside from physical pain, poverty causes immense pain as well, and that’s something that doing art can’t relieve, without being able to get the work. But I still get up every day and work on it. Nothing much else to do. The alternatives aren’t terribly attractive.

From SHARON GOOD . . .

When I'm emotionally upset, I call a friend. Besides getting sympathy and support and feeling heard, it gives me an outside perspective and stops me from "awfulizing" the situation – imagining the worst – and running it around in my mind endlessly.

Music is always healing for me. If I'm tired or not feeling great physically, I lie down for half an hour with soft music or a relaxing meditation (a plus for working at home!). And finally, I find teddy bears highly therapeutic in all situations!



From JAN GERVAIS . . .

Last year was a whirlwind of creating and shows, commissions, etc. After finishing up orders for Christmas, tiredness and depression wound its way into my life amidst other everyday problems that just mounted up. I went to an illustrator's conference on April 12th. When I got back, I found that my 15-year-old cat, my baby, was sick, and I had to put him to sleep. My van, which was a used, but great-looking van, which I had for only 10 months, burst into flames 2 weeks ago.

A couple of months ago, I decided I really needed a rest from everything. (I hold onto a 40-hour-a-week job as well as doing the artwork.) I am cleaning my house, getting things in order for when I do start painting and then selling again. I am eliminating clutter out of my house and out of my mind. When the family is home, there's one or two TVs going, the stereo is going, kids' voices all about, it's sometimes even hard to hear the telephone with so much going on.

My point is, if there's too much clutter, you could miss that creative moment. Take time to deal with the clutter in the house, the clutter in your mind weighing heavily on you. The ideas never stop; just write them down. They'll still be there to paint or write about later. You won't lose anything. With things in order, the creativity will have room to flow. You'll have room to paint, because things are in their place. You will feel better, and you will have grown.

From PAULA GOLDEN . . .

Your inquiry could not have come at a better time. I herniated a disk in my lower spine, which precludes any type of sitting. I am a quilter and quilt teacher, so I have had a lot of time to reflect on life instead of rushing around and "doing." It is easy to deal with pain and be a "Tough Old Broad" when one only has to deal with the concept of pain.

I love how life brings you what you need, even though one may not realize it at the time.

From KELLY JO MURPHY . . .

Gratitude is THE thing that works for me, whether it is a physical or emotional pain. For years, I thought I “should” be grateful for what I had, when things didn’t seem to be going my way. The “should” part got in the way of true gratefulness.

Now, when some kind of pain creeps up on me, I look at what I’m grateful for in a different way. I ask myself, “What is right or good about this situation, person, etc.?” It takes the “should” out, and I get to choose what I TRULY am grateful for. Which creates and attracts more of those good and right situations.

From MASOOMA MOHIB . . .

Expressing oneself in whatever way possible is a consolation itself. This is something I have naturally realized. I have always been one of those people for whom it is very difficult to let out anger; it would hurt inside bad, but it would not come out at the right moment on the right person so truly deserving it (heh heh heh). It is emotional pain.

Writing has always helped me let out my pain, and not just a late anger reaction, but other kinds of emotional pain, too. Expression of any kind, like I said, helps. I generally let out my emotional pain through writing or painting. I would not say I am a great writer or a great painter, but I know a certain part of me relies on it terribly for turning emotional pain into a fairly creative output. It’s like resolving with oneself to find something fulfilling beyond it.

From GRETCHEN KUBACKY . . .

Funny you should ask, as I just broke my foot, on vacation in Italy yet! The pain and inconvenience have been awful, as has the enforced dependence. I am currently unable to drive, walk, exercise or even stand for long. I find that I’m channeling my creative energies primarily into journal writing and poetry, as they’re portable and require no special equipment or physical ability, other than to write. The poems lately have been about the pain, the brokenness of my body, the frustration, the medical process, etc. I find that they’re a good way of integrating the experience into the rest of my life.

From ROGER MAILHOT . . .

Some 11 years ago, after I was forced into retirement, I found myself classified as manic-depressive. I refused to take the prescribed drugs, having been able to do [without them] for most ailments I had to endure in my rather stressful life. It was suggested that part of the cure would be

for me to join an association that procured social contacts with others. There, I met Madeleine Garand, the then vice-president of the association. She enrolled me, and we became friends. I found that she had done ceramics and was a renowned artist.

Through our outings, trips, dancing, I noticed that at times, she seemed to be suffering, physically. I learned that her ailment was fibromyalgia. She never really complained. Her secret was in keeping busy, holding self-help groups and reunions, painting classes and caring for her four grown-up and grandchildren.

One day, I borrowed her paint brushes and found that it helped me also. My talents were not as great as hers, but I did fairly well. I also joined her reunions, sharing experiences with widowed people, separated and divorced and others like me, shelved in downsizing.

Without Prozac or such, I've learned methods of controlling my immune system, and except for a couple of accidents, never been hospitalized. To me, the power of the mind can be used to overcome many human ailments.

From CAROL HEPPNER . . .

At the ripe age of three, my favorite aunt died. A few months later, my dad went into the hospital, and like any good three-year-old, I thought he would die, too. To help me cope, my mom spent her free time coloring with me. So now, many years later, my art is a way for me to reconnect to that safe feeling that I had when I colored with mom. The more things change, the more they stay the same! My dad died March 22, 2002, and true to form, I am arting my heart out.



When I first put out the call for stories, I expected to hear about the strategies people used to feel better so they could access their creativity. Instead, I learned that most of us use our creative work to deal with our pain, both short- and long-term. This speaks highly for the power of creativity to heal and our passion for it.

Healing ourselves and doing our creative work act in a synergy. As we become more creative, we heal, and as we heal, we free our creativity. Thus, we can turn what could be a downward spiral into one that raises us out of our pain and misery.

Our art can lift us up, if only for awhile, and allow the healing process to occur. Living with physical or emotional pain is an act of courage, and it's comforting to know that beauty can also come of it.

My special thanks to all who generously contributed to this article, inspiring us all!

Creative Tip

When you're experiencing pain, the natural reaction is to resist it and try to make it go away. Instead, allow yourself to go into it and feel it fully. Visualize its shape and color (make it up if it doesn't come to you), and imagine it diminishing. Breathe slowly and deeply into the pain, wherever you're experiencing it in your body. Often, that will relieve or release the pain, at least for awhile.

Wise Words

"You can be greater than anything that can happen to you." ~ Norman Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking Every Day*

"Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which, in prosperous circumstances, would have lain dormant." ~ Horace

"One cannot get through life without pain ... What we can do is choose how to use the pain life presents to us." ~ Bernie S. Siegel, MD

Bookshelf



The Soul's Palette: Drawing on Art's Transformative Powers for Health and Well-Being ... Cathy A. Malchiodi



The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts As Healing ... Natalie Rogers



Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression ... Michele Cassou and Stewart Cubley



Art and Healing: Using Expressive Art to Heal Your Body, Mind and Spirit ... Barbara Ganim



Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness ... Jon Kabat-Zinn



When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times ... Pema Chödrön



Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma ... Peter A. Levine

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Issue 49

Positive Success

Success is something a lot of us think about a lot of the time. We either have it or we don't (or at least we see it that way). If we have it, we want more. And if we don't, we wonder why. Certainly, there are issues that may block our success, but we also need to look at how much success we really want and how we want it.

Some of us may be looking for success in the wrong place. I recently heard a statistic that 80% of people are *mis*-employed – in the wrong job. The media bombards us with messages about what success is supposed to be, and it's easy to make choices based on those messages. If your heart isn't in it, though, how much effort will you put into becoming more successful? Even if you manage to do it for awhile, at some point, you'll hit a wall. And success at something that you don't enjoy isn't success at all.

We may feel unworthy of our success. In his book, *Lucky Man*, actor Michael J. Fox talks about how, when success hit for him so quickly, he feared that people would discover he was still this kid from Canada, faking his way. Many of us experience "imposter syndrome" when we first become successful. We become afraid that success will require more of us than we're capable of producing. And at the same time, we fear losing it.

We may fear the demands success places on us and feel we can't keep it up. When we succeed at something, people expect that we will surpass ourselves with even greater successes, and our superiors or our public may demand that of us. Some people have great success early in their lives – I had a college friend who had been a successful child actor and felt like a has-been at 18 (he went on to success in other areas). In David Auburn's play *Proof*, the main character talks about how most mathematicians make their greatest discoveries in their 20s. Other people have a great success later in life, but don't feel they have the time or energy to do it again. It becomes important to find other ways to define success for yourself (we'll do that soon).

We may feel undeserving of our success and all that comes with it. Most of us have been trained to expect the worst, or feel guilty, when good things happen for us, and when things go well, we wait for the other shoe to drop. In Arthur Miller's play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, the protagonist continually finds himself falling into good luck. Ironically, one of the endings Miller initially contemplated was the hero committing suicide because he felt he was at the mercy of his luck, with no control over how and when it

happened. Happily, he chose instead to have our hero pull himself out of a jam with his own foresight, thereby restoring some sense of order and control to his world and the ability to accept his good luck.

We may feel comfortable with our current position in life and uncomfortable with the changes that success will bring about. We fear that if we're successful, the people that care about us will become jealous and reject us or that we'll leave them behind. We may have relationships based on commiserating about our lack of success, and if we succeed, those relationships will likely end. We're afraid that success will change our lives too much or too fast, and we'll be left alone.

So much for the bad news. Now, on to the good. Success comes in a lot of shapes and sizes, and there are ways we can prepare ourselves for it and make it a positive experience.

- ~ First, make sure you're on the right road. If you're doing something you hate, get some books or talk to a career coach or counselor to see what else you might do that would be more satisfying to you. It's not uncommon to fall into a career path and stay there because it's easy. Take the time to consciously choose the path you want to follow. That may turn out to be several paths over a lifetime, or even simultaneously. No one says you can only have one career!
- ~ Make sure that what you're doing is aligned with your personal values. When I worked in advertising, I enjoyed the creative atmosphere, but I just couldn't get bent out of shape about how many donuts we sold the way some of my coworkers did. Instead, I focused on bringing service, excellence and creativity to my work. It's important to feel that your work matters. If you're not getting that validation from your supervisors, find a way to make it matter in terms of your own personal and professional growth, in a way that satisfies you.
- ~ Set your own standards. Strive for personal excellence rather than trying to keep up with others. Find ways to challenge yourself and keep it interesting. That may even mean starting on the bottom rung of a new career. Compared to your peers, you will be less successful, but in terms of your own life path, facing that new challenge may be your greatest success.
- ~ Decide what you want your life to be about. If it's your work, then you may want to sink a lot of yourself into it. If time with family, your creative pursuits outside work or just enjoying life are more important, you may be very content climbing halfway up the corporate ladder, working in a fun, but lower-paying job or having your own small business, rather

than aiming for the top. Write a personal mission statement to keep you focused on what's important to you. Try the Mission Formulator at www.franklincovey.com.

- ~ Look at what skills you enjoy using. How can you use more of them in and out of your job? Often, someone who is very skilled at what they do is promoted to management, where they no longer get to use those skills. You may choose a lower-level position where you can continue to do what you love rather than a higher position, and more money, to do something that doesn't satisfy you.
- ~ Plan for your success. Think about where you would ideally like to be in 5, 10, 20 years. What do you need to do to make that happen? Take things a step at a time. Prepare yourself for your next career move, whether that means acquiring new skills, discovering a new career or planning to start your own business.
- ~ Think about the quality of your success. Are the money, possessions and status worth it if you compromise your integrity, your relationships or your health? The current collapse of so many corrupt corporations is showing us that success without integrity can be a straw house.
- ~ As you change, your relationships will change. If you change careers, you'll be spending time with a whole different group of people. As you become more aligned with your values, some of your friendships will fall away. Grieve the loss, and be open to new people, more attuned to who you're becoming, coming into your life.
- ~ Look for role models, people who you truly admire. What is it about them that you admire? Where do you see that quality in yourself, and how can you bring about more of it? How can you bring those qualities into your pursuit of success?
- ~ Remember, too, that everyone has their own timing. Some people are high-energy and very confident, and they can advance very quickly. Others need time to adjust, to plan, to move through transitions. Honor your own tempo, and don't compare yourself to others.

Decide for yourself what success means to you; it's a very individual thing. Having all the trappings of success is empty if it doesn't feel good inside. And remember that success is a quality, not a quantity. It's about how it makes you feel inside.

Having success on your own terms doesn't mean it will always be smooth sailing, but when you're following your heart, facing the challenges will feel exhilarating and worth the effort.

Creative Tip

To see if a particular activity feels good to you (and is, therefore, a candidate for positive success), get quiet and relaxed, then think about that activity. How does your body feel? Do you feel open and excited, or tense and constricted? If it's the latter, you might want to think more deeply about whether this is something you want to pursue further.

Wise Words

"That man is a success who has lived well, laughed often and loved much; who has gained the respect of intelligent men and the love of children; who has filled his niche and accomplished his task; who leaves the world better than he found it, whether by a perfect poem or a rescued soul; who never lacked appreciation of earth's beauty or failed to express it, who looked for the best in others and gave the best he had." ~ Robert Louis Stevenson

"Regard it as just as desirable to build a chicken house as to build a cathedral. The size of the project means little in art, beyond the money matter. It is the quality of the character that really counts." ~ Frank Lloyd Wright

"Trying to do well and trying to beat others are two different things. Excellence and victory are conceptually distinct ... and are experienced differently." ~ Alfie Kohn

"Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it."
~ Maya Angelou

Bookshelf



What Matters Most: The Power of Living Your Values ... Hyrum W. Smith



Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values ... Robert M. Pirsig



The Road Less Traveled: A New Psychology of Love, Traditional Values and Spiritual Growth ... M. Scott Peck, MD



Manifesting Your Desires: How to Apply Timeless Spiritual Truths to Achieve Fulfillment ... Victoria Loveland-Coen, RScP



Self Matters: Creating Your Life from the Inside Out ... Phillip C. McGraw, PhD



10 Secrets for Success and Inner Peace ... Wayne Dyer

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Issue 50

Handling the Obstacles in Our Path

No matter how right the path you're on, there are times when things will not go smoothly: That's just the way life is. Achieving your goals may take persistence and resolve, so that you don't get derailed every time something happens differently than you planned and hoped. By anticipating and understanding the obstacles you may encounter, you can prepare to handle them.

There are many types of obstacles that may fall in our way. Some are personal situations that need to be dealt with, and the methodologies will vary with the circumstances. There are also obstacles that are common to all of us. These include:

~ **Fears**

While some fears are a normal reaction to a real or imminent danger, fears can be an excuse for not confronting situations in which we expect to feel inadequate or humiliated. Fear can become a habitual, automatic reaction to uncomfortable, unfamiliar circumstances. It is a way of keeping ourselves safe, but it can prevent us from taking the risks that make life exciting.

~ **Beliefs**

We form beliefs from the time we're born. Some serve us, while others limit us. The problem comes when we see our beliefs as factual realities. By identifying our beliefs as such, we can make other choices.

~ **Lack of Clarity**

With all the choices that life throws at us, we may not know how to wade through them. We get confused, overwhelmed and stuck.

~ **Lack of Focus**

Even if we can narrow down the choices, we may have so many that we don't know what to focus on first. We end up responding to all the urgencies and distractions, rather than actively choosing where we will put our attention.

~ **Lack of Knowledge or Skills**

When approaching something new, we may feel unprepared to deal with the additional education that will be required of us. We may feel inadequate to learn new skills. What we're missing may feel unattainable, and we give up before we even start.

As you can see, these obstacles are interwoven, and one can lead to another, until we find ourselves caught up in a downward spiral. But we don't have to let obstacles defeat us.

How we face obstacles can leave us either empowered or hopeless. They can stop us or motivate us. They can discourage us from doing the things we would love to do, or like a dare, a block can bring up our competitive drive to push through and triumph.

It's also helpful to differentiate between real and perceived blocks. If I start ice skating at the age of 40 with the intention of qualifying for the Olympics, that's a real block – even 25 is considered old for that arena. On the other hand, if I decide to start a new business at that age, it may be difficult, but it's doable. I may need to work through the 5 blocks above, but with the proper determination, resources and support, I can do it.

Some other ways we can look at and face obstacles:

~ **Punishment/Victim**

Sometimes, we hold our obstacles as punishments from God or society, and we feel like victims. Coming from this place will disempower you, and feeling small and weak, you will likely give up on your goal.

~ **Lesson/Opportunity**

Seeing your obstacle in this way can fuel your determination. If everything was easy, it would all become bland, and you would get bored and stagnate. Blocks force us to go beyond our current capabilities, both inner and outer, and to stretch ourselves, to push the envelope. You can use them as a chance to grow, to become a better, stronger person, to gain coping tools that will serve you in the future and allow you to take on even bigger challenges.

~ **Blocks vs. Hurdles**

I define blocks as something that completely stops you and hurdles as something that gets in your way, but that you can "jump over." Often, what turns a hurdle into a block is a belief that you can't do it, for one reason or another.

As you work through your obstacles, you can learn and create strategies to help you manage future ones:

- ~ Get clarity. Write, draw, speak your issues. Work with a friend or coach to pull apart the pieces that are confusing you, and come to a place of clarity. To begin with, make sure you're clear on what your goals are. Fuzzy goals are hard to hit and can leave you confused and frustrated when they don't work.

- ~ Prioritize and plan. Take your goals and dreams, write them down and prioritize them. Break them down into small steps, and schedule those steps. Take into account deadlines, but be sure to also give priority to the things that may not be urgent, but are important to creating the future you want.
- ~ Make time. If you don't handle the obstacles now or try to ignore them, they'll just snowball into bigger ones. Better to nip them in the bud.
- ~ Get help. If you're mired in overwhelm and confusion, don't feel you have to do it alone. Ask a friend or hire a coach to support you in getting clarity or working through fear. Take a class or hire a tutor to learn needed skills.
- ~ Face your fears. Fears can stop you in your tracks or, at best, slow you down. You can't wait for them to go away on their own – they won't – and when you try to avoid them, they only get stronger. By facing them, you learn effective strategies and increase your own power and strength. Deal with your fear on a daily or hourly basis if necessary. Expand your comfort zone gradually. Create strategies. Breathe. Meditate. Use affirmations to keep you focused. Play music that calms or energizes you. Work with a partner. Do a reality check to see if there's really something to be scared of or if you're terrorizing yourself. If it's real, determine what you can do about it; if not, let it go. Stay focused in the present moment – most of our fears are in anticipation of a tragic future that hardly ever happens.
- ~ Challenge and change your beliefs. Much of what we take as fact is, in fact, a belief. Check your facts to see if your belief is true – for you. Don't rely on statistics, as they're often skewed – and besides, you're an individual, not a statistic. Don't buy into what "they say." If a belief is not working for you, change it. Create new beliefs by writing affirmation statements, and then go about proving them.
- ~ Give yourself permission to dream. Many times, we cut off our dreams by expecting ourselves to know on the spot how to reach them. Achieving a dream is a process that you'll work out over time. All you need to figure out now is the first step, and that will lead you to the next.
- ~ If you failed at overcoming a particular obstacle in the past, be willing for it to be different this time. You're not the same person you were then, nor are the circumstances the same. There's no reason you can't succeed this time around. And if not this time, the next. Many successful people have left at least a couple of colossal failures in their wake.

As you succeed in moving through an obstacle, you build the confidence to take the next step. You don't have to do it quickly, and you don't have to do it perfectly. You can, in fact, learn a lot from your mistakes, so that you deal with future obstacles with more finesse. Look at your obstacles as an opportunity to grow stronger and more competent, and you will be able to embrace them and make the most of them.

Creative Tip

To get clarity on a chaotic to-do list, try using an Excel spreadsheet or a table in Word. List your tasks and goals in the first column, followed by a column for each coming month (or week if you need to be more specific). For each goal, put a deadline date or an X (or a series of X's to mark out time for a project) in the appropriate column(s). Then, you can rearrange and fine-tune the list as your goals become clearer over time.

Wise Words

"It has been my philosophy of life that difficulties vanish when faced boldly."
~ Isaac Asimov, *Foundation*

"The human capacity to fight back will always astonish doctors and philosophers. It seems, indeed, that there are no circumstances so bad and no obstacles so big that man cannot conquer them." ~ Jean Tetreau

"History has demonstrated that the most notable winners usually encountered heartbreaking obstacles before they triumphed. They won because they refused to become discouraged by their defeats." ~ B. C. Forbes

"A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for." ~ John A. Shedd

"I've been terrified every day of my life but that's never stopped me from doing everything I wanted to do." ~ Georgia O'Keefe

Bookshelf



Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway ... Susan Jeffers, PhD



Waking Up: Overcoming the Obstacles to Human Potential ...
Charles T. Tart



Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance ... Angela Duckworth



Noble Heart: A Self-Guided Retreat on Befriending Your Obstacles ...
Pema Chödrön (audiobook)



The Resilience Factor: 7 Essential Skills to Finding Your Inner Strength and Overcoming Life's Hurdles ... Karen Reivich PhD and, Andrew Shatte, PhD



Chicken Soup for the Unsinkable Soul: Inspirational Stories of Overcoming Life's Challenges ... Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen and Heather McNamara



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 51

A Career With A Heart: Marketing Fine Art

Every once in awhile, I come across someone who has a great story to tell, one that's instructive as well as inspiring. Mark Fort started a business called Victory Art to help fine artists market their work. In the process, he created an exciting career for himself.

SHARON GOOD: Hi, Mark. I visited your website. I know it's in its initial stages, but I can see there's a lot of thought behind it. What brought you to create this business?

MARK FORT: For the last 6 to 7 years of my career life, I owned a staffing company, here in the Silicon Valley, placing technical consultants to technology companies. I got into that business because it was the best opportunity when I sold my last business, and I was quite surprised at the high feel-good value that recruiting and staffing had.

When you're helping somebody to find a job and helping a hiring manager fill a role on his team, you're actually creating some very important relationships, very significant to those individuals, and the rewards are really high. But since the tech boom has kind of collapsed, it's been tough to earn a living doing that. So, I found myself at a crossroads. I thought about waiting until the economy turned around, but I thought, Do I want to wait? I look back on my career life and realize that I've probably been, like a lot of people, just being opportunistic. Sometimes, you find yourself on a career path due to some real haphazard circumstances. Something is presented, and it's the best opportunity at the time, so you take it.

I'm 39 now, so I'm becoming more aware of my mortality and some of the issues I'm faced with as far as the longevity of my career life, and I decided that it was really important for me to take this opportunity to make the right decision. And so, I decided to design my own career: If I could create the perfect job, what would it be?

If I look at my inventory of talents, I do have quite a lot of experience and talent in the business world and sales and marketing. I've always really admired artists and their talent and their courage to embark upon that career path. And I also have a passion for golf and the golf industry. This business model I've embarked upon, Victory Art, is really a thrown-together business model of all the things I'm good at. And it's also what I would consider to be the perfect dream job for myself.

Helping and working with artists on a daily basis is something I've always enjoyed doing. I love creative people and their belief systems, their philosophies, their demeanor, everything about them. And it would be my pleasure to work with them and help complement their talents with whatever talents that I might have in business and sales and marketing.

SG: And to use your own creative talents as well.

MF: When it comes to my creative talents, even though I certainly do have some artistic talents, I think that I'm very creative with respect to my business talents and the entrepreneurial qualities that I have.

SG: You're living what I teach: that creativity is not just in art, that you can use it in any endeavor. How are you going to use your business, sales and marketing talents with Victory Art?

MF: I think sales is really all about relationship and people skills. And I think the most successful people in sales and marketing have found a way to understand the needs of those who they're selling to. And so, what I'm trying to do is create a win-win-win situation.

I want to help artists, and so I've tried to look at their needs. So many artists are spending their weekends traveling around to art festivals and shows, sitting in a booth all day in a parking lot or on a street somewhere that's been blocked off for this particular event. And chatting with artists, it seems to be, really, their least favorite part of what they do, but it's necessary for them to create the revenue.

So, in trying to provide artists with other marketing avenues, it's about looking at all the markets that are untapped and creating markets. For instance, in the golf world, every golf club has annual Christmas events, spring leagues, awards banquets, charity fund-raising events and such. And so, one of my first thoughts for marketing would be to bring in a bunch of artists prior to an event and have them create individual works of art that feature the signature holes or the most beautiful scenes on a particular golf course and then put these pieces on silent auction at these events.

And that's creating a market where one didn't exist, because that Christmas party would have gone along just fine without a silent auction or anything art-related. But it would certainly be an enhancement to that event, plus it helps the artists to expose themselves to the right kind of people in their communities and to generate relationships with a whole new client base.

If you really care about the people you're selling to and if you really believe that the products are something that they need or will enhance their lives

and their job, then it becomes just a matter of trying to find a way to present it to them.

SG: I see that you're displaying artwork on your website, and you're also working locally. How does that work? If somebody wants to auction a particular item, do they need to have the item on their local site?

MF: Most likely, yes. And that's going to work through regional partnerships with, probably, gallery owners or maybe even eventually some type of a franchise opportunity to somebody that's already involved and connected in the art community in their geographic area.

SG: How does the website fit into your business model?

MF: The website is a tool for generating relationships with artists. So, I'm building the website to offer to artists free services that are needed and will enhance their ability to promote themselves to their communities.

It's also a tool that I need, because if I'm going to go to event planners and say, "I have this stable of artists. Here is their work. And these are our local artists for this particular region. Would you like to bring in some of their work for silent auction to generate funds for your charity or your cause?", then I really have to have that portfolio to show them. And so, the website becomes a perfect tool for that.

SG: I see. And your role in this is as an agent or rep for the artists?

MF: Well, not really, but yes, kind of in some ways. I like to think of myself as a business or marketing partner for the artist. I'm just providing them with some tools and resources that are going to help them to expose their work to potential buyers.

And at the same time, because of the costs involved in developing and building a website, yes, there will be a sales commission associated with any artwork that actually moves through the site, but it's like 20 percent. Typically, a gallery owner takes anywhere between 45 and 55 percent.

SG: So, you will derive your income through commissions and also through memberships to the website?

MF: Yes, those are two of the revenue models that are present. I'm providing a basic level of services on the website that will be free, and at the same time, there are a lot more enhanced services that could be provided that I can't afford to give away. So, if an artist wants a higher level of services, then I'm willing to go out and do those things. But it's going to cost a little bit, so there probably will be a monthly service fee to the artist, certainly something less than \$20 a month.

SG: What other types of services do you see yourself offering?

MF: There are a lot of relationships that the entire business model will generate just by virtue of its existing in the first place. One of those relationships is exposing the artist to publishing companies. Publishing companies are often looking for talented artists, and at the same time, it's a really big deal for an artist to be published and for their work to be in every poster shop and frame shop across the country. It's a great exposure and resume builder, an enhancement to the career and credentials of an artist.

And so, I'm talking with publishing companies now about offering them visibility and access to the artists that are published on the site. I'm going to have to be very proactive and aggressive about pursuing these relationships with publishing companies, and that's going to take quite a bit of time and energy, so that's one of those enhanced levels of service that I'm talking about.

SG: That's wonderful. I'm sure a lot of artists would love to have somebody else doing their sales and marketing for them.

MF: And for me, it's the perfect job. It's meeting people and developing relationships that are more in-depth than just making a sale and walking away. It's an ongoing partnership.

SG: It sounds like an offshoot of your work doing staffing, putting people together.

MF: Yes, it's exactly that. The experience I gained in the staffing industry has really helped me to define myself and what I enjoy doing with my career life.

SG: It sounds terrific. You mentioned that you're focused on golf-related art, but I'm hearing that you're looking for different types of art to feature on the site.

MF: Yes. I think that my pursuit of that one specific niche market comes from my own desire to create a reputation in the golf world for being a provider of unique, individual works of fine art that are golf-related. I always thought it would be cool to be involved in the golf industry somehow. And when I started looking at designing my own perfect job, there was definitely a desire to be involved somehow there.

And when I also started looking at the art world and what I could do for artists with my business skills, it made sense. The golfing community tends to be more affluent, with a little more disposable income, if you will. There's also the whole phenomenon of explosion that's happened in the golf world in the last 5 or 10 years – probably since Tiger Woods came on the scene –

and as a businessman, I identified the golf market as one that's going through some explosive growth.

And there's a trickle-down effect. There are a lot of industries that have gone through explosive growth through their association with the golf industry. And so, I think that the golf market, with respect to memorabilia and fine art, is an industry that will catch up. And I think it'll be doing a service to the artist to try to find ways to tap into that market.

SG: I'm seeing in coaching that there's a big trend toward "niching" and branding your business, and this is a way of you doing that for your company.

MF: Yes. If there's any particular niche market that I feel qualified in, it's golf. I'm an avid golfer myself, so I do feel like I have my finger on the pulse of that industry. I know enough about it to feel like I could make intelligent business decisions.

SG: But you're still looking for a wider range of art.

MF: The Victory Art.com site in general is a nonspecific sales and marketing resource for artists who sell their fine art. Golfers are simply one very affluent niche group of potential buyers who host events on a regular basis. I have decided to focus on this particular market early on; it's just one of many potential markets. I certainly don't want to scare any artists away thinking that it's just about golf art.

As far as the artists are concerned, VictoryArt.com is an across-the-board marketing tool and resource for artists of all kinds. If an artist is posting their work, or if a visitor to the gallery is doing a search for something specific, they're going to be able to search by medium, artist, theme, or any combination of keywords that might apply to a piece that would fit their specific needs – everything from painting to printmaking to sculpture to carvings to glass. All artistic mediums are represented there.

If somebody's going to be putting on a charity event that has to do with, say, children's issues, we'll do a keyword search on "child," "children," "youngsters," "infants," "babies," whatever, to see what we have that might lend itself to the theme of their charity in the first place.

At the same time, they can look at the work of a particular artist, and if they really like an artist, but weren't able to find anything specific that lent itself to that theme, we can contact the artist and ask the artist to create something. A lot of artists are open to commissioned works, and this is like a commissioned work, but on contingency – they're not paid for it until it

actually sells, but they're almost certainly guaranteed that it will sell, because it'll be on silent auction at this event.

SG: So, you've got a lot of creative marketing ideas.

MF: I'm just not the kind of person that likes to do something that everybody else is doing and try to jump into a market that everybody else is already in. It's the kind of stuff that keeps me awake at night, thinking of new ways to do something. And so, that's, I guess, where these concepts have come from – hours of sleepless nights. *(laughs)*

SG: I know the feeling. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

MF: The only thing I could share would be my own personal experience, in that so many of us end up in places based on taking the best option at the time. And that often leads us to financial success, but not necessarily the spiritual rewards that we would get from pursuing our dreams and really being proactive about deciding, What am I supposed to be doing based on what I know about myself?

I'm more energized about this particular project than I've ever been about anything in my life. And it's because I have more purpose now than ever before, because this is something that I listened to my heart when I decided what I should be doing, rather than just taking a job that paid the most or buying or creating a company because it was a financially sound decision at the time.

I'm excited about this, because I'm doing it for all the right reasons spiritually for myself. I'm sure the financial rewards will come, because I have so much energy to put into it, I can't see how it would ever fail, even if it just stays a very small boutique business and I get to deal with artists and event planners locally for the rest of my life. I can't imagine anything more rewarding than that.

My thanks to Mark Fort for so generously sharing his new business idea with us.

Note: As of this writing, the Victory Art website at www.victoryart.com no longer exists.

Creative Tip

Where else in your life, besides your art, can you use your creativity? Choose an area where you're facing a challenge right now. How can you be creative in finding a solution? Start with solutions you may have used in the past, and then brainstorm as many new ideas as you can come up with. From there, choose your best option, or combine two or more ideas for the best result.

Wise Words

"For most of us, working toward our own vision, following our own intuition, and respecting our own authority all feel incredibly bizarre... But don't let the alien sensation of taking your dreams and ambitions seriously deter you from what you really want to do: create a life you love." ~ Carol Lloyd, *Creating a Life Worth Living*

"It is only with the heart that one can see right; what is essential is invisible to the eye." ~ Antoine de Saint-Exupery

"Do what you love and love what you're doing, and you'll never work another day in your life." ~ Unknown

Bookshelf



Art Marketing 101: A Handbook for the Fine Artist ... Constance Smith



New Markets for Artists: How to Sell, Fund Projects, and Exhibit Using Social Media, DIY Pop-Ups, eBay, Kickstarter and Much More ... Brainard Carey



The Artist's Guide to New Markets: Opportunities to Show and Sell Art Beyond Galleries ... Peggy Hadden



The Fine Artist's Guide to Marketing and Self-Promotion: Innovative Techniques to Build Your Career As an Artist ... Julius Vitali



How to Survive and Prosper As an Artist: Selling Yourself Without Selling Your Soul ... Caroll Michels



Creating a Life Worth Living: A Practical Course in Career Design for Artists, Innovators and Others Aspiring to a Creative Life ... Carol Lloyd



The Power of Purpose: Live Longer, Better ... Richard J. Leider



Finding a Path With a Heart: How to Go from Burnout to Bliss ... Dr. Beverly Potter



Allworth Press: Business books for the arts

Issue 52

Starting a New Year

The new year is always a time to reflect on the past and look to the future. It's a time to celebrate our wins and victories, let go of our struggles and losses, and set new goals and dreams for ourselves. There's a freshness, a sense of having a new chance at life.

We're living in challenging times. This past year has been a difficult one for many, with job and personal losses and the impending threat of terrorism and war. It can be tempting to succumb to fear and hopelessness. Or we can raise our sights and use our imagination to lift us out of the dark place.

Most of us are adept at negative imaginings – we have no trouble seeing the worst possibilities. As artists, we also use our imaginations to create things of beauty. We can use our creativity to envision and bring forth a positive future, inspiring ourselves and others.

The world is changing. The visionaries speak of a "new world," an evolution of humanity. We can take the events in our current world at face value, fearing the end times, or we can see them as the birth pangs of that new world. Our worldview is changing, and artists have traditionally been on the cutting edge.

There is much reason for hope. We need to continue seeing what's possible for ourselves and the world. Difficult times don't mean we have to give up our dreams. Our parents and grandparents lived through the Depression, and many prospered. We need to remember that life happens in cycles. Some of those cycles are longer than our lifetime, so we don't always see them. The Depression didn't last forever; it was followed by decades of prosperity, as will our current time.

While there's a tendency now to hunker down and protect your security, there is also a call to get in touch with what really matters to you. Despite the precarious job market, more and more people are realizing that they can't put off their dreams forever and are deliberately walking out on jobs they can no longer tolerate. Some part of them is compelling them to take a leap of faith into what they anticipate will be a more fulfilling and happy life. In light of all that has occurred, the risk no longer seems so huge. Others are seeing being downsized, not as a tragedy, but as an opportunity to make a change they've been putting off, to pursue a more desirable path.

It's important to hold onto a sense of optimism. I'm not talking about sticking our heads in the sand and acting happy. It's about understanding how things are in the world and still choosing to look forward, to keep

taking steps toward creating your future, to be the strongest, most courageous person you can be. They say that living well is the best revenge. If we use this time as an opportunity to retune our lives and make them better, then the terrorists have lost.

Times like this force us to dig deeper into ourselves and rise to the challenge. Rather than fall into despair, we can look inside and see what we're being called to do. It can be a time to grow and to surprise ourselves with the strength we already have. Instead of knuckling under, we can look to the future we want to create and live by that vision, taking it one step at a time.

It may seem like an overwhelming task to change the world, but we're not doing it alone. There are thousands of groups and individuals around the world actively working to improve their lives and those of others and to make the world a better place. We don't hear about them much, because doing good is not newsworthy, but they're there, quietly working in the background. Each participant counts, and no contribution is too small. Getting in touch with who you authentically are and then living that is one way to do it.

To start the new year on a note of courage and hope (and a little playfulness), I invite you to make one Big Wish for yourself – something so far-fetched or improbable that you don't expect to achieve it all. Hold it out there as a possibility and see where it leads you.

Use this year to brighten up your little corner of the world, to make it a more fun and joyful place for you and, in doing so, to lift the whole world to a higher place.

Creative Tip

Take a look at the various activities you do in your life. Some of the things we do, particularly the longstanding ones, become habitual and unconscious; we do them on "automatic pilot." Take a look at those in particular and consider:

- 1) Are you still getting benefit from doing them?
- 2) Are you doing them in the most advantageous way?
- 3) Is there something else you could be doing that would get you the desired result in a better way?

Wise Words

"This is the precious present, regardless of what yesterday was like, regardless of what tomorrow may bring. When your inner eyes open, you can find immense beauty hidden within the inconsequential details of daily life. When your inner ears open, you can hear the subtle, lovely music of the universe everywhere you go. When the heart of your heart opens, you can take deep pleasure in the company of the people around you.

"When you are open to the beauty, mystery, and grandeur of ordinary existence, you 'get it' that it always has been beautiful, mysterious, and grand and always will be. This is the precious present." ~ Timothy Ray Miller, *How to Want What You Have: Discovering the Magic and Grandeur of Ordinary Existence*

"The very act of envisioning a better future can in itself initiate change." ~ *New Age* magazine (in a review of *Promise Ahead*)

"In these days of scrambling to make a living, it may sound 'unrealistic' to seek purpose and meaning in one's work. As many who survived the Depression have said: 'You get work where you can and you do what you have to do.' Well, yes, but that doesn't mean ignoring purpose. Meaning and purpose have economic as well as spiritual payoffs. If you're committed to the 'Why' of your work, you're far more likely to succeed and make money doing it." ~ Howard Figler and Richard Nelson Bolles, *The Career Counselor's Handbook*

"Live out of your imagination, not your history." ~ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

Bookshelf



Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential ...
Barbara Marx Hubbard



Jump Time: Shaping Your Future in a World of Radical Change ...
Jean Houston



Promise Ahead: A Vision of Hope and Action for Humanity's Future ...
Duane Elgin



Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future ...
Margaret J. Wheatley



The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World ... Paul H. Ray, PhD and Sherry Ruth Anderson, PhD



Ethics for a New Millennium ... His Holiness the Dalai Lama



Imagine: What America Could Be in the 21st Century ... Marianne Williamson, editor



Peak Evolution: Beyond Peak Performance and Peak Experience ...
Lauren Holmes

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Issue 53

Updating Your Self-Image

As you move forward in your life, you go through numerous inner and outer changes. And with these changes, from working the “muscles” you use to cope with them, comes inner growth. Who you are changes. But sometimes, your image of who you are lags behind. It becomes important, from time to time, to take a look at your self-image and to update it, so it doesn’t keep you stuck or drag you back into the past.

Let me make a distinction here between “self-image” and “persona.” A persona is a mask we create in order to interact safely with the world, to protect our delicate psyche and appear socially appropriate in whatever circles we travel. A persona is layered on from the outside. Think of all the articles and books you see on how to project the right image for success, how to attract a mate, how to win friends and influence people.

Self-image, on the other hand, comes from within. It’s how you see yourself, which, in turn, projects out to the world. It is more authentic than a persona, and it’s something that you can work with and cultivate as part of your developing self.

We respond to our world – the opportunities that show up, the people we interact with – based on how we see ourselves. When you have an old, outmoded image of yourself, you behave and make choices based on who you were in the past, without including all your new growth, accomplishments and depth. Imagine if I still saw myself as the shy sixth-grader I was, who felt she had nothing of value to say. You wouldn’t be reading this now!

We create an identity and image based, often, on the outer circumstances of our lives. We see ourselves as child, parent, spouse, employee or employer, friend, neighbor, teacher and many other roles. We behave the way people expect us to and assimilate that into our image. When we go through a drastic change, we experience an identity crisis. Retirement, for example, can precipitate a crisis if your identity is wrapped around your job.

Another part of our image is childhood labels. In family dynamics, each person takes on a role. You may be the smart one, the outgoing one, the good one, the nice one, the difficult one, the artistic one, the athlete, the charmer. You may also find a role assigned to you at school.

Although there are many other dimensions to you, you tend to take on these roles to fit into the structure and not upset the apple cart. And as a child, you don’t have the understanding and power to choose otherwise.

Leaving home can be an opportunity to break out of that mold, but it can stay with you mentally and emotionally unless you choose to let it go. How many of us, well into middle age, revert to feeling like teenagers when we visit our parents?

Our self-image becomes a synthesis of all these roles and behaviors, until it becomes as invisible to us as the air we breathe. It's just who we are. But we have choices. Each of us has a range of personality traits from which we can choose. If you don't like your assigned ones, you can make different choices that are more authentic for you.

Begin by consciously observing your current self-image and then deciding which traits you want to keep and enhance, and which traits you want to let go of or replace. Notice also how you've grown and how your image may not have caught up. By acknowledging the change, you make it a part of your image.

Turn your focus to what's good about you. It's all too easy to dwell on what we think is wrong with us, and we get a lot of reward for being humble and self-deprecating. Humility is a good thing when it balances a healthy self-image and self-esteem. Learn to accept yourself, warts and all. Work on the parts you don't care for, accept what you can't change and be forgiving of yourself for things you've done in the past. Remind yourself of your strengths and positive traits, and incorporate those into your new self-image.

Monitor your self-talk. We have people in our early lives who spoke to us negatively. Even when they're long gone, we carry on their legacy by continuing that negative talk in our minds. If you catch yourself putting yourself down, stop, forgive yourself and change the thought. We're all trying our best, and demeaning your efforts doesn't make you any better.

You can also deliberately create a new image for yourself based on where and who you want to be. You can dress a certain way, educate yourself about a new interest, learn to speak the lingo, join associations or clubs and meet people who are doing what you want to do, as well as cultivating personal qualities that you would like to enhance. In a sort of "fake-it-till-you-make-it" way, you begin to convince yourself that that's who you are, and you gain more confidence and comfort in your new role. Then, when opportunity comes, you're ready.

As you go through this process, there are a couple of things to look out for.

~ When you achieve something, you have a wave of excitement, a period where you feel greater than you were, and for a time, you ride the wave.

But eventually, it subsides. You “absorb” the new achievement, and you settle back to your normal way of feeling about yourself.

For example, if you feel you’re never good enough, you may achieve something that disproves that, but once the glow wears off, you once again feel not good enough. Your accomplishment was great, but you feel you’ll never live up to it or surpass it.

It’s important to take the time to acknowledge the new level of growth and achievement, perhaps by marking it with a ritual of some sort, and consciously making it a part of your new self. How does it change the way you feel about yourself? The way you behave? The new challenges you take on? The way you are with other people? Actively acknowledge your success, give yourself credit for it and then update your self-image to include the new skills, accomplishments and inner changes you’ve achieved.

- ~ You also need to be aware that there are people in your life who won’t welcome changes in you; they’re comfortable with you just the way you are. When we get into a relationship with someone, a certain dynamic takes place between us, like pieces of a puzzle that fit together. When one of us changes, it shifts the dynamic balance, and the other person might not like it. If they’re not willing to adjust, the relationship may experience friction or fall apart.

When I was in my early 20s, I had a friend who, from time to time, pointed out that I didn’t know how to handle anger. At the time, he was right, and it made him feel superior. Our friendship drifted apart, and we reconnected several years later. At that point, I had grown, and handling anger was no longer an issue for me. However, my friend continued to point it out as a problem. Our friendship once again ended, because he couldn’t get comfortable with the person I had become and kept trying to fit me back into the old mold.

While we can’t control how other people see us, we can control how we see ourselves. When you carry a certain self-image, people begin to treat you like you *are* that person, which reinforces it even further. When your self-image is a positive one, it puts you into an upward spiral, and you can build upon it. As you acquire new skills and develop yourself, you’ll be able to take on new challenges that were previously out of reach. Just remember to take your self-image with you on the journey.

Creative Tip

To begin updating your image, write a list of your personal qualities, for example: strong, generous, oversensitive, hard worker, socially adept, shy, poor willpower, good friend, etc. Now, review each one. Is it still true for you? How have you changed in that area in the last 10 years? The last 20 years? How would you update that part of your image? What qualities would you like to add or eliminate?

Wise Words

"To gain confidence, we need to have a true picture of who we are and where we belong." ~ Walter Anderson, *The Confidence Course: Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*

"Most of those who succeed in achieving their goals do it by creating an environment for opportunity. They feel that they are entitled to go after what they want in life... They open themselves to positive change by becoming positive, energized people. They don't limit themselves with a poor self-image or a negative attitude. They get rid of negative baggage that holds them back. They believe in themselves, giving others cause to believe in them." ~ Stedman Graham, *You Can Make It Happen: A Nine-Step Plan for Success*

"You've got to get up every morning with a smile on your face and show the world all the love in your heart. Then people are going to treat you better. You're going to find, yes you will, that you're beautiful as you feel." ~ Carole King, *Tapestry*

Bookshelf



How to Develop Self-Confidence and a Positive Self-Image Permanently and Forever ... Michael S. Broder, PhD (audiocassette)



Think Like a Winner! ... Dr. Walter Doyle Staples



Shaving the Inside of Your Skull: Crazy Wisdom for Discovering Who You Really Are ... Mel Ash



Success and the Self-Image: Inspiring Greatness in Yourself and Others ... Zig Ziglar (audiobook)



*Self-Image Demystified: The Proven Art of Attracting What You Want
by Becoming What You Want ...* Elena G. Rivers

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Issue 54

Transition and Change

Nobody likes change. Most of us are resistant to it. But, for better or for worse, change is here to stay. So, as much as we don't want it, it's in our best interest to understand and develop ways to deal with change and transition.

Change happens again and again throughout our lives. These changes may be self-chosen or imposed upon us. Change can happen quickly, or it can take some time. And with each change comes a period of transition, where you get used to a new way of life, a new way of being, new people and situations.

To add to it, we're in a time of transition on the planet. Change seems to be constant these days. As I walk through my neighborhood, it seems that not a day goes by that something hasn't changed – a shop closed, a different restaurant where an old favorite used to be, an entire block torn down. Last year, even the old family pharmacy across the street, which had been there for 3 generations, was razed to build a high-rise apartment building.

If you're lucky enough to transition over a period of time, you'll go through 3 stages: an ending, an in-between stage and a new beginning. The in-between stage can be uncomfortable; you're neither in the old nor comfortably established in the new.

I recently bought a new computer. There was a period where I was setting up the new computer, getting all my new software working and transferring files from the old one. For a time, it was chaotic, as I moved from one computer to the other to get things done. Eventually, the new computer was completely up and running and I was able to let go of the old. It was nerve-racking for a couple of weeks, but the new computer is so fabulous, it was worth the trouble!

Change puts us face-to-face with the unknown and uncertain. It shakes us up and threatens our sense of control. When we go through too many changes too fast, it can put us into crisis. The more prepared we are to deal with change, the more elegantly we'll move through it. Here are some suggestions:

- ~ Stay grounded. Find stability where you can. While I've changed careers several times, I've found my stability by living in the same apartment for over 25 years and the ongoing community with my neighbors. You may find your stability in your relationships, your family, your community, your job, your geographic location, your spirituality, your values.

- ~ Manage your expectations. If you expect things to be consistent and predictable, the unexpected changes will throw you. Be open to the possibility that you will confront change, perhaps on a daily basis, and make internal and external adjustments to deal with that.
- ~ Be flexible. There was a time when you could make plans and follow through. With changes often surprising us now, it helps to have contingency plans. Have goals and visions, for sure, but be relaxed and pliable with them. Allow new and different possibilities to come your way. Use your creativity and imagination to brainstorm different ways of getting where you want to go, and don't allow the detours to discourage you or lead you to feel your dreams are impossible. Consider that the change may offer you opportunities that your original plan didn't.
- ~ Create a safety net, particularly in the areas where you feel most vulnerable. Build your nest egg. Solidify your support system. Have a Plan B, and maybe a Plan C and D. With the inability to take anything for granted these days, it gives us peace of mind to have some options in place.
- ~ Keep your eye on the horizon and be honest with yourself if change seems inevitable. As scary as that may be, facing it unprepared is even scarier. Exercise control where you can by making active choices. Gather information. Learn new skills. Talk to someone who's been where you're going.
- ~ Let go of the past. Once the change takes place, there's nothing you can do about it. The wisdom of the Serenity Prayer entreats us to accept what we can't change. Dwelling in what was uses precious energy that you can use to adapt to the new situation. Better to clean out the old to make space for the new, both physically and mentally.
- ~ Prepare for the future, but live in the present. Constant worrying will drain your energy. Use your plans as a road map, and be willing to try another route. Several years ago, on our way out of Washington, DC, we consulted a map to find a way onto the Beltway. When we got to where the entrance was supposed to be, we encountered a dead end, even though the entrance was clearly marked on the map. We could see the Beltway elevated above us, but no way to get onto it. We had to try another route that took us farther out of our way, but worked.
- ~ Be willing to change your mindset. We get used to seeing things a certain way, and change shakes us up. Try looking at things a different way. Be open to new possibilities – in fact, look for them!

- ~ Own the change. Whether you were victimized or not, ownership and responsibility puts you in a position of power that allows you to do something about it. In the work world, for example, it has become imperative for each of us to chart our own career path and enhance our skills, rather than relying on a company to guide and nurture us.
- ~ Be creative in dealing with the transition period. The tendency is to try to fit the old structures into the new. Be adventurous and try things in new and different ways. You may continue using the old method as a stopgap (as I did with some of my old computer software before I upgraded it), but look for or create new methods that better suit the new situation. Use it as an opportunity to learn something new and, often, better.
- ~ Don't panic. Take the time to breathe and think things through. Don't act just to act. Sometimes waiting is more advisable, until you can develop a well-thought-out strategy. Rash action may cause more problems than it solves.
- ~ This may be a tough one: Trust that the change will take you someplace better that you may not see right now. Change is life's way of making us grow. If we had our way, most of us would keep things the way they are indefinitely. There's a certain comfort in that, but eventually, we would stagnate and become bored.
- ~ Enjoy the journey. The truth is, things are always changing. Rather than thinking of it as running from one base to the next as fast as you can, take the time to look around and assimilate the new. Use the in-between period as a time of adjustment. Let it be okay to feel uncomfortable for a time.
- ~ Take care of yourself. You may need to talk through the confusion with someone. You may need extra sleep – change can be energy-draining. Find a safe place you can retreat to, whether it be a physical place or an inner one.

While change is something we have to confront, the good news is, dealing with change is a skill you can learn and master. And the more you do, the easier it gets. We can become what author Marsha Sinetar calls “creative adaptors.” We can learn to make the most of change and use it to our advantage. And who knows, you may even begin to embrace it!

Creative Tip

It's uncomfortable living with uncertainty. Practice staying in the moment. Do what you can to ensure the future, and then let it go. Bring yourself back to

the present moment and notice everything that's okay. Do something to take your mind off the problem. Take it a day at a time.

Wise Words

"People can't live with change if there's not a changeless core inside them. The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value." ~ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

"Life is what happens when you are making other plans." ~ John Lennon

"Life is change. Growth is optional. Choose wisely." ~ Karen Kaiser Clark

"The outer forms of our lives can change in an instant, but the inner reorientation that brings us back into a vital relation to people and activity takes time." ~ William Bridges, PhD, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*

Bookshelf



Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes ... William Bridges, PhD



Comfortable with Uncertainty: 108 teachings on cultivating fearlessness and compassion ... Pema Chödrön



Embracing Uncertainty: Achieving peace of mind as we face the unknown ... Susan Jeffers, PhD



Between Trapezes: Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease ... Gail Blanke



Building Resiliency: How to Thrive in Times of Change ... Mary Lynn Pulley and Michael Wakefield



Developing a 21st Century Mind ... Marsha Sinetar



In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life ... Robert Kegan



We Are All Self-Employed: The New Social Contract for Working in a Changed World ... Cliff Hakim

Issue 55

What Really Matters

When the world around you is going haywire, as it has been particularly in the last year and a half, it makes you think about what's really important to you. We have a tendency to put things off to a better, more convenient time. But when you have no idea what the next day will bring, there's an urgency to doing the things that really matter to you, rather than perhaps losing the chance to do them at all.

As a career coach, I've had many people come to me who want to craft a life that's meaningful to them. Some have walked out on successful, high-paying careers because they could no longer face getting up in the morning. Others have been downsized from jobs they hate and choose to use this time as an opportunity to get on a better track instead of continuing their suffering in a different place. Still others want to revive pursuits that are important to them, but that have gotten lost in the frantic pace of day-to-day life.

Many creative people, in needing to make a living, put off doing their creative work, and their souls suffer for it. I'm not saying that it's easy to work a full-time job and still find time to paint, write or sing. But what will it feel like to come to the end of your life and not have done those things? Better to give up the premium movie channels and invest the time and money on something that will matter in the long run.

Perhaps you've come to the conclusion that you do want to invest in your dreams, but you get stuck because you don't know what to do or where to begin. It helps to have a map, so let's look at how you can start to reevaluate your life and make space for what matters to you.

- ~ Begin by taking stock of your values. According to Hyrum W. Smith, a motivational speaker who is one of the founders of Franklin Covey and the author of *What Matters Most*, much of our dissatisfaction about our lives comes from a conflict between our actions and our deeply-held personal values. Once you've determined what these values are, note whether the actions you're taking and the activities you're involved in support them. Wherever they don't, begin to plan action steps to bring them in line or replace them with something that does. In some cases, these will be small adjustments. In other cases, a major life change may be in order.
- ~ Next, look at what situations in your life you have been meaning to change or leave, but haven't. How do you justify them? What's stopping you from moving on? What are you sacrificing by staying stuck? What

actions can you take to set change in motion? If necessary, start slow – chances are you've been hesitating because of a fear or because it will cause an upheaval in your life. Take it a step at a time. Once you start taking action, one step will lead to another, and it will gain momentum. It may help to make some preparations before you act to make the transition smoother.

- ~ Think about why you're doing the things you're doing. Often, we start doing something for a good reason, it becomes a habit, and we keep doing it long after it's useful to us. Think about activities that you've been doing for years that are no longer fun for you. Such things can be eliminated or minimized to make room for things that are more meaningful to you now.
- ~ Note the things have you been putting off till "someday." In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey has us classify our activities based on "urgency" and "importance." Sadly, the things that are "important but not urgent" often slip through the cracks. It's these – the things that lead us into the future of our dreams – that we have to make priorities.

Now, here's the test: Once you've determined what's important to you, pretend you're 80 or 90 years old, and look back on your life. Pretend you've done all the things you're planning to put into place as a result of this exploration. Is there anything else you can think of that you would deeply regret not doing? Is there anything you're doing you'll be sorry for later? What changes would you make? The good news is, you're not there yet, so you can make the changes now!

In doing these exercises, think outside the dollar sign. We tend to measure our success by how much we make and how extravagantly we live. There's nothing wrong with living a comfortable life, but in using money as your gauge, you may sacrifice the things that will matter most in the long run. Go back to your values. I would bet that most, if not all of them are based on something other than material gain. Redefine success based on what truly matters to you. Write notes to yourself or draw pictures that you can keep in sight to remind you.

Once you've defined what's important to you, make time for it. Craft and shape your life to fit your goals and dreams, rather than letting it run away with you. You may feel some resistance: When something is very important to you, your doubts and fears come into play. Push through them. Once you do and you experience the exhilaration of living a life that's aligned with your passions and values, you'll wonder what took you so long.

Creative Tip

Make a list of the activities you have in your life and the ones you want to introduce. Then, add 2 columns: "Need to Do" and "Want to Do." In the first column, give each item a rating from 1 to 10 based on how much you need to do that activity. Things like money-making activities and family duties will rate high in this column. In the second, assign a rating based on how much you want to do it. Look at the items that rate high in Want and low in Need. What can you do to give them more presence in your life?

Wise Words

"Why [do] I repeatedly fail to live the intentions that matter to me? I want to know how to narrow the gap between the sincerest desires of my soul and my daily actions." ~ Oriah Mountain Dreamer

"The crime which bankrupts men and nations is that of turning aside from one's main purpose to serve a job here and there." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"We all have inconveniences of one kind or another. How you deal with them ultimately determines how successful you are." ~ Craig McFarlane (blind motivational speaker)

"Accusing the times is but excusing ourselves." ~ English proverb

Bookshelf



What Matters Most: The Power of Living Your Values ... Hyrum W. Smith



Life Strategies: Doing What Works, Doing What Matters ... Phillip C. McGraw, PhD



To Do Doing Done!: A Creative Approach to Managing Projects & Effectively Finishing What Matters Most ... G. Lynne Snead and Joyce Wycoff



The Invitation ... Oriah Mountain Dreamer



Your Heart's Prayer: Following the Thread of Desire into a Deeper Life ... Oriah Mountain Dreamer (audiobook)



Take Time for Your Life: A 7-Step Program for Creating the Life You Want ... Cheryl Richardson



Tuning in: Listening to the Voice of Your Soul ... Cheryl Richardson
(audiobook)



Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway ... Susan Jeffers

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Issue 56

Your Self-Story

Many times in life, we find ourselves facing limitations. How often do we stop to consider whether those limitations are ones we placed on ourselves? One of the ways we do that is by adopting a story about who we are, our place in the world, what we as individuals can and cannot do, what “people like us” (family, community, gender, race, etc.) can and cannot do, and then clinging to that story.

Our life story, or personal myth, is a way we make sense of who we are and the circumstances of our lives. We crave coherence, and one way we achieve that is by creating a story that makes sense of the disparate events that we experience and how they impact us. If we can't find a logical explanation, we make one up and then believe it as “Truth.”

Our beliefs about ourselves have a strong impact on how we behave and even how our bodies respond. In 1979, Dr. Ellen Langer, a Harvard professor of psychology, conducted a study in which a group of male volunteers over the age of 70 agreed to live as though it were 1959. They dressed, talked, read newspapers and magazines and watched TV shows from the period. After only 5 days, the men showed improvement in hearing and memory, and many of them even looked 5 years younger!

In her book, *Mindfulness*, Dr. Langer wrote, “The regular and ‘irreversible’ cycles of aging that we witness in the later stages of human life may be a product of certain assumptions about how one is supposed to grow old. If we didn't feel compelled to carry out these limiting mindsets, we might have a greater chance of replacing years of decline with years of growth and purpose.” Similarly, by releasing our limiting beliefs in other areas, we can free ourselves to grow and develop in new ways. We can take the dreams that formerly seemed out of our grasp and begin taking steps to turn them into realities.

There are many reasons we cling to our stories. Our history is something we can call upon at will. It feels much more controllable and predictable than our future and can be comforting to fall back on. There was a time when I didn't know when my next happy moment would come, so I would dwell on happy moments from the past. Happy to say, the happy moments come more frequently for me now, and I know there will always be more, so I no longer need to dwell in the past.

Our stories give us a sense of history and belonging. We remember who we were and the people we connected with. It helps us define ourselves and

create an identity (see Issue 53). The trap is that we can get stuck in the safety of that identity and stop ourselves from growing for fear of upsetting the apple cart and having to cope with change and loss.

We use our stories to bond with others. We may have come from similar backgrounds or had similar experiences, and they bring us acceptance from a likeminded group or individual. In *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can*, Caroline Myss notes that sometimes we hesitate to give up our stories for fear of losing the relationships that come with them.

Our stories may also include the roles we took on early in life. You may have been labeled “the achiever” or “the one who would never amount to anything.” You may have been the caregiver or center of attention. These roles translate into our later choices in careers, life partners, friends, which opportunities we’ll pursue and so on. Our self-story and its related self-image draw familiar and comfortable boundaries around us that we may be reluctant to move beyond.

We may use our stories as a way of explaining to people who we are and how we got that way. If we have less-than-perfect self-esteem (and who doesn't) or feel different, there may be an element of self-justification or trying to fit into the norm. Parts of our story are told to make us look good, to evoke sympathy, to impress, to bolster our own egos, to give us a sense of purpose and meaning, to make sense of a senseless event, to frame our personal challenges and many other reasons.

Our stories change over time as we give new meaning to the parts of our life. Certain incidences gain or lose importance, like shining or dimming a spotlight on them. We may positively resolve a negative incident, or a happy one may be superseded by a disappointing outcome or even happier times. Our successes and failures will add to the story, as will the new perspectives and deeper understanding we acquire in the process of life.

As you can see, your personal story is an important part of creating identity and coherence in your life. But when you get stuck in it or take it as the gospel truth, it can limit you from growing beyond it. You may be afraid of upsetting people or losing relationships by acting in a totally different way. You may feel uncomfortable that a sudden or radical change in behavior will make people think you've gone off the deep end. Or you may feel that each step you take needs to progress logically out of your past – that you need to be able to explain or justify it to yourself or others – rather than taking a leap into something you know you can do, or passionately want to do, but is a radical departure from what you've done or been before.

It's up to you how quickly or drastically you want to change, and I strongly advocate taking things a step at a time. You can begin to move beyond your

limitations by rewriting your personal story. We believe that our futures are determined by the circumstances we were born into and our childhood experiences, but there is ample evidence that many people have squandered the gifts they were given, while others had the strength and determination to transcend dire circumstances.

I was moved by the story of Irene Monroe, a young woman who was abandoned by her mother in a trash can at the age of 6 months. She was placed with a foster mother who constantly told her, "You come from nothing, you are nothing, you'll be nothing." At the age of 6 or 7, she realized that she had an inner strength and that the world was open to her like everybody else. Realizing that education was her ticket out, she worked hard and created opportunities to pursue higher education at Wellesley, Columbia and Harvard. She is now a respected theologian, writer and speaker.

While you can't change the past (although the accuracy of our memories is somewhat questionable anyway), you can always change how you look at the circumstances of your life. You can see them from a different perspective or put them in a different context. For example, several years down the road, you may be able to see how an incident that was painful at the time led you to something better. Or you may come to understand the perspective of someone who hurt you.

And you *can* change your future. You will grow and have new experiences. You can continue writing your story based on the person you are becoming and reframe the past based on the perspectives you will undoubtedly gain as you move forward and have access to the bigger picture of your life. You always have a choice how you relate to the circumstances of your life, and by rewriting your self-story, you can literally change the direction your life takes.

Creative Tip

Write your personal story as if it were a myth or fairy tale. Is it a heroic journey or a tale of woe? How do you want it to end? If you don't like the direction it's going, rewrite it now, and then take steps to make your happy ending come true.

Wise Words

"Each of us comes to know who he or she is by creating a heroic story of the self." ~ Dan P. McAdams, *The Stories We Live By*

"Our entire society functions under many shared and sometimes harmful beliefs... So it is that we can be sure the events of our childhood set the stage for our beliefs about ourselves and therefore our experience." ~ Christiane Northrup, MD, *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*


"Ancient decisions you made as a young boy or girl about what you can and cannot do, or will and will not do, are keeping you from doing what you most want to do now." ~ Paul and Sarah Edwards, *The Practical Dreamer's Handbook*


"Although reality can't be erased, it seems only fair that our *thoughts* about things might be erasable. We can change our mind, get new ideas, see things in different ways, and easily move our attention from one thing to another. In other words, it usually seems that we can control what we think." ~ Daniel M. Wegner, *White Bears and Other Unwanted Thoughts*


Bookshelf

 *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self* ... Dan P. McAdams

 *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* ... Paul John Eakin

 *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* ... Charlotte Linde


 *The Book of Self-Acquaintance: A Guided Journal* ... Margaret Tiberio

 *The Story of Your Life: Becoming the Author of Your Experience* ... Mandy Aftel

 *Myths to Live By* ... Joseph Campbell

 *Why People Don't Heal and How They Can* ... Caroline Myss, PhD

 *Mindfulness* ... Ellen J. Langer

 *Eating in the Light of the Moon: How Women Can Transform Their Relationship With Food Through Myths, Metaphors & Storytelling* ... Anita Johnston, PhD



Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives ...
Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson

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Issue 57

Owning Your Power: An Interview with Susan Jeffers

One of the things we need to confront as we grow and develop ourselves and our work is an increasing sense of personal power. As we see ourselves blossoming, we begin to “feel our oats.” We like who we are. We’re producing work we’re proud of. And yet we may feel we’re treading a thin line between confidence and arrogance or conceit. The people who eagerly supported us through our tribulations may be showing ambivalence about our success. We may have mixed feelings about our newfound confidence.



It can be tempting to backslide to the less-confident person you were, but giving up your power is not the answer. We have a myth that artists and spiritual people should be poor and “humble.” But power, like money, gives us the resources we need to bring our good work into the world. With power, we have the confidence and clout to let people know what we have to offer and to find those who will enjoy and benefit from our work.

We need to learn to wear our new mantle of power gracefully, with humility and love. I recently encountered a beautiful model for this in Susan Jeffers, PhD, author of the award-winning *Embracing Uncertainty* and the best-selling classic *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. I had the pleasure of doing a workshop with Dr. Jeffers and later interviewing her for this article. I was impressed with how she owns the powerful impact of her work, and yet she’s a warm and compassionate person who makes *you* feel important.

In beginning a discussion about power, we first need to define what it is. “People mistake power as when people throw their weight around,” Dr. Jeffers told me. “That’s not power to me. Power to me is knowing that you will handle whatever happens to you, so that you will take the risks to improve your life and to improve the world in any way you can.”

It is by knowing that we make a difference that we build our power in a positive way. “I think that arrogant people really don’t have the understanding that they do make a difference in the world,” said Dr. Jeffers. “They are relatively insecure. I love Zig Ziglar’s line, ‘Every obnoxious act is a cry for help.’ And I think arrogance is a cry for help. That you’re not feeling secure enough in yourself, you’re not understanding that you do make a difference.”

Taking power at others’ expense is not really power at all. When you know that your actions, positive or negative, affect people, you think twice about

deliberately hurting others. In the film, *Girl, Interrupted*, the character Lisa does harmful things to other people to provoke a reaction from them in order to feel alive, to feel that she has some impact. But negative acts have negative consequences. When you know that you make a difference, that you can have positive impact on people, it is so much more exciting and gratifying than causing harm.

Jeffers concurs. "Oh, my gosh, yes. It brings you to tears of joy. 'My life makes a difference!' And when you see how people just ruin their lives or commit suicide or do ugly things, you know they don't know that they make a difference... We come into the world totally helpless, and unless we take, we die. I think our job in life, if you want to call it that, is to become the givers, to become the adult, the true adult, and to help other people."

Jeffers feels strongly that we can give our children a sense of empowerment, not just by showering them with praise, but by giving them responsibilities that will enable them to feel good about their accomplishments and learn that they make a difference in other people's lives. Through volunteering, they see that their lives matter, rather than trying to get attention or feel a sense of power in destructive ways, such as bullying, drugs or violence.

Paradoxically, part of the process of becoming powerful is letting go of control. Jeffers explains why: "I think it's incredibly powerful to know you have no control. Because you then open your mind to a more powerful way of thinking. If you think that you can control everything, it's controlling you, because the agony that's associated with needing things to be a certain way is huge. We must do our homework. We must take the action. But then, at some point, you say, 'Okay, I've done my best, whatever happens happens.' That is so powerful.

"One of my most favorite affirmations is, 'Whatever happens, I'll handle it.' We say, 'I want this to happen,' and then add, 'or whatever is for my highest good.' And I think it's all for our highest good. That's an interesting way of looking at the world. It's all for our highest good – if (and there's the 'if') we take the responsibility for looking for the learning, for looking for the growing that can come from anything that happens in this world."

One aspect of learning and growing that is important in owning your power is moving from being the victim to taking responsibility for the choices you make. Unfortunately, we've been conditioned to associate responsibility with fault or blame. But owning your choices is very different from trying to avoid blame. It's a position of power. It's "response-ability," the ability to respond to whatever occurs in your life. If you have responsibility for your choices, you also have the power to change them. If you give away your power by blaming someone else or the circumstances, you're back in the victim role.

Jeffers had an awakening that led her from being the victim to taking responsibility for her life. "I looked into the mirror one day with my red eyes, and I said, 'Enough! There has to be a better way than this!' And that's when I started my own spiritual path." But that was only the beginning. Once she made that choice, there was still the journey of learning how to do it.

She became a "workshop addict" for many years, gathering and developing the material and tools to empower herself and later to teach to others. In her own workshops and books, Jeffers stresses the importance of having a set of tools you can call upon and the necessity of constant repetition in forming the new habits and thought patterns that will empower you.

"Because talk about having a bad habit," Jeffers adds. "I mean, negative thinking is a really bad habit, a habit that you've probably had from the minute you were born. And it's instilled in us by everything around us." The good news is, habits can be changed, using the tools and techniques that Jeffers and many others teach us.

To shift from negative to positive thinking also takes courage. We're taught to look for our faults and criticize ourselves constantly. Our society cheers the underdogs, but tries to knock them down a peg when they become successful. In order to bring our gifts to a world that very much needs them, we need to own our power and value ourselves enough to stand up to the criticism that comes our way. And we need to not take it all so seriously.

"I think once again, it's a matter of training and habit," Jeffers comments.

"We are so self-critical. I could do that myself very easily. I could have gone an entire day helping people, giving to them, and I might have said one thing that I would have said differently. And I could punish myself for that, instead of saying, 'Wow, 99.99% was really okay, and I'm sure it helped people.' Instead, let's focus on that one little thing. Then, I start laughing at myself."

While most of us claim fear of failure, it is actually more frightening to face the extent of our power, talents and abilities – what many spiritual teachers call our magnificence. This is the touch of greatness that is in each one of us. We tend to play down our strengths and deny or concur shyly when someone compliments us. Perhaps we fear being rejected if our friends perceive us as being arrogant and conceited. Perhaps we feel inadequate to live up to the label.

But, Jeffers says, "Owning your magnificence is so, so important. And we get that from acting magnificently." This does not mean playing the star or pushing yourself on people. True magnificence goes hand in hand with humility. Think of someone who's a good magnificence model for you. For me, it's someone like Nelson Mandela or the Dalai Lama. These are people who own their power and magnificence, who act magnificently, and yet

they're the most humble people you'll ever meet. Knowing your magnificence is knowing that everyone else – and I mean everyone – is also magnificent. It's not about being better than other people, but about seeing the greatness in everyone, including yourself.

Finding our way there doesn't happen overnight. It's trial and error, and we may not always do it elegantly. "Sometimes, as we're gaining our power," Jeffers explains, "we really become obnoxious. Sometimes, we see that so clearly in teenagers. In their attempt to separate from parents and to become adults, they become truly obnoxious. And hopefully, as life goes on, you learn that you really are powerful, that you have so much to give. And then, you come into the area of appropriate, which is to be loving and powerful. (By the way, I don't think that true power exists without love. If you see power without love, it's not power at all.)"

It's important to be aware that once you come into that area of appropriate, you will not stay there 100% of the time. There are times when you will slip. Even accomplished teachers like Jeffers have their days: "Nobody has it forever. I pointed that out with the line (in *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*): 'Even the Buddhas have their days.' And I'm not a Buddha.

"We are working on a pathway toward a sense of power and love, and sometimes we go off the path. And then we say, 'Whoops, off path. Let's go back again to the path of power and love.' And that's what life is about. It's teaching us lessons. Even those who are very, very evolved and very conscious – still, they get stuck."

As an example, Jeffers told me of one of her heroes, the spiritual teacher, Ram Dass, a vigorous, active man who suffered a stroke at the age of 65. As a result, this helper became dependent on the help of others. At first, he became fearful, but eventually found his way back to his yoga and meditation practices and began to take an active part in his own healing. He survived his worst fears about getting old and continued to do his work. Despite severely impaired speech, he began teaching again and being with his students in a different way. A friend told him that the stroke has made him more human.

Jeffers continues, "So, I think even those who make their life one of increasing spirituality, something new hits, something out of the blue, and bang, the Lower Self comes in. But that's okay! As long as we understand the tools that can pull us out of that Lower Self into the best of who we are, then we are okay. It's when we don't have these tools that we become, in our own minds, the victim."

Jeffers and I heartily agree that the bottom line is to see life as a journey and an adventure. "And, by the way," she adds, "it's a wonderful journey. I've had

a wonderful time along the way... We can't take it all so seriously. I think this is really, really key. We have to laugh at ourselves, laugh at our predicament. Ram Dass, even with his stroke, he's laughing about it all."

In going through the process of owning and managing our power, we can support each other in remembering to use our tools to stay focused on the positive. We don't have to have all the answers; we can learn together. Jeffers concludes: "We don't know what's right. We don't know what is wrong. We don't know how the outcome will be. And there's the adventure again. Let's wonder, let's watch it all unfold. If we have friends to do this with, it's very, very powerful... It's spectacular, because you have a great time along the way."

My heartfelt appreciation to Susan Jeffers for an enjoyable and empowering conversation. Please visit her website at www.susanjeffers.com to learn more about her work.

Creative Tip

Owning your power means acknowledging your strengths and talents. List at least 10 strengths and talents that you possess. If this is uncomfortable for you, stay with the feeling and do it anyway. Review the list periodically to become more and more comfortable with it. Add to the list as you own and discover more strengths and talents.

Wise Words

"The difference between the way we operate in this world when we know we count and when we don't know we count is staggering." ~ Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*

"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." ~ Audre Lorde

"When you become detached mentally from yourself and concentrate on helping other people with their difficulties, you will be able to cope with your own more effectively. Somehow, the act of self-giving is a personal power-releasing factor." ~ Norman Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking Every Day*

"If we just worry about the big picture, we are powerless. So my secret is to start right away doing whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning, and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon... That is the secret. Start right now." ~ Sister Chan Khong

"There are a whole lot of women out here who are not aspiring to be humble." ~ Kamala Harris

Bookshelf



Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway ... Susan Jeffers, PhD



Embracing Uncertainty: Achieving peace of mind as we face the unknown ... Susan Jeffers, PhD



Ram Dass: Fierce Grace ... A Film by Mickey Lemle (DVD)



Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying ... Ram Dass



Earning Your Own Respect: A Handbook of Personal Responsibility ... Thom Rutledge



Unlimited Power: The New Science of Personal Achievement ... Tony Robbins



Success and the Self-Image: Inspiring Greatness in Yourself & Others ... Zig Ziglar (audiobook)



Personal Power Through Awareness: A Guidebook for Sensitive People ... Sanaya Roman



The Confidence Connection ... Sharon Good

Issue 58

Going the Extra Mile

No matter how much we love our lives, there are parts that we wish we could do away with. It may be washing the dishes, doing the bookkeeping for a business you otherwise enjoy or even doing the work that pays the bills so you can do what you're passionate about – what we used to call “survival jobs” when I was in the theatre. Often, these tasks feel like a drain on your energy.

When we don't enjoy something or feel stuck with it, we tend to plod through it, giving it as little attention as possible. It leaves us feeling lethargic and uninspired. What if, instead, we invested energy in making these tasks more palatable, or even pleasurable?

There's a scientific principle called “entropy.” What this means is, when you don't fuel something, whether it be a wood stove or an idea, it diminishes. Think of pushing a child on a swing. If you don't keep pushing, eventually, the swing will come to a standstill. In the same way, when we don't fuel the activities in our life, they become like dead weight and drag us down.

In *Scientific Creationism*, scientist Henry M. Morris states that “every system left to its own devices always tends to move from order to disorder, its energy tending to be transformed into lower levels of availability, finally reaching the state of complete randomness and unavailability for further work.”

I find the last phrase – “unavailability for further work” – particularly intriguing. If we're doing a survival job, it's with the intention of coming home and doing what we love. But often, we feel so depleted, we just want to drop in front of the TV or surf the Net and eat a pint of ice cream. Getting involved in our creative work after plodding through the day is like trying to accelerate from 0 to 60 mph dragging a loaded trailer behind us.

The philosopher Nietzsche formulated a concept called “amor fati,” or love of fate. This means loving your situation, whatever it is, rather than merely enduring it. The psychologist Carl Rogers spoke of the “fully functioning person” as one who “not only experiences, but utilizes, the most absolute freedom when he spontaneously, freely, and voluntarily chooses and wills that which is absolutely determined.”

In other words, by actively choosing the situations that seem thrust upon you, you create freedom for yourself. In *Finding Flow*, psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihaly summarizes, saying simply, “The quality of life is

much improved if we learn to love what we have to do." This makes so much more sense than expending precious energy fighting what we can't change.

Doing what you do consciously and attentively shifts your relationship with it. In a 1998 interview for the New York Philharmonic, Dr. Ellen Langer, author of *The Power of Mindful Learning* and a psychology professor at Harvard, warned against practicing to the point where you no longer have to think about what you're doing. "First of all," she states, "you're not going to enjoy it if you're not there. And if you're there, you can take advantage of all sorts of opportunities that wouldn't occur to you if you are practicing to 'perfection.'" When you learn or work mindfully, actively engaged in what you're doing, you enjoy what you're doing and feel energized by it. You lift it to a new level of serendipitous creativity.

Csikszentmihalyi says that the way to reverse the entropy of a lackluster job is to think and care beyond what the job description calls for. We do this by paying attention. By expending additional "psychic energy," we can turn a job that lacks challenge and variety into one that satisfies our need for novelty and achievement. By matching an optimal level of skill and challenge, we achieve the state that Csikszentmihalyi calls "flow."

You may argue that you want to conserve this energy for your creative work. But by bringing your attention and creativity to everything you do, rather than hoarding it and using it selectively, you bring a more lively level of energy to your entire life. It's like making a good investment that reaps dividends. You leave the job in an energized state, or at least a "good" tired, and come home ready and eager to write or paint or play with the kids.

To bring more energy to everything you do, ask yourself these questions:

- ~ How can I bring greater challenge and interest to what I'm doing?
- ~ What can I learn?
- ~ How can I pay more attention? What are the small details of my everyday tasks that I don't even notice anymore? Is there something I can do better or differently that would enhance this task in some way? Come up with 3 new approaches.
- ~ What skills can I improve? Even if your skills are adequate for your job, create a fun, challenging project for yourself that will allow you to use your skills in a new way. Who knows, your improved skills might lead to a more interesting job or assignment!
- ~ Some jobs inherently include "down time," which is often squandered surfing the Net or making small talk with coworkers. How can I use that down time in a more creative, expansive way?

- ~ How can I improve job performance for myself and my coworkers? Can I invent new techniques or systems that would help us be more effective or efficient? Do I have ideas for new or improved products or services?
- ~ How can I make this more fun?
- ~ How can I bring more meaning to what I'm doing? How is it helping me grow and develop as a person? How am I being of service? Can I see its value as a means to a greater end, such as supporting the creative work I'm passionate about or the family I love?
- ~ How can I bring more enthusiasm to what I'm doing? How can I get others more excited about it?

As creative people, we can use our creativity to breathe new life into the stale, necessary tasks that used to drag us down. We can approach them in new and enlivening ways. By going the extra mile, we can elevate the quality of our lives, uplifting ourselves physically and emotionally. It can put us into an upward spiral, creating a reverse entropy that effortlessly brings energy and enthusiasm to everything we do.

Creative Tip

Try this classic mindfulness exercise: to eat 3 raisins mindfully. Go to a quiet place and eliminate any distractions. Now, slowly and deliberately eat each raisin, paying attention to sensory details. Look at it; notice the way it feels in your hand – the color, the texture, the smell, the way the light falls on it. Put it in your mouth. (You might want to close your eyes at this point.) What does it feel like on your tongue? On the roof of your mouth? What happens when you bite into it? When you chew and swallow it? How does it make you feel? Eat the second and third raisins, treating each as a new experience. See what new details you can discover each time.

Wise Words

"Even the most routine job can benefit from the kind of transforming energy that creative individuals bring to what they do." ~ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Finding Flow*

"Life engenders life. Energy creates energy. It is by spending oneself that one becomes rich." ~ Sarah Bernhardt

"Voltaire once described a man as being like a warming oven, always heating but never cooking anything. Commenting on this viewpoint, Harold Blake Walker points out that many people live without zest, dragging themselves through their jobs without vitality; in a word, heating just enough to get by

but never really cooking. But amazing things do happen ... when a person really catches fire and starts the cooking process." ~ Norman Vincent Peale, *Enthusiasm Makes the Difference*

"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live." ~ George Bernard Shaw, *Man and Superman*

Bookshelf



The Power of Mindful Learning ... Ellen J. Langer



Discipline: Training the Mind to Manage Your Life ... Harris Kern and Karen Willi



Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life ... Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi



Enthusiasm Makes the Difference ... Norman Vincent Peale



Overcoming Job Burnout: How to Renew Enthusiasm for Work ... Dr. Beverly Potter



Love Your Job: The New Rules for Career Happiness ... Kerry Hannon



Scientific Creationism ... Henry M. Morris



The Power of Full Engagement: Managing Energy, Not Time, is the Key to High Performance and Personal Renewal ... Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz



The Magic of Thinking Big ... David Schwartz

Issue 59

Handling Fear

You've come up with a new project or life path. You're psyched. You dream about what it's going to be like when it happens. You talk about it with your friends. It looks great. Life looks great.

Then you have to actually do something about it. And reality comes crashing in.

Whenever we do something new in life, we enter unknown territory. All our life experience may not tell us exactly how this situation needs to be handled. The strategies we used in the past may no longer work for us, for one reason or another. We're pioneers on the path of discovery of our own lives, and one of our companions is fear.

Fear is a natural response to real and imagined danger. It's an important survival mechanism. The problem comes when we allow our imagination to run away with us, showing us all the disastrous things that could happen if we follow this path, and we give our power away to the fear.

Our impulse is to avoid fear or make it go away, but the only way to do that (if it's possible at all) is to also give up your dreams and live a safe, bland life. The only way through fear is to go through it. Thinking it through helps, but eventually, you need to take action and confront it head on. Otherwise, you may find yourself living in a fantasy world filled with great triumphs, while your real life is tedious and devoid of any excitement.

While you'll never eliminate fear entirely, you can develop strategies and tools for dealing with it, so it doesn't stop you from pursuing your goals and dreams.

- ~ First, congratulate yourself for having the courage to try something new. Doing something you've never done before is challenging and scary, but if you kept doing the same things over and over, you'd be bored and frustrated. Facing the new and unknown is a life-affirming choice.
- ~ Get more information. A lot of fear comes from speculating on things we know very little about. We base our decisions on limited information or hearsay and fill in the gaps with usually negative imaginings. Instead, get the facts. Find out what's really so; don't make it up from what you've heard or imagined. Then, you can plan your actions based on real information, which will allay some of your fear.
- ~ As you're planning your next steps, think ahead. Think of it as a chess game, where you anticipate the probable consequences of your next move several steps forward. By doing that, you can anticipate problems

and prepare for them, perhaps even choosing a different plan of action that avoids those problems altogether.

- ~ If you can't avoid problems completely, have backup plans. If you have some idea of what you'll do should a certain obstacle occur, you can face your new challenge more confidently.
- ~ Define the fear. Often, fear is nebulous, and we feel engulfed by it. We fear the fear itself, afraid to look at what it is. Instead, grit your teeth and figure out what exactly you're afraid of. Then, do a reality check. Is it likely that it will actually happen? Very often, our fears are irrational and, when we expose them to the light of day, we realize that the possibility of their really manifesting is minute. If your fear is a real possibility, how can you prepare for it? Or how can you rework your plan to avoid the problem or danger altogether?
- ~ Sometimes, fear grips us because we try to avoid feeling it by pushing it down or away. You've probably heard the expression, "What you resist persists." The more you try to suppress or numb your fear, the stronger its hold on you. Even if you're not consciously feeling it, you may find yourself rationalizing that your dream isn't worth the effort or isn't what you really want anymore anyway.

Instead, take some time to feel the fear with intensity. Put aside half an hour, perhaps with a buddy to support you, and let yourself feel the fear fully. Cry, scream, carry on, whatever you need to do. Use your creative outlets – writing, creating art or music, performing – to express and release the fear. Chances are, once you do that, the intensity of the fear will diminish significantly and you'll be able to start taking action.

- ~ Challenge yourself to face the fear. Facing fears is one of the ways we develop our strength and character. Every time you give in to a fear, fear gets stronger. Every time you face a fear, *you* get stronger. You build your courage and your coping mechanisms, and the next time you face another fear, you have greater resources that you can count on. You know that you've faced fear before and triumphed, and you know you can do it again.
- ~ Take small steps toward what you're afraid of; you don't have to do it all at once. Each of us has a different level of risk tolerance. You need to honor that and, at the same time, push yourself slowly out of your comfort zone. Each step you take will prepare you for the next.
- ~ Monitor your self-talk. Are you focusing on all the reasons you're going to fail or on how you can succeed? Speak to yourself as you would a child you were encouraging to do something new. Even if you don't

believe it at first, keep going. As you start to experience small successes, you'll begin to believe you can do it.

- ~ Use your imagination in a positive way. When we're afraid, we use our imaginations negatively, to frighten ourselves by imagining how everything can go wrong. Use your imagination to envision a positive outcome, as well as thinking through the steps that will get you there. Visualization is a very powerful tool that can ease your path and help you avoid the pitfalls.
- ~ Act "as if" you weren't afraid. Do the thing you're afraid to do. The cosmic joke is, everyone else "out there" is doing exactly that! We've all learned to hide our fear and act as if we have everything under control, but I guarantee you, many of the people who seem most self-assured are just as scared as you are. They've just learned that they are stronger than their fear.
- ~ Give yourself permission to be less than perfect. Several years ago, when I went to Italy, I learned a few phrases of Italian and decided that I would attempt to use them even if I felt foolish. I took the chance, and it was so gratifying to be able to communicate with people, who were kind and even helped me learn some new words.
- ~ Keep in mind that fear and excitement have a similar "vibration." What you're calling fear may very well be excitement about your new opportunity! It may be a combination of fear and excitement. Take a moment to tune into your feelings and see what it really is.

Finally, know that you're not alone. Everyone is afraid of something. Find others who are on a similar path. Help and support each other through your fear, and celebrate your successes along the way. As you face your fears, you'll build your courage, as well as your self-esteem. Each time you overcome a fear, you'll feel better about yourself and have greater faith in your ability to cope and triumph.

Don't wait for the fear to go away and lose precious opportunities. Instead, face and move through the fear, using your tools and strategies, and climb the ladder toward greater successes and fulfillment one step at a time.

Creative Tip

Think of someone you admire, who you see as powerful and courageous. When you feel frightened, think, How would that person handle this? Then, do that.

Wise Words

"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." ~ Audre Lorde

"Imaginary obstacles are insurmountable. Real ones aren't. But you can't tell the difference when you have no real information. Fear can create even more imaginary obstacles than ignorance can. That's why the smallest step away from speculation and into reality can be an amazing relief." ~ Barbara Sher, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*

"You may feel like dwelling on your limits or your fears. Don't do it... A perfect prescription for a squandered, unfulfilled life is to accommodate self-defeating feelings while undercutting your finest, most productive ones." ~ Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*

"Do the thing you fear, and the death of fear is certain." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf



Feel the Fear ... and Beyond: Mastering the Techniques for Doing It Anyway ... Susan Jeffers



From Panic to Power: Proven Techniques to Calm Your Anxieties, Conquer Your Fears, and Put You in Control of Your Life ... Lucinda Bassett



The Monster in the Cave: How to Face Your Fear and Anxiety and Live Your Life ... David Mellinger, MSW and Steven Jay Lynn, PhD



Play to Win!: Choosing Growth over Fear in Work and Life ... Larry Wilson and Hersch Wilson



Beyond Fear: A Toltec Guide to Freedom and Joy: The Teachings of Don Miguel Ruiz



The Culture of Fear: Why Americans Are Afraid of the Wrong Things ... Barry Glassner

Issue 60

Having a Life of More: An Interview with Judith Wright

Do you ever feel you expect too much of life? That, in fact, you're being greedy even thinking of asking for more than you have? Often, we're taught to lower our expectations so we won't be disappointed. It's a way that we protect ourselves from pain, but it also shields us from the exciting things in life. We feel safer, but miss the adventures that life could offer us.



In her powerful new book, *There Must Be More Than This: Finding More Life, Love, and Meaning by Overcoming Your Soft Addictions*, teacher, speaker and author Judith Wright says that rather than asking for too much, most of us ask for too little. "Too many people just don't want enough. They settle, talk themselves out of it, like they're greedy or vain or selfish."

Wright advocates that instead, we aspire to a life of More – one that includes those things you long for and often deny yourself. Wrights claims, "We all have these. I call them 'spiritual hungers' or 'deeper hungers' – to create, to express, to love and be loved, to be known, to matter, to make a difference, to belong."

While these are the things that make our lives delicious, these callings may demand a lot of us. They may open up possibilities that are tantalizing, but frightening. They may require that we leave behind our current social group. They will often take us away from the comfortable and familiar. So, rather than respond to our passions and hungers, we turn away from them. But the longer we deny our heart's longing, the more painful it becomes. We then use what Wright calls "soft addictions" to numb the pain.

Soft addictions include things like surfing the Internet, reading magazines, checking e-mail, shopping, exercising, hanging out, sleeping, overworking, complaining, buying designer clothes and numerous others. These may not be problems when done with purpose and in moderation. They become addictions when we do them mindlessly and overindulgently to avoid the pain of not satisfying our deeper hungers.

Why, you might ask, would someone avoid pursuing their passions and instead indulge in mindless pursuits? Wright pointed out that opening to your creativity makes you vulnerable.

"With the creative process, you're always going into the unknown. To create means to make something that hasn't been done before. That's vulnerable. It's not tried and true. It takes a lot of courage to keep doing something that

hasn't been done before, a thought that hasn't developed before or an artistic impression."

When you're open and creative, intense feelings can come up. Very few of us were taught how to deal with that. "We don't have good models," Wright explains. "We haven't been that well trained with it. We have mistaken beliefs that our feelings are wrong somehow or they make us weak. We don't recognize or admit them, and then we're threatened by them. So, we either avoid situations that bring them up, or we numb it with our soft addictions."

When we dream of More and it feels so beyond our grasp, it's easy to lose hope and settle for what we think we can have. Wright understands this firsthand. "It hurts. I know for myself, I was really hungry for More, but I was kind of hopeless about getting it in my life. The way I dealt with it was to do a lot of achieving, in my career and school and things like that. I was using a lot of soft addictions to try to numb or distract myself from trying to touch that place that had given up."

Soft addictions ease that pain, but they also keep us locked in habitual routines, preventing us from seeing possibility beyond them. Wright illustrated how that happens: "The positive intention behind our soft addictions is to make ourselves comfortable, but it's not the highest calling for us. We think if we can keep things the same, then we'll be safe, then we'll feel okay."

"Soft addictions are tried and true. You know when you watch a television program, it's pretty predictable. You know what you're going to feel like when you eat a candy bar. You know the buzz you're going to get from overshoppping. You don't know how you're going to feel when you start working on a creative project. And that's what causes the trouble. It makes us live kind of stagnantly and keeps us from taking the risks we need to grow."

One way we perpetuate our soft addictions is by using what Wright calls "stinking thinking," the use of justification, denial, defensiveness, postponing, lying, minimizing the problem and many other strategies to defend our soft addictions. Wright spoke of one example: "I work with some people that compare themselves to others. These people have immense potential; there's so much more they could be doing. So, it's actually not relevant to compare themselves to somebody who's not even playing the same game as they are. You're trying to soothe yourself with that comparison, but it doesn't honor who you really are and what's possible."

What makes this more poignant is that while our soft addictions may seem harmless, they have a price. Wright points out that "the failure to realize and develop our gifts is perhaps the greatest cost of our soft addictions. They

really rob you. They take a lot of time. The average American, for example, spends about 4 hours a day watching television. So, by the time you're 50, you've spent 7 years watching TV. A lot of creativity could happen in that 7 years. You're spending your time, energy and money in going *away* from life."

So, how do we deal with our soft addictions? Is it the same as dealing with "hard" addictions? Wright clarifies: "So many people look at the process, and the minute I label it 'soft addictions,' they think, I have to go cold turkey or I have to give up something. And I figure, we're already feeling deprived, that's why we're going to these soft addictions. So, yeah, sometimes we need to curb or subtract things to make a little bit more room in our lives.

"But what I think is even more important is to recognize how much self-care is really important for us and how to add more nourishment to our lives. That's what really fosters the creative process. Sometimes, you set up this thing like, 'Well, I don't deserve to take care of myself, because I haven't written yet today, I haven't done what I was supposed to do.' It's an awful process that way.

"What I found in my own creative process is that the more I tended to myself and set up a beautiful surrounding to write, with music, flowers on my desk, lighting a candle, saying a prayer before I write, taking a little tea break, the easier my writing. Or I go to a certain hotel and sit in the lobby – it's really beautiful, with fountains and flowers and things. I sit and work with a cup of tea, and hours can pass without distraction, and that's really nourishing."

Wright concurred that it's not about being a suffering artist; it's about making the process more enjoyable. "It's tough enough to face your fears, it's tough enough to face a blank page or a blank canvas. Why shouldn't we make that as easy for ourselves as possible?"

To help us manage our soft addictions and stinking thinking, Wright emphasizes the importance of developing a set of tools and techniques. Here are a few to start you off:

- ~ Instead of beating yourself up or going into denial, use your soft addictions and stinking thinking as clues that you're not feeling secure, that you're avoiding your highest potential. Once you face this truth, you can use other tools to work with it.
- ~ Develop skills to deal with stinking thinking. Begin by monitoring your self-talk and the way you explain yourself to others. Look for the justifications and rationalizations, and question them. Uncover the soft

addictions they're keeping in place, and then hold yourself accountable for that behavior and begin to make better choices.

- ~ Start to eliminate or reduce your soft addictions. Be realistic. Don't expect yourself to quit all your addictions at once. Consider each addiction. Look at whether you're doing it with a clear purpose and whether you're spending an excessive amount of time on it. Use the techniques in Wright's book to start letting go of soft addictions that are eating up your time and energy.
- ~ Replace your soft addictions with more positive habits. Remember that your soft addictions are giving you comfort. Find that comfort in more nourishing ways, like starting on that creative project that's been on the back burner for years.
- ~ Be prepared for feelings that may come up when you take the soft addictions away. Soft addictions keep a lid on your feelings, and when you take away the addictions, the feelings will surface. In creativity as well as in life, we need our feelings, both the pleasant and the not-so-pleasant ones. Learning to manage them is an important skill you can develop.
- ~ When you're facing the blank screen or canvas, use your creativity to handle the anxiety or fear that arises. Wright shared how she does that: "If I'm facing a blank computer and I just don't have a clue how to get across, that's when I want to go to my soft addictions. What I've found is, I can actually just speak my anxiety, either to a friend or my husband, or I'll just type it right into the document: 'Oh, boy, I'm afraid I don't have anything to say right now. I'm so anxious. I just feel so stupid.' I express, and all of a sudden, I'll have more clarity. Or you can draw it, you can type it, you can write it, you can sing it, but to express it is really important."
- ~ Have a vision that will keep you focused and committed. Wright calls this the "One Decision." It's like your personal mission statement, the beacon that guides you when you're going off track or losing focus. "It's important to have a vision," Wright stresses, "to be able to picture what your life will be like when your life is nourished and not full of soft addictions. What would I feel like? What would I do? How would I fill my evenings? Start to picture yourself taking really good, wonderful nourishing care of yourself."

The One Decision takes what might be random acts and gives them direction and consistency. And, Wright adds, "You can use that to guide your smaller decisions. With my One Decision, if I've got a choice between what to do or to eat or to think or to feel, I can think, 'Which of

these things is in alignment with my One Decision?’ And it’s pretty easy to sort that out. That One Decision makes a great difference, a kind of a contextual decision to guide the rest of your life.”

- ~ Finally, reinforce your new choices. Put Post-its on your bathroom mirror. Have people remind you. Send yourself e-mails. Use your to-do list. Wright herself uses such reminders, “and I freshen it every once in awhile, or I might do it another way. I have it in my wallet, I have it on my computer screen, or I ask someone to send it to me periodically as a reminder.”

Living a life of More is a choice, choosing where to spend your time and energy, as well as your money. If your creative hungers are not being fulfilled and you’re confronted by fears and doubts, you’ll probably turn to soft addictions to numb out. Choose instead to face the fears and doubts and do it anyway. Eliminate or reduce soft addictions to make time for what’s really important. Once you’re doing that, your deeper hungers will be fulfilled, and the soft addictions will lose their attraction.

Wright concludes: “And you will still do the soft addictions, but with the One Decision, you can say, ‘Wait, why did I go and eat all that right then?’ Or, ‘Why did I say that nasty thing?’ Or, ‘Why am I on eBay right now when I should be writing?’ If you look at it, your One Decision can actually help you learn from the soft addiction. ‘Oh, boy, I was sad, I was scared, I was nervous, I was angry.’ You can use it to find out things. Otherwise, you’re just indulging yourself without learning anything from it.”

A life of More is yours for the asking. Open yourself to the possibility, monitor your soft addictions and stinking thinking and give yourself the gift of expressing your creativity. The false satisfaction you get from your soft addictions will soon be overshadowed by the true gratification of fulfilling your deeper hungers and living a life of More.

My sincere thanks to Judith Wright for this interview. Please visit her website at www.livewright.com to learn more about her work and access lots of great tools and resources.

Creative Tip

Learn to identify, understand and find positive alternatives to your soft addictions using the Soft Addictions Template in Judith Wright’s book, *The Soft Addictions Solution*.

Wise Words

“‘Now’ is the operative word. Everything you put in your way is just a method of putting off the hour when you could actually be doing your

dream. You don't need endless time and perfect conditions. Do it now. Do it today. Do it for twenty minutes and watch your heart start beating." ~ Barbara Sher, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*

"When we are motivated by goals that have deep meaning, by dreams that need completion, by pure love that needs expressing, then we truly live life." ~ Greg Anderson, *The 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness*

"Convincing ourselves that we lack any real gifts or have nothing to contribute leaves us with an aching void that we often fill with soft addictions. Our fear of failure and our perfectionist approaches bar us from fully engaging in life. We are willing to just get by in order to distract ourselves from our fear. If we believe we have nothing to contribute, we don't fully engage in life and we seek solace in soft addictions. Since we only discover our gifts by engaging in life, we may miss finding the gifts we surely possess." ~ Judith Wright, *There Must Be More Than This*

Bookshelf



There Must Be More Than This: Finding More Life, Love and Meaning by overcoming your Soft Addictions ... Judith Wright



The Soft Addiction Solution: Break Free of the Seemingly Harmless Habits That Keep You From the Life You Want ... Judith Wright



The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life ... Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander



The Right Questions: Ten Essential Questions to Guide You to an Extraordinary Life ... Debbie Ford



What Are You Hungry For?: Women, Food, and Spirituality ... Lynn Ginsburg and Mary Taylor



The Power of Positive Habits ... Dan Robey

Issue 61

Gauging Your Progress

It feels good to know you're making progress in whatever you're doing. It's a great motivator to keep you going. The catch is that progress is a subjective thing. It depends not on any objective measurement, but on how you perceive it. I can't tell you how many times I've had a client show up for a coaching session and blurt out, "I did nothing this week," only to rattle off a list of accomplishments.

There are a number of reasons for this gap in perception. Many of us have to-do lists that would cower a superhero. We overestimate how much we can do and underestimate how much time we'll need, and then beat ourselves up when we don't complete our list in the allotted time. If we accomplish less than we set out to do, we don't feel we're moving forward.

We also have a preconceived idea of what progress should look like. Very often that means that we accomplish our goals easily and efficiently, with no glitches or unexpected interruptions. How often does that happen?! More often, life is what empowerment teacher Gail Straub calls a "beautiful mess." We get where we're going, but feel a little worse for wear when we arrive, so it doesn't feel like progress to us.

Similarly, we may have a certain expectation of what constitutes a result. When I was a desktop publisher, at the end of the day, I would have a stack of paper to hand someone, demonstrating my progress. As a coach, my progress, and that of my clients, is often intangible and unmeasurable, so I've had to learn to measure progress in a different way.

We may have unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We may be trying to keep up with a sibling's success or a parent's expectation or the guy in the next cubicle, rather than focusing on our own talents and achievements. We push ourselves to improve our weak areas, so we can be the perfect employee. Or, like so many of us, you may carry the old belief that nothing you do is good enough, so no matter what you accomplish, you keep raising the bar for what you expect from yourself so that it's always just beyond your reach.

Many of us judge our progress by our feelings. If we feel good, we've progressed; if we feel bad, we haven't. But feelings are not always a good measure of progress. For example, you may have a fight with someone you care about that ends on a sour note because you spoke up for yourself. Having the confrontation and its painful result may feel bad, but speaking up may mark progress in your personal growth. In another instance, you may push through your fear to do something that's a stretch for you. Because

you didn't do it with the finesse you hoped for, you don't see it as an accomplishment.

Similarly, many of us buy into the "no pain, no gain" philosophy. We may have a work ethic that says that if something is fun and easy, it's not an accomplishment. But there's a difference between "struggle" and "hard work." If you love what you're doing, you may be working very hard, but it won't be painful. Conversely, you may be making great strides, getting accolades and promotions, in a career you hate. Is your progress in continuing the climb or in listening to the inner voice that's telling you to get the hell out of there?

Another pitfall is judging progress on the short-term, without looking at the bigger picture. Progress is rarely a straight upward line, and when we focus too closely on the details, life becomes a roller coaster ride, up one day and down the next. Or we focus on how far we have yet to go and forget how far we've come. We only see a piece of the view, rather than looking at the greater arc of progress over time.

By reframing our view of progress, we can take encouragement from the day-to-day successes that lead us to the longer-term ones. Here are some ways to do that:

- ~ Make your expectations realistic. What can you *really* accomplish in a given amount of time? Leave extra time for unexpected detours.
- ~ Rework the gauges by which you measure success. Set standards that are authentic for you now, rather than adopting someone else's measure for success or comparing yourself with others or what you did in the past.
- ~ Develop your own vision, and hold it out there as a beacon to guide you. Periodically review it, so that it continues to be big enough to excite and motivate you, but not so big it feels unattainable.
- ~ If you're pursuing a long-term project, break it down into steps or milestones, and use those to gauge your progress. Having small successes along the way will encourage and motivate you to go the distance.
- ~ Look at the big picture. Like following the stock market, if you watch the daily ups and downs, you can make yourself crazed and fearful. Instead, measure the arc of your progress over time. Look at how far you've come, how far you need to go and whether the speed of progress is to your liking. By keeping your eye on the big picture as well as the details, you can evaluate whether your long-term goals are still serving you and make adjustments as needed.

- ~ Be aware that progress is not a straight run. Like a sailing technique called tacking, you may zigzag to the left and right, never actually headed straight toward your goal. By keeping your eye on your desired outcome and making constant course corrections, you eventually get there.
- ~ Focus on your strengths rather than your weaknesses. The concept of being “well-rounded” is a fallacy in a way. Those who are truly successful are those who focus on and develop their greatest strengths. You’ll enjoy yourself more and make greater strides naturally.
- ~ Take time on a regular basis, perhaps weekly or monthly (annually at the most), to document your accomplishments and progress on your big goals. Keep a success journal, and periodically share successes with those who support you. (Keeping track of accomplishments can also be a great tool when you’re pitching for a raise or promotion at work.)
- ~ Find some way to quantify your progress. For example, one of my clients decided she wanted to write an 80,000-word novel. Each day she wrote, she did a word count and figured out the percentage of her goal she had reached. Seeing the number consistently growing encouraged and motivated her to complete the first draft.
- ~ When you have accomplished something, take the time to acknowledge and celebrate it. In our “you’re only as good as your next success” world, it’s easy to slide over our successes and look to the next hurdle. Acknowledge yourself (and anyone else involved), and feel appreciation and gratitude for where it’s taken you, how you’ve learned and grown and the enjoyment you’ve had in doing it.
- ~ If you don’t feel like you’re making progress, ask yourself these questions:
 - ~ What results am I expecting or hoping for?
 - ~ What actions am I taking?
 - ~ What results am I getting?
 - ~ Are my expectations realistic?
 - ~ Am I giving it enough time?
- ~ Dream big, and ground it in reality. It’s about balance. You want dreams that excite and motivate you, but you don’t want them to be just pipe dreams or fantasies. Dream, and then figure out how to make it happen in the world, perhaps with some adjustment.
- ~ As you work on your personal development, you may find that you’ve grown by leaps and bounds in your inner work, but your outer life looks

exactly the same. Don't fret. It often takes longer for external change to catch up. As you continue doing your inner work and taking the appropriate actions, you'll begin seeing a difference in your life. Remember, too, that as we change, we tend to assimilate the change and forget where we were even 6 months ago and the growth that has occurred.

- ~ Let it be easy. As you craft your life to be what you want it to be, aligned with your passions and values, your accomplishments will be fun and easy. That's still progress.

Progress is in the eye of the beholder. Set challenging, but realistic goals, and be kind and encouraging to yourself as you pursue them. Find positive ways to motivate yourself. Acknowledge the small successes, and before you know it, you will have progressed more than you had imagined you would.

Creative Tip

In your day planner, keep a record of your accomplishments each day or each week. When you're feeling discouraged, go back and review your accomplishments to reinforce your sense of progress.

Wise Words

"Every day you may make progress. Every step may be fruitful. Yet there will stretch out before you an ever-lengthening, ever-ascending, ever-improving path. You know you will never get to the end of the journey. But this, so far from discouraging, only adds to the joy and glory of the climb." ~ Sir Winston Churchill

"To make progress in any difficult situation, you have to start with what's right about it and build on that." ~ Norman Vincent Peale

"Never discourage anyone ... who continually makes progress, no matter how slow." ~ Plato

Bookshelf



The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse ... Gregg Easterbrook



Now, Discover Your Strengths ... from Gallup with Don Clifton



Empowerment: The Art of Creating Your Life as You Want It ... David Gershon and Gail Straub



Optimal Thinking: How to Be Your Best Self ... Rosalene Glickman, PhD



Goals: How to Get Everything You Want – Faster Than You Ever Thought Possible ... Brian Tracy



Discipline: Training the Mind to Manage Your Life ... Harris Kern and Karen Willi



Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done ... Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan



Soar With Your Strengths ... Donald O. Clifton and Paula Nelson

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Issue 62

Things Just Work Out

Toward the beginning of the film, *Shakespeare in Love*, we see Philip Henslowe, producer of the Rose Theatre, being dragged away for money he owes a creditor, Hugh Fennyman. When Henslowe explains that theatre is a business replete with disasters, Fennyman, understandably, wants to know where his money will come from. "What do we do?" he demands. "Nothing," Henslowe replies. "Strangely enough, it all turns out well." "How?" Fennyman asks. Henslowe responds, "I don't know. It's a mystery."

Nowadays, we're led to believe that if we don't plan our week, our year, our life, for that matter, it's all going to fall apart and we'll be destitute. I'm all for a bit of planning and saving for the future, but the truth is, there's no way that we can predict what's going to happen. Even if we take all the precautions in the world and plan in detail, we can't guarantee that everything will work out the way we expect. "The best laid plans of mice and men" often go awry.

We have an illusion (or perhaps a delusion) that we're in control of our lives. Sure, we have some control, but there is much that is beyond our control. We can do whatever we can to bring about good things and avoid bad, but some things will happen no matter how much we prepare. But this is also good news. Often, wonderful things happen that we could never have predicted or caused. Situations that seem dire can resolve positively, even though we can't see a way to get there.

As I was writing this, I experienced a "day from hell," where everything went haywire. Some Christmas gifts I had ordered looked like they wouldn't arrive in time, my Internet connection (which I use constantly) went down on Christmas eve, when tech support had gone home for the holidays, and a few other minor mishaps occurred that I won't bore you with. Did I worry? Did I fret? Well, yes, I did, but I kept reminding myself that things just work out and this would, too. Did I feel out of control? Yes, but I got help. I got my Christmas gifts just in time, and tech support returned from their festivities and helped me get back online. The minor incidences resolved themselves as well.

Many of us were taught to worry by our parents, by example. It becomes an emotional habit that just seems to come upon us as an automatic reaction, without our knowing how or why. Worry is actually a misuse of our imagination and ability to create abstract thoughts. We think that what we're worrying about is real, and it often cascades into fear.

At one time, fear was a survival mechanism – we’re wired for it, but we no longer need it in the same way we did when faced with a saber-toothed tiger. Now, we use that mechanism to worry about what could go wrong, rather than what’s right in front of us. We see it as a talisman to keep the evil spirits away. But it’s been said that 90 percent of what we worry about never happens anyway, so what a waste of good energy!

In a similar vein, we’re often afraid to take on a new challenge because we can’t foresee how to take it all the way to its conclusion, and the unknown frightens us. The truth is, we never really know how things will work out, no matter how planned and predictable they may seem. By taking the first step or two, we pave the way for people and opportunities to show up that guide us to the next steps. By venturing into the unknown and unplanned, we open ourselves to wonderful outcomes that we could never have anticipated.

But what about real threats? Certainly, terrorism is frightening, and some of us have been impacted directly. But for most of us, aside from dealing with heightened security at airports and theatres and such, it’s a fear of what might happen to us, rather than something that actually has or is a real probability.

In truth, most of us are still quite safe. We need to remember that because something happened to someone else, it doesn’t mean it will happen to us. We don’t want to do anything foolhardy, but we don’t have to lock ourselves in our homes and stockpile provisions. Upsets and tragedies are a normal part of life. Throughout human history, we have survived them and triumphed, and we will continue to do so.

The good news is, things often work out *better* than we anticipated. By being open to possibility and letting go our grip of control, serendipity often brings us things we couldn’t have imagined or made happen directly by our efforts. We meet people, jobs fall into our laps, opportunities come our way that lead us to an even brighter future.

What about when things don’t work out the way we want? Perhaps there’s a lesson we can learn from it. Perhaps what seems like a disaster is actually opening us up to a greater opportunity – I can cite many cases of people who lost their jobs in recent years who went on to something much better. Worst case scenario, we can make the most of what life has handed us and turn it into an opportunity.

Even for those of us who believe we create our own reality, in truth, it’s a co-creation with a power much greater than us. There is much that we can do, but at some point, we need to let go of our pictures of how we think things ought to turn out. Life is a surprise. There’s no way we can possibly predict

all the twists and turns it will take. By doing our part and then letting go and experiencing what follows, it will take us places we could never have anticipated.

So, with all the temptation these days to worry about the future, it is going to work out, although perhaps not the way you expected. Think about what you want, and perhaps make some lists, but don't get stuck on how it will turn out. If you feel in your gut that you're moving in the right direction, just keep going, and the next step will reveal itself to you at the appropriate time.

Be patient, and be open to the possibility that something wonderful lies in your future. If you're in a difficult situation, do what you can and know that eventually, it will pass. Stay alert and deal with anything that looks like it might grow into a problem. Then, relax and be open to what the universe brings you, knowing you can handle it.

When I get worried, I like to think of a saying that author/teacher Joan Borysenko shares in her video, *Inner Peace for Busy People*:

"Everything is okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end!"

Creative Tip

Try this experiment: Go out for a walk or a drive, but don't plan where to go. Just follow your whims and see where it leads you. Let it be an adventure!

Wise Words

"I've been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened." ~ Mark Twain

"Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow; it empties today of its strength." ~ Corrie Ten Boom

"If you believe that feeling bad or worrying long enough will change a past or future event, then you are residing on another planet with a different reality system." ~ William James

Bookshelf



Worry: Hope and Help for a Common Condition ... Edward M. Hallowell, MD



The Worrywart's Companion: Twenty-One Ways to Soothe Yourself and Worry Smart ... Dr. Beverly Potter



Meditations for People (May) Who Worry Too Much ... Anne Wilson Schaef



Women Who Think Too Much: How to Break Free of Overthinking and Reclaim Your Life ... Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, PhD



Do One Thing Different: Ten Simple Ways to Change Your Life ... Bill O'Hanlon



Shakespeare in Love (DVD)



Inner Peace for Busy People: 52 Simple Strategies for Transforming Your Life ... Joan Z. Borysenko, PhD



Inner Peace for Busy People: Music to Relax and Renew ... Joan Borysenko, PhD and Don G. Campbell (audio)

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Issue 63

Interview with a Working Writer/Artist: Linda Armstrong

From time to time, I like to take a glimpse into the life of a working artist. I was fortunate to meet Linda Armstrong, a delightful person who has achieved success both as a writer and a fine artist.

SHARON GOOD: I assume you began your writing and/or painting as a child?

LINDA ARMSTRONG: Yes, both. My mom had always wanted to be a writer. She went to night school when I was a little kid and studied writing. She taught me to read before I went to school. The first book that I can remember that really meant a lot to me was a poetry book called *For a Child*, and I wrote mostly poetry when I was little.

My dad [Charles F. Keck] was a watercolor painter in California. On weekends, I was taken to galleries, and artists and people who were interested in arts came to our little apartment. I sat in the corner like a little mouse and listened to them talk. And so, art was always a big part of my life.

I got A's in art class, but what I did never seemed to fit exactly what they wanted. It wasn't until much, much, much later that I found that that was an advantage. To skip way ahead, I had a breakdown in my mid-30s, because I was really depressed, and ended up in the loony bin for a couple of weeks. It really changed my life. I had taught school for 18 years, and it got me out of teaching. Also, it gave me this thing like, Well, I'm nuts and I have nothing to lose.

So, one day, I did a bunch of little, tiny paintings – they were like 8x10s. My assignment to myself was to cover these little canvases and to do one a night for a month. I took pictures of them and took them in to my shrink, to see if he could fathom any deep meaning in these crazy things. He said, "Have you shown them to anybody?" And I'm going, "You've got to be kidding!" Then I thought, "Well, what, really, do I have to lose?"

His office was down the block from the then art strip in Los Angeles, on La Cienega (it's in Santa Monica now). So, I took these slides into the fanciest, biggest contemporary art gallery on the street. Now, who would do this? Only somebody who was crazy! I expected her to laugh at me, but she was so nice! She said, "How long have you been doing this?" I said, "A month." And she said, "Well, you're kind of all over the place, but come back in six months and show me what you've done." After 6 months, I had gone around and looked at other galleries, and I saw that most people were working much bigger, so I got bigger canvases and I started to work bigger.

By then, I'm starting to have second thoughts, 'cause I'm beginning to be less crazy. So I decide, I'm going to go to another gallery and see what they say and make sure I'm on the right track before I go back to that other place. Well, I took my slides to a gallery that was closer to me, over in Pasadena, and she says, "We're putting together a show, and we'd like you to be in it." This is 6 months after I started painting!

Those first paintings were really primitive. But what I realized was that I'm not going to paint like everybody else. And that's great! If I paint like me, then I have my own style, and things that are rare are valuable, right? If you're naturally different, you're going to have trouble with teachers, 'cause teachers have problems with things that are different. But when you get out into the art world, there are people that are going to appreciate work that is fresh.

So, you have to be crazy enough to start trusting the value of your unique take on things. The minute you stop trying to make your stuff accessible to everybody else, that's when you start being an artist. And whether or not it's accepted, what's the point in doing what everybody else does anyway?

SG: On your All at Once website [*no longer available*], you talk about originality versus making money, and that if you want to make money, you have to be commercial and be like everybody else. But it sounds like you stuck with your originality and you've managed to make some money at it.

LA: Well, I have made some money with my artwork, but I couldn't live on it. What I'm making with my writing, I can live on. It's on assignment, and it's for very a specific market. Publishers tell me exactly what they want, and I do it.

Now, that is more original than it seems. In fact, some of it is really original. For one of the education workbooks that I worked on this summer, I did 10 original short stories, and there's a book of poetry that will be coming out from one of the educational houses that has one of my original poems in it, along with a lot of classic work. So, you actually do original work, but it's originality within a framework.

There are several different kinds of things that I've done, but they're all related. One of the first projects that I did was the 4th grade teacher's workbook and student workbook for SRA/McGraw-Hill's *All-Star Phonics*. That is a textbook that school systems buy. Then, I have done a whole lot for educational supply stores – special stores that teachers go to and spend their own money on supplementary materials that they can photocopy and pass out to the class.

And then, for the children's trade market, I've done 28 adaptations for Disney's *Parent & Child Read Together Series*. What I did was to take existing stories, like "101 Dalmatians" and "Cinderella," and make them fit a particular format that was designed to help parents teach their children how to read by reading to them. People ask me, "Well, did you write the story?" No, I didn't write the story. "Well, did you come up with the format?" No, I didn't come up with the format. "But what did you do?" Well, I put the two things together, and it's harder than it seems.

SG: How did you get into educational writing?

LA: I work a lot with a packager. She has told me that writing skills are really important, but what the publishers insist on in this particular field is teaching experience. They want books written by credentialed teachers. You probably could write some of these materials without having classroom experience if you did the research, but as an experienced teacher, you have some ideas you would not come up with otherwise and also a better sense of what's going to work.

SG: A lot of people think that to become a writer, you have to start in college and continue writing consistently, but it sounds like other life experience can contribute.

LA: Oh, yes, absolutely. What people need to do is to sit down and make an inventory of everything they've done and of what they know. That's what made a real difference for me, when I sat down and said, "Okay, this person over here has an advantage over me because they know that person or because they're a nurse. Now, where do I have an advantage? What did I do?" Well, I've spent 18 years in the classroom. In what field of writing would that be an advantage? It really made a difference for me in finding publishers who would be interested in what I knew how to write.

SG: So, you don't necessarily need to come up with a whole concept and write a proposal if you can take your knowledge and find publishers or packagers who want what you've got.

LA: Yes. Nancy, the packager, was in one of my art classes at the Western Colorado Center for the Arts. We first went out to lunch just as friends. Before she took me on as a writer, I did make some proposals to her. She pitched them to people, but she said, "They don't want to do any of those right now, but I do have this other project."

Connections are very important. Nancy started to get a lot more work, and she needed a lot of writers day pronto. She gave some of the projects to me,

but I couldn't do everything, and her other writers were busy, too, so some of my friends in our critique group got work.

SG: You're in a writing group?

LA: Yes, I've been in writing groups on and off for the last 18 years. In the writing group that I'm in now, we're all children's writers.

SG: So, you have a whole community of writers, all helping each other out and giving each other leads.

LA: Yes. It is very important, in art and in writing, to use networking, to meet people and to remember that you never know who you're talking to. Be really nice to everybody, because you don't know who is going to provide the lead or who's going to be able to help you down the line. It may be the least likely person.

SG: How have you been finding the writing process? I would imagine you've developed a certain amount of discipline.

LA: Well, there are two different kinds of writing and two different kinds of painting for me. For the assignment work, it's extremely important to impose discipline on yourself from the outside. You have to keep an eye on your deadlines, you have to check in with people, you have to check your e-mail, you have to keep certain hours, and you have to keep right at it. People think of it as a part-time job or something somebody can do who has health problems. Uh-uh. It's very demanding. The deadlines are extremely tight.

Now, with a novel or poetry and painting, you have to actually use energy to keep yourself away from them if you have a deadline or something else you have to do. It takes discipline to stop, because you get into that kind of flow state, and you don't know where you are. You know, people have to tell you it's 2 in the morning. You just get lost in it.

I think you start with discipline. The discipline makes you sit down, and the discipline makes you open the project instead of all the other things that you could be doing. And also, when you get in the middle of a novel, the same thing happens. You have a lot of energy at the beginning of a novel. You have a lot of energy at the end of the novel, because you can see how it's all come together. In the middle, when things haven't come together, you need discipline, because that's when you want to sharpen pencils, clean house, do the shopping, do anything not to face the middle of the novel.

In rewrites, you need discipline. If you're getting ready for a show and you have to have eight paintings, and you aren't setting your own pace, then

yeah, you do have to have discipline. But, once you get started, then the other things take over.

SG: The other thing you mentioned on your website is the concept of just saying you're an artist. Declaring who you are. Tell me about that.

LA: Well, that goes back to that first gallery. I went in with the slides, and she said, "Well, are you an artist?" All she meant was, Are you here to buy work, or are you an artist? And I said, "Well, yeah, I'm an a-a-artist." It was obvious it was between those two things, but there was resonance in it. The more times that you say that you're an artist, the more you start to believe it, and when you believe it, why should other people disbelieve you?

SG: You create a new identity for yourself. I love that, because so many artists are afraid to declare it until somebody else buys their work or gives them that label or hires them.

LA: Think about how many really great artists there were who sold hardly anything in their lifetimes, but they knew they were artists. It's up to you to define it, really. There are always going to be people who don't like your work, so you can't depend on what other people think.

SG: Is there any advice that you would like to give to people who would like to do the kinds of things you're doing?

LA: One thing is to take disappointments as incompletions. They're never what you think. When your publishing house goes out of business, or your editor moves, it seems like the end of the world, and it isn't. Because that person is going someplace else, and you're eventually going to know an editor someplace else. So, a disappointment at one time can be an opportunity at another time.

SG: It's exciting that you're getting to do the things you want to do. There's a misconception that you have to go about it in a very planned, linear way and work your way up the ladder. Sometimes things just come to you.

LA: Sometimes they do. But you have to be ready. You're always meeting people. Like, many years ago, I met a woman who knew the widow of a very famous writer and had connections with publishers. If I had had a manuscript ready, she could have made some contacts for me, but I didn't have a manuscript ready at that time.

SG: So, just keep doing your work and putting yourself out there, and you'll meet people, and the work and the people will come together.

LA: That's right.

SG: There's a quote from Seneca, the Roman philosopher: "Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity."

LA: Exactly. I couldn't say it better.

My sincere thanks to Linda Armstrong for candidly sharing her wisdom and experience with us. To see her work, go to <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B001JPAPZU/about>.

Creative Tip

Broaden your horizons! Try something new with your creative work. For example, I heard recently of an artist who switched to a different style, and all the discomfort she felt with her painting just fell away. Try a different medium or a completely different creative outlet. Playing a musical instrument may be just what you need to make your writing flow!

Wise Words

"We are each gifted in a unique and important way. It is our privilege and our adventure to discover our own special light." ~ Mary Dunbar

"Those who are fired with an enthusiastic idea and who allow it to take hold and dominate their thoughts find that new worlds open for them. As long as enthusiasm holds out, so will new opportunities." ~ Norman Vincent Peale, *Positive Thinking Every Day*

"This is the time for every artist in every genre to do what he or she does loudly and consistently. It doesn't matter to me what your position is. You've got to keep asserting the complexity and the originality of life, and the multiplicity of it, and the facets of it. This is about being a complex human being in the world, not about finding a villain. This is no time for anything else than the best that you've got." ~ Toni Morrison

Bookshelf



Pooh's Honey Tree ... Linda Armstrong



Disney's Jungle Collection ... Linda Armstrong



Writer's Market ... Writers Digest Books



Writing for the Educational Market: Informational Books for Kids ...
Laura Purdie Salas



The ASJA Guide to Freelance Writing: A Professional Guide to the Business, for Nonfiction Writers of All Experience Levels ... Timothy Harper, editor



The Artist-Gallery Partnership: A Practical Guide to Consigning Art ... Ted Crawford and Susan Mellon



The Fine Artist's Guide to Marketing and Self-Promotion ... Julius Vitali

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Issue 64

Self-Esteem

Self-esteem looms large on our radar screen these days. There's tremendous – and well-warranted – concern about self-esteem in our children and ourselves. As a society, we've realized that having high self-esteem is crucial to our development. Without a healthy sense of self-esteem, we block ourselves from expressing our creativity and fulfilling our potential.

As children, we depend on the reflection of others to build our self-esteem. If you grew up in a loving and supportive household, you probably entered adulthood with high self-esteem. If your experience, like most of ours, was less than perfect, it's not the end of the story. As an adult, you have access to strengths, information and resources you didn't as a child, and you can continue building self-esteem throughout your life. You don't have to live out your days as a victim of your childhood circumstances.

As adults, our self-esteem needs to come from within us. Admiration and praise from others is great, but if we don't have a receptacle of self-esteem in which to hold it, compliments will feed our egos for awhile and then fall into a bottomless pit, leaving us waiting for the next "fix." We can never get enough to make us really believe it, and we continually seek to please others in order to get more.

In building our self-esteem, healing our past is helpful, but it's just the start. Self-esteem, along with self-confidence and self-respect, is something we earn. According to the National Association for Self-Esteem (www.self-esteem-nase.org/), we do that by taking action. Two ways, among many, that we can do this are: 1) to face or invite challenges and 2) to act with integrity.

By facing challenges, we gain skills and confidence in dealing with life. We come to know our own strength and stretch our limits, and we experience the joy and satisfaction of our own accomplishments. We discover that we can succeed, and also that we can fail and learn from it. We learn that we can cope with whatever life throws at us. As we build strength and courage, we can then take on challenges by choice, to open up new areas of life and continue building those strengths. As we do, we also build our self-esteem.

In the beginning, we need to plan our challenges strategically. If you haven't been to the gym in ten years, you start with small weights, rather than risking damage by doing too much too fast. In the same way, you can rack up small successes and build on those, continuing to raise the bar. If you're afraid – and you're not alone on that – don't try to take on a huge challenge

right away. Take it in steps, and allow your growing confidence to propel you higher.

Often, we avoid big challenges because we're afraid of making fools of ourselves. In the Tarot deck, the 22 cards of the Major Arcana map the journey of the Fool, who faces the world with a sense of wonder and a willingness to take a leap of faith, knowing that it will lead to something worthwhile. When we take ourselves lightly and leap with a sense of playfulness, we can exhilarate in our risks, rather than fearing them and berating ourselves if they don't work out. We can include our mistakes as part of the journey and use them as a guide to redirect our efforts.

Having high self-esteem does not mean that you will always meet with success. In truth, most successful people have failed a few – or many – times before they succeeded. Thomas Alva Edison filed over 1,000 successful patents, but also 500 unsuccessful ones. He ran thousands of experiments, testing over 6,000 filaments, before he created a successful light bulb. Where would we be if he had gotten discouraged after 10?

Dealing with failure is part of the picture. It teaches us valuable lessons and builds the “muscles” we need to handle success. How could you be CEO of a large corporation if every setback makes you want to crawl under the covers? How can you be a successful artist if every criticism crushes your spirit and creativity? One of my greatest lessons in failure was watching a gymnast fall off the balance beam during the Olympics. My heart sank for her, but she leapt back on the bar and continued her routine, going on to win a medal. I learned from this world class athlete that on the road to success, wallowing in self-pity is a costly luxury.

Another path to self-esteem is through integrity. Living with integrity means having principles and standards we believe in – and then upholding them. It's not enough to give lip service. By acting on our principles, we come to respect and even admire ourselves in a way that's more solid and lasting than simply taking in praise from others. It helps create the receptacle into which we can receive that praise and be nourished by it, instead of continually craving more.

Some of the ways we may be called upon to live our integrity include:

- ~ Doing what you know is right even when no one is watching
- ~ Keeping your word to others – and to yourself – even when you don't want to
- ~ Speaking your truth in the face of opposition
- ~ Giving someone a deserved compliment even when you're jealous of them

- ~ Taking responsibility for the impact of your words and actions on others
- ~ Refusing to be in a relationship with someone who treats you abusively
- ~ Owning your mistakes and making things right
- ~ Taking care of your own needs
- ~ Treating yourself and others with kindness and dignity

Living your principles and standards takes courage and resolve. You will inevitably be faced with the choice to stand up for what you believe in or to sell out in order to please someone or avoid conflict. It's by having congruity between your words and deeds that you build self-esteem. You learn that your word means something. You learn that while you may lose some people by taking a stand for what you believe in, you will attract people with the level of character you aspire to. That in itself will increase your self-esteem.

Building self-esteem is a solo journey. It's something you can only do for yourself, and it has to be based on your internal sense of values and direction, not somebody else's. Positive competition can be a great way to challenge yourself, but constantly comparing yourself to others (usually negatively) can point you away from your internal compass.

Build your self-esteem step by step. Challenge yourself, and live by your principles. Set standards for how you want to be treated and to treat others. As you get stronger, you'll face bigger challenges, but you'll have a history of handling challenges successfully that will help you face the fear and uncertainty of new levels of challenge. You'll become a person you respect and admire, and you will draw people to you who appreciate you for who you are. You will have the courage to follow your heart and pursue your passions.

In the journey of the Fool, the final step is Mastery. Through daily practice, you become better at taking the actions that build your self-esteem and self-confidence. It's a courageous journey, and an exciting one with ever-increasing rewards.

Creative Tip

To raise your self-esteem, choose something you've been avoiding doing out of fear. Then, do it. If it's something big, break it down into steps, and take the first step. If you fail the first time, try again. You can do it!

Wise Words

"Creativity flourishes when we have a sense of safety and self-acceptance."

~ Julie Cameron, *The Artist's Way*

"No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." ~ Eleanor Roosevelt

"The level of our self-esteem creates a set of implicit expectations about what is possible and appropriate to us. These expectations tend to generate the actions that turn them into realities. And the realities then confirm and strengthen the original beliefs. Self-esteem – high or low – tends to be a generator of self-fulfilling prophecies." ~ Nathaniel Branden

"Whatever good things we build end up building us." ~ Jim Rohn

Bookshelf



Self-Esteem: A Proven Program of Cognitive Techniques for Assessing, Improving, and Maintaining Your Self-Esteem ... Matthew McKay PhD and Patrick Fanning



The Self-Esteem Workbook ... Glenn R. Schiraldi, PhD



How to Raise Your Self-Esteem: The Proven Action-Oriented Approach to Greater Self-Respect and Self-Confidence ... Nathaniel Branden



The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem ... Nathaniel Branden



Breaking the Chain of Low Self-Esteem ... Marilyn J. Sorensen, PhD



Ten Days to Self-Esteem ... David D. Burns, MD



The Sedona Method: Your Key to Lasting Happiness, Success, Peace and Emotional Well-Being ... Hale Dwoskin



Self Esteem and Peak Performance ... Jack Canfield (CD)

Issue 65

Accessing Genius

For most of us, when we think of “genius,” Einstein or Mozart comes to mind. Certainly not ourselves. We see genius as the domain of the elite – the extremely smart or extremely talented. In *Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior*, David Hawkins (<https://veritaspub.com>) says that genius resides within all of us, that the processes of creativity and genius are inherent in human consciousness. Every one of us has moments of genius, but they often surprise us and we don’t know where they came from.

It has become clear to us that much of our genius is squashed at an early age. School curriculums are standardized in the interest of conformity and control and rarely address diverse talents and learning styles. If you perform outside the expected norms, there is no context for your creativity, and it will often be suppressed as an undesirable deviation, rather than encouraged as unique and noteworthy.

In discussing this topic, I’m going to call on some experts, beginning with Merriam-Webster, who defines “genius” as “extraordinary intellectual power especially as manifested in creative activity,” but also as “a peculiar, distinctive, or identifying character or spirit” – in other words, your unique gifts and talents! Everyone is a genius and an artist. Your genius may be in painting or music or writing, or your artistry may be in making people feel comfortable, organizing events, fixing cars, raising children or growing tomatoes.

We often miss these flashes of genius because we narrowly define genius by either high IQ or outstanding artistic ability. But IQ only measures one type of intelligence. In his new book, *Intelligence Reframed*, in which he expands on his earlier work on multiple intelligences, Howard Gardner (www.infed.org/thinkers/gardner.htm) posits 9 separate intelligences: logical-mathematical, musical, linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, natural (as in “nature”) and spiritual/existential.

Gardner defines intelligence as “a biophysiological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture.” Clearly, there are many ways to process information that contribute to a culture. Many of our most useful inventions were created by ordinary people.

In the 1950s, a divorced secretary, fearing for her job when the speed of her new electric typewriter caused her to make more mistakes than usual, filled

an empty nail polish bottle with white tempera paint to cover her typing mistakes, thereby inventing Liquid Paper. In 1948, a Swiss electrical engineer came back from a nature hike with his clothes covered with burrs. His curiosity led him to look at them under a microscope, where he saw what looked like little hooks that had attached themselves to the fabric of his trousers. He saw its potential as a unique fastener, and after a few years of experimentation, Velcro was born.

Michael Gelb (www.michaelgelb.com) has made a career of studying geniuses. He cites seven critical principles, which he learned from Leonardo da Vinci, that need to be followed to bring out your genius:

- ~ *Curiosita*: An insatiably curious approach to life
- ~ *Dimostrazione*: Willingness to learn from mistakes and continually test theories through experience
- ~ *Sensazione*: Using the senses to connect with the world around you
- ~ *Sfumato*: A willingness to embrace contradictory ideas, ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty
- ~ *Arte/Scienza*: Developing a balance between science and art, logic and imagination; “whole-brain thinking”
- ~ *Corporalita*: Taking care of the physical body, cultivating fitness and poise
- ~ *Conessione*: Recognizing and appreciating the connectedness of all things; “systems thinking”

These are practices we can all embrace. While the world around us may not seek out our genius, we can value and nurture it ourselves, working with the principles of daVinci and the examples of his peers to create a welcome environment for it.

- ~ Genius emerges from the interplay of logic and imagination. Gelb calls these “critical thinking” and “creative thinking.” Both are vital to powerful thinking. Logic alone is earthbound, while imagination alone is ungrounded. Put the two together, and magic happens.
- ~ One of the most important components of genius is intensity of focus. When you’re working in your arena of genius, it’s easy to get intensely involved in your creation or quest for hours at a time. When this is alternated with time away, in which you give your ideas time to germinate, inspiration arises.

If focus is difficult for you, you can train yourself. In *Conquest of Mind*, spiritual teacher Eknath Easwaran (www.easwaran.org) says, “It is the nature of the untrained mind to keep moving, moving, moving. But the

mind is infinitely teachable. You can make it natural for your mind not to move, but to dwell like a laser wherever you place it. That is the secret of genius."

Great artists start with talent, but it is through this intensity of focus, and endless hours of practice, that genius emerges. Easwaran observed that "after seeing the kind of training Nureyev must have undergone, I realized anew why genius has been called just an infinite capacity for taking pains."

- ~ Don't let obstacles deter you. If you hit a wall, use your creativity and imagination to dissolve it. When Isaac Newton reached an impasse in his work because the existing mathematics were inadequate, he created calculus.
- ~ Seek out an encouraging environment. When people believe in us, we are capable of rising to genius. The film *Stand and Deliver* tells the story of math teacher Jaime Escalante, who motivated and inspired 18 disadvantaged, East Los Angeles barrio kids to pass the Advanced Placement Calculus test. (Newton would have been pleased!)
- ~ Take time to just be, and not always do. Keeping ourselves constantly moving prevents the soft voice of inspiration from coming through. Harvard business professor Shoshana Zuboff said that her real work occurs when she is putting her feet up on her desk to think and reflect. This winter, a few of my clients were sick or injured and had to stop their normal routine. Every one of them reported greater clarity on personal issues that had baffled them before.

Gelb corroborated this in an interview in the Spring 2001 issue of *Linezine*: "In the last 20 years I've been asking people all over the world, 'Where are you when you get your best ideas, where are you actually physically located,' and people almost invariably respond, 'I was lying in bed, I was going for a walk in nature, I was driving my car, I was taking a bath.' They almost never say, 'I was in a meeting.'"

- ~ Generate new ideas by being curious and open to new possibilities. Albert Einstein said that the childlike, open, imaginative, playful way of thinking was at the core of his approach. When you dare to dream, you create the possibility that your dream could come true. Use creative thinking to dream and brainstorm, without censoring what comes through, and then follow up with critical thinking to see which of your ideas might be developed further.
- ~ Pay attention to your ideas; take them seriously. Gelb stated that "all the geniuses I've studied are pretty good at paying attention to the inner

muse." Great men like da Vinci, Newton and Edison kept extensive notebooks, while Thomas Jefferson poured his ideas into letters. Today, we might keep a journal or an idea log.

- ~ Always be open to learning, no matter how accomplished you are in your field. Buddhism calls this "beginner's mind." Have the courage to ask questions, even if you feel foolish, and not just ones to which you already know the answer. Don't judge or rule out the responses, but playfully explore and experiment with them.
- ~ Be patient and persistent. Thomas Alva Edison tested over 6,000 filaments before he created a successful light bulb. Wilbur and Orville Wright began building toy airplanes and kites at the ages of 12 and 8, respectively. Twenty-four years later, when they took their craft to Kitty Hawk, they had carefully tested each component and knew it could fly.
- ~ Great geniuses usually also demonstrate great humility. Einstein often protested that he had no special gifts, except perhaps his curiosity, focus and persistence. Ego is what bursts the delicate bubble of genius. Take, for example, an athlete running a race. When that athlete is performing optimally, he is mentally and physically "in the zone," totally focused on the sublime ecstasy of pushing the envelope of human limits. If his mind turns to the rewards – glory, praise, money or fame – the intense focus is broken. You may have experienced this yourself, when you were "in the flow" with your creation and then lost it when you began to think about how your work might be judged.
- ~ Remember that your genius may be focused in a particular area, and don't discount it because you also have weaknesses (as we all do). In his PBS special, *The Power of Intention*, Dr. Wayne Dyer admitted that while writing books and talking to audiences about spirituality is easy for him, don't ask him to fix the screen door on his house.
- ~ Finally, trust yourself, value your own experiences and talents, and don't look to others for approval. Your genius may elicit jealousy and competitiveness, and the responses you get from others may be aimed, consciously or unconsciously, at keeping your genius in check, not encouraging it. Listen to your own muse, and protect your genius and your creations; don't expose them to criticism during the early, delicate stages.

Genius may be elusive, but with a persistent effort, we can create the optimal conditions in which it can show up. While we can't schedule genius, we can tap into it by heeding the words of David Hawkins: "Do what you like to do best, and do it to the very best of your ability." Genius comes from

something within us, and also from something greater than us. We can align ourselves with exalted values, such as perseverance, patience, courage, humility, concentration and integrity, and then allow our talents to shine.

Creative Tip

Set aside some quiet time at least weekly, if not daily, with nothing to do. Let your mind rest. Give it free rein to wander. Keep a pad and pencil or a micro recorder handy to note any ideas that may emerge.

Wise Words

"The art of using moderate abilities to advantage often brings greater results than actual brilliance." ~ Francois de la Rochefoucauld

"Genius is only the power of making continuous efforts... A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn to glorious success." ~ Elbert Hubbard

"In ancient times, everyone was considered to possess inner genius. It was a kind of guardian spirit that accompanied a person through life and helped one overcome odds and achieve personal heights. We've lost touch with this original meaning of genius (related etymologically to the fabled genie in the lamp) in all our concern over IQ testing and similar nonsense. It's time we brought it back." ~ Thomas Armstrong, PhD, *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Many Intelligences*

"No one can arrive from being talented alone. God gives talent; work transforms talent into genius." ~ Anna Pavlova

Bookshelf



Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior ...
David R. Hawkins, MD, PhD



Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century ...
Howard Gardner



How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci: Seven Steps to Genius Every Day ... Michael J. Gelb



How to Think Like Einstein: Simple Ways to Break the Rules and Discover Your Hidden Genius ... Scott Thorpe



Discover Your Genius: How to Think Like History's Ten Most Revolutionary Minds ... Michael J. Gelb



Conquest of Mind ... Eknath Easwaran



Stand and Deliver (DVD)



The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-Create Your World Your Way ... Dr. Wayne W. Dyer



The Gifted Adult: A Revolutionary Guide for Liberating Everyday Genius ... Mary-Elaine Jacobsen



Understanding Creativity ... Jane Piirto



Way of the Peaceful Warrior: A Book That Changes Lives ... Dan Millman

Issue 66

Focusing On What You Want

Going after your dream is a labor of love. But even when you're following your heart and doing what you love, there are times when you're going to encounter obstacles. These may be big ones or a myriad of small ones, and they can be disheartening. You may not know how to get through them and give up in despair.

With any ongoing, long-term pursuit, there's a constant stream of short-term tasks. While we may see our dream out there in the distance and feel energized and excited thinking about it, when we shift our focus to what's right in front of us, it can seem like a mess of endless details and insurmountable hurdles. We may get so caught up in dealing with the difficulties that our dream starts to feel burdensome or unreachable.

There is a solution. We can develop the skill of keeping alive our vision, and all the passion and anticipation that goes with it, while simultaneously dealing with the day-to-day details. It's like driving a car. You have to keep your gaze out in the distance to anticipate what's coming up, and at the same time be able to swerve in an instant if an obstacle materializes right in front of you. It's not one or the other; you need to do both.

The Law of Attraction says that what we put attention on increases. This seems simple, in theory, but *how* we pay attention makes a difference. Most of us tend to spend a lot more time thinking about what we *don't* have, rather than what we want more of. For example, many of us pay a lot of attention to money, but more often than not, we focus on the *lack* of money, or what we *don't* have because of it, so it's the lack that we perpetuate. A subtle, but crucial difference.

In the same way, if you're focusing on the obstacles, rather than the dream, your life is going to be about the obstacles, and you'll find them expanding. Thoughts and feelings are like magnets that draw like objects to them, and negative, self-defeating thoughts will attract undesirable results. Focusing on your vision with strong intention, while dealing with the details, will carry you through the discouraging moments and bring hope about the future.

Knowing that the Law of Attraction brings you what you put your attention on, you can retrain your thought process to make it work for you. Begin by observing your thoughts. As a recovering worrier, I've become acutely aware of how relentless negative, frightened thoughts can be. They become so much a part of us that we don't even notice them. If you find it hard to remember to notice your thoughts, set a timer to go off at half-hour

intervals, and write down what you're thinking. This will help uncover your habitual thought patterns.

Next, retrain yourself to phrase your wants positively. Say (and think), "I experience and enjoy excellent health," rather than, "I am no longer sick." If you want to lose weight, picture yourself enjoying playing tennis without getting winded, rather than having pictures of pigs on your refrigerator. Have something positive you can aspire to, rather than something that makes you feel bad about yourself.

Writing affirmations can reinforce your thought processes. Pick out 2 or 3 negative thoughts that you want to turn around, and write positive affirmations that counter them. For example, if you fear that your creative work isn't good enough to sell, you might phrase an affirmation such as, "The perfect buyers, who will enjoy, appreciate and benefit from my work, are attracted to it now." Once you've composed your affirmations, write each one 15 times a day. When you feel you've exhausted those, pick out new thoughts to work on, or write different affirmations that reinforce the same issue in a fresh way. In the beginning, it may take time to see results, but persistence pays off.

Changing your thoughts is a start, but there's another step: You need to bring your feelings into alignment with your thoughts. It doesn't work to think and write positive statements when you feel a knot in your stomach every time you think or write it. As you work with your positive affirmation, pay attention to your body. Notice if you feel a tightening in your throat, chest or stomach, a shallowness of breath or a sinking feeling. This negative feeling has the same effect as a negative thought.

You can turn around negative feelings in the same way that you turn around negative thoughts. Think about the things you want, and feel the excitement and joy around having them. If you start to feel fear, doubt or dread, pull yourself firmly back to positive feelings. When you feel defeated by obstacles, shift your focus back to your dream. Hold tenaciously to it and get in touch with the enlivening feelings around it. Keep your attention on an ultimately positive outcome – even if it doesn't seem likely right now. Tap into the joy of success. You may have to "pump it up" at first, but the more you do it, the easier it will get. "Fake it till you make it" does work!

If this is too much, too fast, scale down your vision until thinking about it feels good in your body. Rather than imagining being in a show on Broadway, start by envisioning a smaller goal that feels doable for you, such as getting into a show with the local regional theatre.

Engage your senses to reinforce your thoughts and feelings. Record your affirmations, and play them back in the car or as you fall asleep. Use visual aids, such as pictures and quotations that inspire you. Make a “treasure map” by collecting images and phrases and putting them into a collage that you can keep on your bulletin board or refrigerator, where you see it often. If there’s a taste, touch or scent that engages your passion, work with that, too.

Speak enthusiastically about your dreams, if only to yourself and people you can trust to support you. Daydream about it. Find examples of people who have accomplished your dream, or something similar, and hang around with others who are on a similar path, with whom you can safely speak your vision and receive positive reinforcement. Keep alive the feeling of joy and possibility.

And last but not least, work with gratitude. Rather than dwelling on what’s wrong or what’s missing from your life, feel gratitude for all the good things you have and look forward to. When you get your paycheck, instead of begrudgingly wishing it were more, feel thankful that you’re getting it! When you’re paying your bills, feel grateful that you have the money to pay them, and feel the enjoyment you get from the things they’re paying for. There may be times when you really have to stretch to find something to feel grateful for, but the more you do it, the easier it will get. By living in a state of gratitude, you begin to attract more of the positive things you want, and the things you don’t want seem to lighten up and disappear.

Develop the skill of relentlessly shifting your thoughts and feelings to the positive. Sure, there are times when you will feel scared, discouraged or defeated. Keep shifting your focus back to your goal. Be tough with yourself. Develop a powerful will, and be unwilling to let the obstacles sidetrack you.

Keep your attention on your vision, and at the same time, deal with the immediate concerns. Dealing with the details will move you closer to your dream, and holding the vision will keep your dream alive when momentary defeats get you down. Have a strong intention about what you want, and pursue it persistently. You’ll continually get closer to your dream and receive all sorts of unexpected rewards along the way.

Creative Tip

Having trouble refocusing? Get quiet. Stop whatever you’re doing, go to a quiet place and just sit for 5 minutes. Close your eyes to eliminate visual stimuli. If your thoughts are still racing, focus on your breath – the inhale and exhale. When your thoughts calm down, redirect them to the positive

thought or feeling you want to focus on. Take a minute or two to immerse yourself in it before you go on with your day.

Wise Words

"Focus more on your desire than on your doubt, and the dream will take care of itself. You may be surprised at how easily this happens. Your doubts are not as powerful as your desires, unless you make them so." ~ Marcia Wieder

"When you have too much month for your paycheck, then what you need to do is realize that there is abundance all around you and focus on the abundance and not your lack, and as night follows day, abundance will come to you." ~ Sidney Madwed

"The quality of your life is a result of what you choose to focus on. Focus acts like a magnet. When you're grateful, you're focusing on all the things that are good or right in your life. You give those aspects of your life more power. Your world begins to feel more full and more alive." ~ Nolan Myers

"What I focus on in life is what I get. And if I concentrate on how bad I am or how wrong I am or how inadequate I am, if I concentrate on what I can't do and how there's not enough time in which to do it, isn't that what I get every time? And when I think about how powerful I am, and when I think about what I have left to contribute, and when I think about the difference I can make on this planet, then that's what I get. You see, I recognize that it's not what happens to you; it's what you do about it." ~ W. Mitchell

Bookshelf



Excuse Me, Your Life Is Waiting: The Astonishing Power of Feelings ... Lynn Grabhorn



The Heart of the Soul: Emotional Awareness ... Gary Zukav and Linda Francis



Law of Attraction: The Science of Attracting More of What You Want and Less of What You Don't ... Michael J. Losier



The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-Create Your World Your Way ... Dr. Wayne W. Dyer



Magnetizing Your Heart's Desire ... Sharon A. Warren



The Cosmic Ordering Service: A Guide to Realizing Your Dreams ...
Barbel Mohr



Write It Down Make It Happen: Knowing What You Want – And Getting It ... Henriette Anne Klauser



Visioning: 10 Steps to Designing the Life of Your Dreams ... Lucia Capacchione, PhD, ATR

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Issue 67

Letting Go

In order to move forward in our lives, we need to leave behind the excess baggage we carry with us. Like a cluttered closet, our old thoughts, feelings and entanglements weigh us down and keep us from using our creativity toward building the lives we want.

Through advances in physics, we've come to know that the currency we use in creating our lives is energy. When we focus our energy, through our thoughts and actions, we manifest the things we want. But often, we invest our allotment of energy in unresolved issues that no longer serve us, leaving us with a minimal budget to finance our new goals.

As someone who's energy-challenged, I've found that it's crucial for me to conserve and reclaim energy wherever I can. One of the strategies I use for doing that is letting go, in many different ways. On a day-to-day level, I've learned that when I make a choice to do something, I need to let go of the other options. If I agonize over whether I made the right choice, I squander the time and energy I could have used to move forward with the choice I made. By letting go, I free myself to focus my entire attention on that choice.

One of the hardest forms of letting go for me is letting go of control. I like to feel I have control of the circumstances of my life, but the truth is, I often don't. At times like that, the best thing I can do is accept what is, let go of trying to control it and see what I can do with the situation in which I find myself, rather than hanging onto what I wished it would be.

I also sometimes need to let go of people. In the course of life, relationships come and go. If it's a natural flow, it's generally easy to move on. But if the parting was fraught with anger, sadness or pain, we may be more reluctant to let it go. We may need to grieve the loss or forgive a hurtful act.

When someone hurts us, we relive the interaction over and over again and fan the flames of anger. We often resist forgiving, because we feel it condones the hurtful action or behavior. But forgiving is something we do for ourselves, not the other. It's how we release ourselves from a situation that no longer works. By forgiving, we reclaim energy that we had been pouring into keeping alive an old issue. We can then let go of that relationship or give it new life.

We need to let go of the past in other ways as well. We may want to cling onto happy memories and past achievements. In my younger (unhappier) days, when something good happened, I would savor the memory and play it over and over in my mind, fearing that another such moment might not

come. While it's certainly important to appreciate your past memories and accomplishments, staying stuck in the past saps the energy you could be using to create new ones.

One reason we hang onto the past is because we derive our identities from our history. We know who we are because of what we've done, what we own, who we relate to and how we've behaved. When we experience a major life change – starting or ending a committed relationship, having a child, entering a new career or retiring, moving to a different home or location or taking a big leap in our personal growth – our identity changes. This is an important part of our development, but it can leave us feeling like we don't know who we are. The tendency is to resist, to hold onto the old identity. Instead, we need to let it go and embrace the new one.

As we continue to grow in our lives, we need to continually release the past. We all know someone who has been in therapy or doing self-help workshops for eons, and they never seem to change. While they may gain a deeper understanding of their issues, they fail to let them go, create a new identity and move on. We get comfortable with our issues, often bonding with others who have had similar experiences, and become reluctant to take on a new, unknown self.

Fear of the unknown is probably the biggest obstacle to letting go. It's easier to cling to "the devil you know" than risk moving forward into the unknown and unpredictable. But not moving forward is not an option. When you don't, you stagnate and fall into lethargy and depression. Neuroscientist Gregory Berns, MD, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Emory University in Atlanta, advises that to be happy, you have to challenge yourself to do things you've never done before, to embrace uncertainty. It is through the unfamiliar that we find the exhilaration in life.

While we don't want to leave our energy in the past, we also don't want to focus so much on the future – planning it in infinite detail – that we don't leave ourselves any room for spontaneous, life-enhancing experiences. When we're enthusiastically focused on what we're doing in the moment, we leave the door open for surprises – another way in which Berns claims we find happiness. While it can be scary to feel out of control, when we can let go of our pictures of how things are supposed to happen, the unexpected can take us in new and exciting directions.

Although we're talking here about mental/emotional letting go, you might find it cathartic to also do some physical letting go, symbolic of the inner release. Clean off your desk and set up a nice, neat filing system for your papers. While you're at it, throw away old, outdated files. Clean out the closets and get rid of things you're no longer using. Fix the things that need

fixing or dispose of them. Make room for the new, or just enjoy the space created by eliminating the clutter.

Begin to craft a new self-image by living the part. If you're moving into a new career or retiring, for example, start "living the life." Get to know people who are already doing what you want to do. Read books or subscribe to magazines about it. Start seeing yourself in that life. Even start dressing the part and acquiring the accoutrements that go with it.

Remember that letting go doesn't mean forgetting the past or not planning for the future. It's when we invest our attention in the past or the future that we give our energy to it. We can live in the present and still savor our memories and learn from our mistakes, without sending our energy there. We can anticipate our future, but without becoming rigidly attached to how it will turn out.

Learn from your experiences. Stand on the shoulders of your accomplishments. Plan for and anticipate the future. But let go and invest your life force in living in the present and taking steps toward a fulfilling future, based on the person you're becoming, rather than who you were in the past.

Creative Tip

If you're having trouble letting go of something, try this visualization: See yourself standing on the shore of a lake. See a representation of your problem issue in a small boat. A rope is attached to the boat, and you hold the other end. Let go of the rope and see the boat (with your issue) drift off. Wave good-bye as you let it go. As the boat drifts out of your view, turn your back on it and walk away.

Wise Words

"To linger in the past is to do so at the expense of your future." ~ Ron Rubin and Stuart Avery Gold, *Tiger Heart, Tiger Mind*

"Finish each day and be done with it...You have done what you could; some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; you shall begin it well and serenely." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Much as we may wish to make a new beginning, some part of us resists doing so as though we were making the first step toward disaster." ~ William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*

"It would add much to human happiness, if an art could be taught of forgetting all of which the remembrance is at once useless and afflictive, that the mind might perform its function without encumbrance, and the past might no longer encroach upon the present." ~ Samuel Johnson

Bookshelf



The Language of Letting Go ... Melody Beattie



Love Is Letting Go of Fear ... Gerald G. Jampolsky, MD



Letting Go of the Person You Used to Be: Lessons on Change, Loss, and Spiritual Transformation ... Lama Surya Das



Little Book of Letting Go: 30 Days to Cleanse Your Mind, Lift Your Spirit and Replenish Your Soul ... Hugh Prather



Letting Go: A 12-Week Personal Action Program to Overcome a Broken Heart ... Dr. Zev Wanderer and Tracy Cabot, PhD



Letting Go of Anger: The 11 Most Common Anger Styles and What to Do About Them ... Ron T. Potter-Efron, MSW, PhD and Patricia S. Potter-Efron, MS



The Art of Letting Go: The Journey from Separation in Love to Fulfillment in Life ... Carlino Giampolo



Letting Go: The Pathway of Surrender ... David R. Hawkins, MD, PhD



Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself: How to Lose Your Mind and Create a New One ... Dr. Joe Dispenza

Issue 68

Dealing with Turmoil

When I start to hear the same stories from everyone I encounter, I take notice. This year so far has been one of intensity and turmoil. On a global and national level, we're dealing with war, terrorism and a crucial presidential election. On a personal level, many of us are facing health issues (ourselves or loved ones), losses and financial or other challenges. (Even new opportunities and growth can be emotionally challenging.) While we're seeing some improvements in our economy, the job market and cost of living continue to be in flux.

Along with our own fear and apprehension, those of us who are sensitive or empathic will also pick up the "vibes" around us. A few weeks ago, I found my heart pounding for no apparent reason. In retrospect, I realized that New York had been on terrorist alert that week. While I take an optimistic approach to such things, many people around me were fearful and cautious, and I was feeling that energy.

The world we live in has gotten faster and more intense, and the frequency of change is bound to increase rather than settle down. Since we only have limited control of what's going on in the world, it behooves us to develop strategies for coping, so that we can deal with the turmoil and keep ourselves sane and healthy.

For starters, find places where you can feel grounded and secure. Cultivate multiple areas, such as family, friends, community, job or career, trust in your own strength and skills, and trust in a higher power, so that if the bottom drops out on one or two, you have others to fall back on. Focus on what's going right in your life. When we're frightened, it's easy to expect and focus on the worst. Generally, there are things in your life that *are* going well, and you can alleviate the fear, despair or depression by putting attention on those positive things.

Take it moment by moment. When we get caught up in fear or anxiety, our tendency is to project the frightening images into the future, thus scaring ourselves further. Bring yourself back into the present moment. Chances are, right now, at this very moment, things are fine. If not, do what you can do to restore equilibrium. If you can't change the circumstances, try to find your emotional center, perhaps through meditation, focused breathing or just pausing amid your flurry of activities. If there's something you anticipate happening in the future, look at what you can do now to avoid it or reduce the impact.

Look for ways to create inner peace. Find places you can go to restore and rejuvenate, whether it be a spiritual venue; the gym; a dance, yoga or tai chi class; a museum; somewhere outdoors or a special spot in your home. For some of us, especially city dwellers, quiet places can be hard to find. Instead, or in addition, create an inner sanctuary where you can feel safe and peaceful. Use meditation, breathing, visualization tapes or music to help you get there, and visit often, so that you can achieve that sense of peace more easily. You might even cuddle up with a pet or a favorite stuffed animal.

Use your tried-and-true creative outlets, and explore some new ones. Early this year, I found myself moved to replace the large upright piano I gave away years ago to make space in my apartment with a trim digital keyboard. Later in the year, I took a “painting from intuition” class with the Painting Experience (<https://processarts.com/>) and have continued to use painting as an outlet. These two forms have provided a much-needed steam valve when I find myself off-kilter. The time I spend on them is calm, focused and peaceful. Hearing the music created from my own hands brings me a soothing sense of peace and satisfaction, and painting provides a way of expressing what’s in my heart and my subconscious in a way that, for me, transcends words, my usual creative outlet.

In finding a new form of creative expression, select something that isn’t goal-oriented, that you have no performance expectations around, so that it can simply be an outlet for your feelings. You might even choose something that you think you’re bad at, as I did with painting. (I was very encouraged to learn that Jackson Pollock’s greatest frustration, like mine, was that he couldn’t draw!) Release any expectations about how you think the results should be, and just let loose with it. When you let go of technique and outcome, using this new form can be very healing and freeing, and a lot of fun.

Use this time to challenge yourself, to stretch and grow. While we’d all prefer to grow through fun and joy, we can also use difficult times to discover and cultivate our inner strengths. For those of us who study personal growth or spiritual techniques, it’s during times of adversity that we get to flex our muscles and use what we learned.

Over many years of taking more spiritual and personal growth seminars than I can count, I’ve learned that there comes a point where we need to go beyond the concepts and actually put what we’ve learned into practice. When something goes wrong, I find that I want to fall back on my tried-and-true methods of dealing with things, even though they may no longer be as effective as the new techniques I’ve learned. I’ve come to call it my “put-up-or-shut-up metaphysics” – using what I’ve learned in all those

workshops in real-life, challenging situations, so that it becomes more than just interesting ideas or a nice hobby. It can be scary going out on a limb like that, but the truth is, it's never failed me, and when I come out the other side, into smoother waters, I can use the techniques and really soar.

During troubled times, it becomes particularly crucial to have a support system, whether it be family, friends, an organized community or helping professionals. During the blackout in northeastern United States in August 2003, I was alone in my apartment, which is in a large apartment building. On the second afternoon, as I was waiting for power to be restored to my section of town, I attempted to go up a few flights to visit a friend on another floor. By that time, the emergency generators had run down, and the hallways and stairways were pitch black and a little spooky to navigate, so I went back home. With no working computer, my usually trusty e-mail connection was inaccessible. As long as I was able to reach people by phone, I felt connected and safe. It was when the phone lines became jammed and I was unable to reach anyone that I started to feel anxious. So, be sure to stay connected somehow, especially if you live or work alone.

It also helps to get your attention off your own troubles by helping others. If you feel upset or frightened, reach out to someone else. See what you can do for them. Volunteer at one of the numerous agencies that would be grateful for your help. Check on an elderly neighbor. Babysit for a friend who needs to work overtime. Phone or get together with a friend and make a point of lifting each other's spirits. You'll stay connected and feel more grounded.

Watch out for a hidden, and erroneous, belief that fear and worry will keep the terrorists away. It won't hurt to lighten up. Set aside time to play every day, to do something purely pleasurable. If you're a caregiver, be sure to get someone to step in occasionally for an hour or two to give you some time off. Enjoying yourself de-stresses mind and body and helps you to cope with your responsibilities and handle crises more effectively. It's interesting to note that some of the lightest, most fun stage and movie musicals were produced during the 1930s, the time of the Depression, when people desperately needed to escape everyday reality and regain hope for a better future.

Finally, don't feel you have to stay glued to the news. While it may make you feel safer to know what's going on and preparing for it, the media tends to run the same frightening stories over and over. Carefully choose which news programs to watch. It doesn't do your psyche any good to be branded with these horrifying thoughts and images. I find it easier to hold a positive vision when I stay away from not only the news, but from films that feature

violence and terror. We create what we focus on, so why not focus on the good that's possible, rather than the horror.

Do what you can to lessen your fear and cope with turmoil. If it makes you feel safer to have a survival kit in your home and your car, or to get a physical exam, or to join some sort of support group, do so. Have an action plan in case something happens. Set aside time on a daily basis to restore and reconnect. Then, let go and relax. Things *will* get better – they always have, even in the worst times in history – and you'll feel stronger for having gotten through this crazy time!

Creative Tip

Use aromatherapy to alter your mood for the better. It's believed that odors stimulate the limbic system, the part of the brain associated with moods and emotions. Whose mood isn't lifted by a beautiful fragrance! Search Amazon and the Internet for books and resources to guide you on the best essential oils for your issue.

Wise Words

"True hope dwells on the possible, even when life seems to be a plot written by someone who wants to see how much adversity we can overcome... True hope responds to the real world, to real life; it is an active effort." ~ Walter Anderson, *The Confidence Course: Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*

"Most people live, whether physically, intellectually, or morally, in a very restricted circle of their being. They make use of a very small portion of their possible consciousness, and of their soul's resources in general, much like a man who, out of his whole bodily organism, should get into the habit of using and moving only his little finger. Great emergencies and crises show us how much greater our vital resources are than we had supposed." ~ William James

"A spiritually optimistic point of view holds that the universe is woven out of a fabric of love. Everything that is happening is ultimately for the good if we're willing to face it head-on and use our adversities for soul growth." ~ Joan Borysenko, PhD

"What we actually learn, from any given set of circumstances, determines whether we become increasingly powerless or more powerful." ~ Blaine Lee, *The Power Principle: Influence with Honor*

Bookshelf



Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression ... Michele Cassou and Stewart Cubley



Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal for Recovering from Trauma & Emotional Upheaval ... James W. Pennebaker



The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and Emotional Well-Being ... edited by Stephen J. Lepor and Joshua M. Smyth



The Healing Power of Sound: Recovery from Life-Threatening Illness Using Sound, Voice, and Music ... Mitchell L. Gaynor, MD



Toning: The Creative and Healing Power of the Voice ... Laurel Elizabeth Keyes with Don Campbell



Healing Yourself With Your Own Voice ... Don Campbell
(audiobook)



Holding the Center: Sanctuary in a Time of Confusion ... Richard Strozzi-Heckler



Home Sanctuary: Practical Ways to Create a Spiritually Fulfilling Environment ... Nicole Marcelis



Discover Inner Peace: A Guide to Spiritual Well-Being ... Mike George



Eliminating Stress, Finding Inner Peace ... Brian L. Weiss, MD

Issue 69

Just Do It!

It was a Saturday afternoon, many years ago, during the time when I was in the midst of my acting career. My plan that day was to send out some pictures and resumes for possible jobs, but I was feeling anxious about doing that. Instead, I was doing crossword puzzles, my “drug of choice” at the time, trying to fend off the anxiety and muster up the motivation to do what I needed to do. The phone rang, and it was my friend Jim, who asked me what I was doing. I told him I was trying to motivate myself to send out resumes. He asked, “Why don’t you stop trying to motivate yourself and just do it?”

Duh.

Lack of motivation is something each of us experiences at some point. Having become an introspective, “self-help” culture, when something isn’t going our way, we tend to look inside to discover why. What painful feelings from earlier experiences are we trying to avoid? What negative expectation do we have? What are we afraid will happen if we complete this task? These can be valuable questions to ask ourselves.

But sometimes, we get bogged down in trying to process and change these feelings, when a simple change in behavior is all we need. When we get caught up in our inner world, we can give so much energy to our blockages and resistances that we take what was once a surmountable hurdle and turn it into an insurmountable wall. Then we stand there trying to figure out how to dismantle the wall. Sometimes, just taking action can lift us out of those often paralyzing feelings into a more productive space.

The first step is to know yourself – how you work best and what gets in your way:

- ~ Which tasks are most confronting for you? When do you become resistant?
- ~ What motivates you?
- ~ How much structure do you need?
- ~ Are you a sprinter (work best for short periods of time) or a long-distance runner (most productive with long blocks of time)?
- ~ Do you need to figure in time for fussing and resisting to help you transition into getting down to work? How much time?
- ~ Do deadlines motivate you or make you feel pressured?
- ~ What time of day are you most alert and focused?

- ~ When are you most distracted? How can you reduce or eliminate those distractions?
- ~ Are you more productive when you have someone to be accountable to?

Once you've explored these questions, create systems, routines and rituals to help you through the resistance. If you're not already in a structured environment, set up daily schedules and goals for yourself to create order and structure. This can alleviate the anxiety around, What do I do next? and, Is there something else I should be doing now? You can do this on a daily basis, planning the night before, or on Sunday for the coming week. I suggest planning ahead, rather than on the same day, so that your subconscious has time to dwell on your plan while you sleep, and you wake up mentally prepared to begin.

For some people, it works best to schedule the most important thing first. For others, it helps to schedule the easy tasks first to encourage them to keep going. Keep a to-do list, with tasks listed in the order you'll tackle them, or actually schedule blocks of time in your planner for specific tasks. Be realistic about how much time you'll need – better to allow too much time than not enough – and be sure to schedule anything with a deadline in a timely way.

Once you begin a task, focus on it completely. Let go of all other tasks, knowing that they will be handled in the proper time. If your mind wanders, bring it back to the job in front of you. If you're afraid of missing the next appointment, set an alarm or have someone remind you.

Scheduling in this way helps you to prepare yourself mentally to approach a task that may be confronting or bring up resistance. You can also create a ritual to transition yourself into a focused and ready state of mind. Your ritual might go like this: start the coffee machine, turn on the computer (set up your easel, change into your dance clothes, whatever), get your papers out onto the desk, check e-mail, turn off the phone ringers, get a cup of coffee, say a little prayer and get to work. The ritual will help your mind to get calm and focused on the job ahead.

If you're still resisting, start doing simple, non-confronting tasks to get you into the flow, such as returning phone calls, preparing your tools, reviewing the previous day's work or cleaning off your work space. As you do them, your mind will begin to focus on the work to come, ideas will start to flow and you'll move more easily into your project. An interesting writer's trick I learned is to stop work in the middle of a thought or paragraph. Then, when you begin again, you can pick up where you left off, rather than facing a blank page.

Here are a few other strategies to help you through resistance:

- ~ Break big jobs into smaller chunks to avoid overwhelm, and then schedule the small pieces. Use checklists to give yourself a sense of accomplishment, and reward yourself periodically for completing tasks. You might use the “work first, play later” strategy by planning something fun upon completion of a less desirable task.
- ~ Have someone you report to for accountability, such as a boss, coworker, spouse, friend or coach. Sometimes, it’s easier to come through for someone else, either to receive praise and encouragement or to avoid the embarrassment of not producing the result you promised. It also helps to feel you have a partner in your endeavor.
- ~ Rather than trying to avoid or numb out a feeling of anxiety or overwhelm, allow yourself to go into the feeling. Get quiet, close your eyes if you wish, and breathe deeply. Notice where you feel the feeling in your body. Stay present with the sensation. It may get intense for awhile, but eventually, it will subside, and you will be able to go about your business without the nagging feeling of resistance that was stopping you.
- ~ If you’re truly resistant, set a timer for 15 or 30 minutes and go to work. This is a great way to deal with such things as alleviating clutter or going through a backlog of e-mail. A small chunk of time is usually manageable, no matter how resistant you are, and the progress you’ll see from the cumulative effect of those small chunks will motivate you to do more.

Along with these strategies, it’s also important to develop mental discipline and strength of will. I read recently that one of the primary reasons we don’t achieve our life goals is sheer laziness. It’s easy, in the short-term, to cave in to tiredness, distractions, social pressure and other temptations, rather than doing what we know will be most meaningful in the long run.

Although I’m not an athlete myself, I’ve come to admire the discipline it takes to become a champion. I clearly remember watching the 1984 Olympics, when American gymnast Julianne McNamara fell off the balance beam. My heart sank for her, but she bounced right back up there and finished her routine. She went on that year to win a gold medal in uneven bars and silver medals in floor exercise and the team competition. Her self-discipline and focus made a lasting impression on me.

It takes that kind of steely focus to be a winner. Falling into the mire of self-pity can rob us of our self-esteem and productivity. We need to have the self-discipline to drag ourselves out of the deep pit of self-pity and talk to

ourselves in ways that will empower and motivate us instead of dragging us down. While you may not be an Olympic athlete, you can be a winner in your own life by keeping your eye on what you want and staying out of the trap of self-pity, refusing to allow anxiety, overwhelm or negative self-talk to win.

Will and self-discipline need to be developed. Like a flabby muscle, an out-of-shape, undisciplined will won't respond to your demands. Start with something small, like practicing your craft or exercising for 15 minutes every day. Don't take any excuses from yourself. As you get stronger and more consistent, begin to exercise your will in other, more challenging areas. Then, when the big challenges come, you'll have the strength of will to make powerful choices and follow through, no matter how confronting it is.

Remember, the point of power is Now. Whatever happened in the past, you can always make new choices and take different actions, and thus get different results. Jim's words have stayed with me all these years. Now, when I feel stuck in anxiety or fear, instead of turning to crossword puzzles, I start to take actions toward the result I want to create. Before I know it, I get absorbed in what I'm doing, the anxiety disappears and I'm well on my way to checking one more item off my to-do list of meaningful accomplishments.

Creative Tip

If you're having trouble getting started or sticking to a goal, get a buddy. You may be pursuing the same goal or different ones. Set a time to be in contact every day to support each other in following through, or do the activity together. Be positive and encouraging, but don't let each other off the hook. Expect results.

Wise Words

"It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult." ~ Seneca

"'Now' is the operative word. Everything you put in your way is just a method of putting off the hour when you could actually be doing your dream. You don't need endless time and perfect conditions. Do it now. Do it today. Do it for twenty minutes and watch your heart start beating." ~ Barbara Sher, *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was*

"When you are feeling fear of some project or idea or dream, ask yourself, What am I still curious enough about to override my fear? Follow your curiosity like a delicious scent leading you to a kitchen. Let your curiosity peel back the dry, bitter skin of drudgery to find the sweet fruit of fun at the

core. Focus on what you love rather than fixating on the feelings of discomfort that sometimes accompany desire." ~ Carol Lloyd, *Creating a Life Worth Living*

"Procrastination and worry are the twin thieves that will try to rob you of your brilliance – but even the smallest action will drive them from your camp." ~ Gil Atkinson

Bookshelf



Self-Discipline in 10 Days: How to Go From Thinking to Doing ...
Theodore Bryant



Ultimate Guide to Mental Toughness: How to Raise Your Motivation, Focus and Confidence Like Pushing a Button ... Daniel Teitelbaum



Unleash the Warrior Within: Develop the Focus, Discipline, Confidence and Courage You Need to Achieve Unlimited Goals ...
Richard "Mack" Machowicz



Attitude Is Everything: Change Your Attitude ... Change Your Life ... Jeff Keller



Optimal Thinking: How to Be Your Best Self ... Rosalene Glickman



Who Are You Really and What Do You Want? ... Shad Helmstetter, PhD



Self-Discipline and Emotional Control: How to Stay Calm and Productive Under Pressure ... Tom Miller (CD)



Power of Will: Unlocking Your Inner Strength for Personal Growth ... Frank Channing Haddock

Issue 70

Playing the Hand You're Dealt

Did you ever feel that you could have everything you want in life ... if only you had someone else's life?

We each come into life with a set of circumstances – parents, siblings (or none) and other family; a particular gender, nationality, race and socioeconomic class; certain talents and abilities; a body that looks and acts a certain way; and many other aspects. While there's nothing inherently good or bad in any of this, our culture instills in us judgments about what's preferable. If we're "blessed" with something different, we feel cheated or inadequate.

While our circumstances may create a certain container for our lives, it is our choices that ultimately determine how our lives will play out. Through our choices and our efforts, we can make the most of what we're given, and even surpass what may be expected for us.

The first choice we need to make is to adopt one of two attitudes: to play the victim or to be empowered. Given these options, you might wonder why someone would choose to play the victim. While it may not seem attractive at first glance, being a victim has its payoffs.

As children – when we truly are, in some sense, victims of the adults who have power over us – we comfort ourselves with self-pity. We console ourselves in situations where we're powerless by telling ourselves how they've done us wrong, that we really deserve better. It provides an emotional balm that gives us a sense of control. Over time, feeling sorry for ourselves becomes an emotional habit that we carry into adulthood, where it becomes an excuse for not taking the risk of challenging our circumstances, and the roller coaster ride of feelings that comes with that.

Playing the victim is also a way to avoid taking responsibility for becoming all that you can be. At first glance, pursuing your dreams has a rosy glow that's compelling. But once you dive in and begin taking actions, it can be confronting ... and a lot of hard work. Much easier to find excuses why you can't – bad day at the office, too busy with the kids, backache, money problems, whatever. We all do this at times.

So, okay, you get it: Being a victim is not the way to get the things you want. So, how do you go about becoming empowered in your life?

To start with the basics, stop comparing your life with others. One thing I've learned through years of observation is that everyone comes into life with challenges. No one gets off scot-free. The catch is, each person has a

different set of challenges. While I might envy your ease at making friends, you might wonder how I land jobs so easily. While I might wish I had your wealth, you might crave the freedom and simplicity of my life. The grass may look greener, but every pasture comes with its weeds.

From a spiritual viewpoint, we come into life with certain lessons to learn. Our life circumstances – including our strengths and, yes, our limitations – are the optimal ones for learning those lessons. Some of those lessons will be exhilarating, and some will be miserable. If we can embrace even the tough ones, we can minimize the pain and struggle of going through them. When we don't learn from our experiences, we're doomed to repeat them. By facing them squarely and doing whatever it takes, we can move on to grander experiences.

Many of us are searching for our "life purpose." I'm not sure that that's something we can easily uncover – in my experience, it unfolds over a lifetime. But what we can do is create meaning for our lives. We can take the hand we're dealt and ask, How can I make the most of what I've been given? How can I be a better person? How can I contribute to myself, those close to me and the world? How can I find the courage to pursue what I'm passionate about? When I focus on questions like that, the fact that I wasn't born rich or beautiful, or that I can't draw, or that my parents never encouraged me to get a PhD, just doesn't matter.

It's in our human nature to always want more – that's how we grow. But it's not about wanting someone else's life. It's about living the life we were given to the max. It's about deciding for ourselves what's really important to us, rather than buying into what our culture tells us we should want. And it's about letting go of the way we *think* things should be and being with what's so.

During his time in concentration camps, psychologist Viktor Frankl discovered that people were able to find hope and dignity by giving meaning to their suffering. How grateful we can be that the circumstances we're dealing with are so much easier than that! Let's not wait until we're in a crisis to appreciate what we have. Let us dedicate ourselves to finding the best in our lives and making the most of our challenges. As the Serenity Prayer so beautifully states:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
And Wisdom to know the difference

Action Challenge

Make a list of the things you dislike about your life. What can you change? What can you do to come to terms with the things you can't change?

Wise Words

"People are always blaming their circumstances for what they are. I don't believe in circumstances. The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them." ~ George Bernard Shaw

"You have to accept whatever comes and the only important thing is that you meet it with the best you have to give." ~ Eleanor Roosevelt

"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it. Once we truly know that life is difficult – once we truly understand and accept it – then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters." ~ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." ~ Carl Rogers

Bookshelf



What You Can Change ... and What You Can't: The Complete Guide to Successful Self-Improvement: learning to accept who you are ...
Martin E. P. Seligman, PhD



How to Want What You Have: Discovering the Magic and Grandeur of Ordinary Existence ... Timothy Ray Miller



Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life with the Heart of a Buddha ... Tara Brach, PhD



Conquer Your Critical Inner Voice: A Revolutionary Program to Counter Negative Thoughts and Live Free from Imagined Limitations ... Robert W. Firestone, PhD, Lisa Firestone, PhD and Joyce Catlett, MA



Illuminations: Visions for Change, Growth, and Self-Acceptance ... Stephen C. Paul



Living in the Heart: The Affinity Process and the Path of Unconditional Love and Acceptance ... Paul Ferrini



Making Peace with Yourself: Turning Your Weaknesses Into Strengths ... Harold Bloomfield, MD



Learning to Love Yourself ... Gay Hendricks, PhD



Man's Search For Meaning ... Viktor E. Frankl

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Issue 71

Between Trapezes: An Interview with Gail Blanke

In these days of constant change and uncertainty, it seems we're continually reinventing ourselves. In the process, we're often taking leaps of faith, and at some point, we find ourselves suspended between what was and what is yet to be. In her new book, *Between Trapezes: Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease*, motivational speaker and executive coach Gail Blanke guides and inspires us to take those leaps.

SHARON GOOD: Gail, what led you to use the image of being between trapezes?

GAIL BLANKE: The reason I use the trapeze metaphor is because we all are "between" in some area of our life, and because the wonderful thing about trapezes is that you can't hold onto two of them at the same time. You've got to let go of the old one – the old view, the old way, the old idea, the old title – before you can reach out and grasp that new one. And in between, you're not holding onto anything.



SG: Which is extremely scary.

GB: And it's also the best of all possible times, because it's where you discover who you are *now* and what you're passionate about *now* and what's possible *now*. You might even discover new talents and new people and new ideas, so that you can, in fact, reinvent yourself. But we all like to know how it's going to turn out, so it's hard to step out into that vast unknown.

We need to be open to discovering who we could be becoming. We don't want to stay stuck in an old idea of ourselves. We have this whole thing about what type we are and aren't that we got when we were little and someone said, "Oh, you're the mathematical type" or "you're the creative type."

I speak to so many people who will say, "I'm not the entrepreneurial type, the corporate type, the stand-up-in-front-of-people-and-talk type, the salesman type, the creative type." And if someone says, "Maybe you'd like to start a company of your own," we say, "Oh, no, I'm not the entrepreneurial type." When we get so wedded to this "type" thing, we shut out a lot of great possibilities for ourselves.

SG: You talk about the difference between choosing to move to a new trapeze and getting blown off the old one. It can be an unpleasant

circumstance, but it can also be a positive one. In your book, you tell about your appearance on *Oprah*, where all of a sudden you were thrust into the spotlight, and your whole self-image changed.

GB: The amazing thing about that “defining moment” in my life was that it was the great unknown. Being on the *Oprah* show and having a whole hour to myself with Oprah was just the greatest possible opportunity, and one I was wildly excited about, but it didn’t go anything like what I thought was going to happen.

They had those big yellow chairs, and Oprah usually sits in one and the guest sits in the other one. When I came on the set, Oprah looked at me and said to the director, “Get the bench.” They took off these big yellow chairs and brought on this big yellow bench, and Oprah said, “You sit on the bench. I’m going into the audience.”

I was absolutely dumbfounded and thought, “Who am I to be sitting on this bench by myself on the *Oprah* show? Does this mean she doesn’t like me? Or what does this mean?” In the end, I had to decide what it meant. I could have decided Oprah doesn’t like me, or I could decide something else.

At any given moment in your life, something happens, somebody says something, and you get to decide what it means. Usually, we make it mean something negative. The way to handle a situation like this is to ask yourself, “Okay, at this particular moment, what am I committed to in my life, in my work?”

I knew I was committed to enabling everybody who watched that show to have a sense of new possibilities in their life. So I said, “Okay, if that’s what I’m committed to, what am I going to make ‘get the bench’ mean?” I decided it would have to mean, Oprah trusts me. So I went with that. And then I thought, “If Oprah trusts me, who am I not to trust myself?” I went with that interpretation, and it just propelled me right through the show.

So, the bottom line is, something happens in life, and you get to decide what it means. I used this as a way to discover the difference between fact and interpretation in my life. You want to make up empowering interpretations for the things that happen in your life that propel you forward.

SG: There are times when fate, or whatever you want to call it, thrusts you into situations that you don’t see yourself as being ready for, even though you are, and you just have to let go of your pictures of what you think you’re supposed to be or what you’re supposed to do, and then go through that thought process that you went through and push yourself up to that next level.

GB: You are exactly right. Sometimes, the universe places these things at our feet, the opportunity for us to step into our power. I never thought of myself in the same way again, because it gave me such strength to know that I could step into that power. I found something in myself that I didn't know I had.

SG: It's one thing to be blown off your trapeze; you *have* to deal with it. It's another to choose it. How do you inspire yourself to take that leap of faith?

GB: One of the things that makes it easier to let go of the old trapeze is to create a powerful vision. Walt Disney, whenever he would build a new theme park in any part of the world, would always direct the workmen to build the castle first, because that's where the magic is. If we have that gorgeous castle to look to, then we can do anything we need to do to bring the rest of the park to life.

And so, if you create a vision of how good you can make it – your own castle – and you flesh it out and color it in, then it enables you to do all the things that might have seemed hard, but won't seem so hard, to bring that fabulous castle to life. Maybe you think about going back to school. Maybe you think about learning new skills. Maybe you think about losing weight or quitting smoking or learning a new language. One of the things that I've found is that when you feel the magic, you can go the distance every time.

SG: Knowing what's possible and what you're going toward.

GB: Then, you can let go of the old stuff. Trapeze artists have this great saying: "Fat don't fly." Now, they don't mean body fat, they mean mental fat.

SG: Like excess baggage.

GB: That 50-pound Hefty bag that we're all carrying around, that we fill up with all our old fears, all our regrets, all our negative assumptions, all the times when we came up a little bit short. And you can't fly, you can't get loft, if you're carrying all that baggage. You've got to let it go.

SG: When I imagine myself being a trapeze artist between trapezes and ask, "What's the most important thing I need right now," what I come up with is, focus. And you can either focus on your vision or you can focus on all of the other things that are holding you back, the fear of failing.

GB: Trapeze artists have a lot of great sayings, and another one of them is, "The greatest flyers are always the greatest fallers." But trapeze artists never confuse falling with failing. There are those times when the thing that you're working on doesn't work out for one reason or another. But we don't think of that as failing; we think of that as learning and moving forward.

But your idea of focus is really important, because there are those voices that get in our heads and diffuse our attention. And when you're out for something really big, you can hear those voices. In fact, if you don't hear them, it means you really ought to push yourself a little further!

It's about being an adventurer. Being a discoverer. And the whole thing about an adventure is, you don't know how it's going to turn out. So, while you want to build that castle and bring that to life, you want to be open to all different ways of doing it, all different kinds of people, all different kinds of solutions. Look for surprising delight. Look for unpredictable, wonderful things that want to happen to you. And people that you never could imagine would appear in your life, and there they are. Which all helps you to see yourself in a new way.

My special thanks to Gail Blanke for a delightful and inspiring interview! .

Action Challenge

In your life, what old trapeze are you hanging onto? Build a castle – an inspiring vision – that will help you to let go and move forward. Fill in the vision with lots of delicious detail that will propel you to do what it takes to achieve it.

Wise Words

"It is for us to pray not for tasks equal to our powers, but for powers equal to our tasks, to go forward with a great desire forever beating at the door of our hearts as we travel toward our distant goal." ~ Helen Keller

"Leap, and the net will appear." ~ Julia Cameron, *The Artist's Way*

"We are very near to greatness; one step and we are safe; can we not take the leap?" ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Have faith and pursue the unknown end." ~ Oliver Wendell Holmes

Bookshelf



Between Trapezes: Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease
... Gail Blanke



Learning to Fly: Reflections on Fear, Trust, and the Joy of Letting Go
... Sam Keen



The Trapeze Buddy Success Strategy: A New Way to Create Trust, Support and Teamwork in Your Business ... Mark Rosenberger



Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life ... Queen Noor



Leap of Faith: An Astronaut's Journey into the Unknown ... Gordon Cooper with Bruce Henderson



The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze And Other Stories ... William Saroyan



Dreams of the Solo Trapeze: Offstage with the Cirque du Soleil ... Mark Schreiber



Trapeze: Poems ... Deborah Digges

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Issue 72

Moving Ahead in Troubled Times

Moving into a new year is always a great time to reflect. In looking back on the year gone by, we've seen a continued pattern of economic ups and downs, fear of terrorism, war, natural disasters and personal challenges. With all of these individual and global stresses, it sometimes feels like each of us is holding up the weight of the world. We may feel powerless in the face of the seemingly overwhelming odds against us.

Life happens in cycles, with good periods and bad. While there are times when we have to grit our teeth and endure, as an eternal optimist, I always believe that things will get better. History will bear out that good does triumph over evil. At one point, it seemed impossible that the Cold War would end or the Berlin Wall would come down. But they did. In the same way, this "reign of terror" will one day be over.

Each of us can be a contributor to that process, in our own small way. The world is not changed by one person, but by all of us working together. We can each participate in the way that calls to us, whether it be working with a global organization or on a grass-roots level in our own families and communities.

One of my heroes is Nelson Mandela. Jailed in the midst of what seemed an endless period of apartheid in his country, Mandela never lost hope, nor compassion for his captors. He never succumbed to bitterness and resentment. Eventually, the unimaginable happened: apartheid ended, and miraculously, Mandela was elected the first Black president of South Africa.

We can use Mandela's courage and humility as examples in our own lives. Mandela never lost the vision for what could be, despite the evidence to the contrary that was everywhere around him. He saw possibility and responded with understanding and kindness, rather than animosity and anger. We, too, can do that and become beacons of light for those in our own lives who feel lost in despair.

Here are some steps you can take to hold your own vision:

- ~ Rather than succumbing to fear, listen to your own inner guidance and truth about how to live your life. There are political forces at play that have a lot to gain by keeping us afraid. Don't buy into it. Take precautions when you feel guided to do so, but don't give in to fear-mongering. Use your own judgment.
- ~ Make choices about what you want to pay attention to. Our news media is slanted toward the negative and disastrous – that's what sells. Some

people are energized by knowing what's going on in the world, while others are disempowered by the constant repetition of frightening images. If you fall into the latter group, it's okay to turn off the news. Trust me – if there's something you really need to know, the information will reach you.

- ~ Assess your values – love, peace, compassion, cooperation, etc. – and become a living model for them. Living your values creates a much more convincing argument than preaching them to others.
- ~ Use your creative outlets to deal with your feelings. Channel your fear, despair, anger, frustration, hopelessness – as well as your positive feelings – into works of art, solely for your own expression and not necessarily for commercial purposes.
- ~ Don't use fear as an excuse to live a small, restricted life. Now, more than ever, it's important to live your dreams and inspire others to do the same. For many of my clients, being thrown out of a seemingly secure world has broken their complacency and propelled them to finally move forward on dreams that had been simmering on the back burner for way too long. Start taking small steps now, and continue doing whatever you can to keep the momentum going.

As we move into this new year, resolve to hold the vision for the world you would like to live in. If miracles can happen in South Africa, they can happen anywhere. Keep hope alive and share it with others, and let's pray that the new year brings us a step closer to that vision of world peace and love, as well as our personal dreams.

Action Challenge

What one thing would you love to do that you've been avoiding out of fear? Do it! List 5 steps you can take toward that goal in the next 30 days, and then take them.

Wise Words

"As more people achieve some degree of mental calm, insight, or the ability to transform negative emotions into positive ones, there will be a natural reinforcement of basic human values and consequently a great chance for peace and happiness for all." ~ The Dalai Lama

"I have heard it said that living out of our vision is more powerful than living out of our circumstance. Holding on to a vision invokes the circumstances by which the vision is achieved. Vision is content; material circumstances mere form." ~ Marianne Williamson, *A Return To Love*

“True hope dwells on the possible, even when life seems to be a plot written by someone who wants to see how much adversity we can overcome. True hope responds to the real world, to real life; it is an active effort.” ~ Walter Anderson, *The Confidence Course: Sevens Steps to Self-Fulfillment*

“What we actually learn, from any given set of circumstances, determines whether we become increasingly powerless or more powerful.” ~ Blaine Lee, *The Power Principle: Influence with Honor*

Bookshelf



Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life ...
Martin Seligman



Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela



In His Own Words ... Nelson Mandela



Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About ... Margaret Read MacDonald



Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life ...
Thich Nhat Hanh



The Voice of Knowledge: A Practical Guide to Inner Peace ... Don Miguel Ruiz with Janet Mills



Peace: 100 Ideas ... Joshua C. Chen and Dr. David Krieger



In Pursuit of Peace: 21 Ways to Conquer Anxiety, Fear, and Discontentment ... Joyce Meyer



Living in Balance: A Dynamic Approach for Creating Harmony & Wholeness in a Chaotic World ... Joel Levey and Michelle Levey



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

Issue 73

Seeing New Possibility

From time to time, I work with a coaching client who's very trapped in their current reality. They've lost touch with their dreams and see very little possibility for the future. Responsibilities and obligations and financial constraints have closed down their world, till they feel they have very little room to maneuver.

As we go through life, our experiences color our outlook on the world and our own lives. We begin to see life through filters. When we've had good experiences, we have filters that tell us to expect more good. When we've been thwarted or discouraged, our filters tell us to expect more of that. We get stuck in our past experiences, feelings, beliefs and attitudes, and we begin limiting our possibilities.

When the "realities" of life close in on us, it's easy to forget what was once important to us. Our dreams seem impossible, so we push them out of our consciousness. We also absorb tons of negative input from the outside world. We turn on the TV or radio, read newspapers or magazines, or surf the Internet and learn that the stock market is in bad shape, that the economy is in recession, that jobs are scarce. Because it's in the media, we believe it's true. We buy into statistics and gather even more evidence that our dreams are impossible.

Advances in quantum physics have shown us that while our experiences create our beliefs, our beliefs also shape our experiences. When we expect a certain outcome, our expectation impacts what happens. On a more concrete level, our thoughts and beliefs will determine which actions we take. When certain thought patterns or actions occur repeatedly, they create neuronal pathways in our brain, in the way that carriage wheels created ruts in a dirt road. These pathways become the paths of least resistance down which our thoughts, and consequently our actions, habitually flow.

With some effort and commitment, we can change our habitual thoughts and behaviors and create new pathways that reopen the doors to new possibility.

- ~ Look at your beliefs. Do you hold a belief that nothing ever works out for you? That an old dog can't learn new tricks? Can you see how these beliefs are limiting new possibility? Create affirmations that reverse these beliefs, and post them in places where you'll see them often.
- ~ Challenge your usual expectations, and be willing for them to be proven wrong. Allow different results to emerge. A favorite spiritual teacher of

mine defines “humility” as knowing that whatever happened before, good or bad, it can always be different.

- ~ Notice 3 new things every day. For example, on the way to work, instead of going on autopilot, actively look around and become aware of things you don’t normally notice.
- ~ Do things in different ways, even if it feels uncomfortable at first. Change your daily routine, take a different route to the supermarket or do things with your non-dominant hand.
- ~ Try something new. Take that class you’ve thought about for years. Meet new people. Challenge yourself to do that thing that’s intrigued and scared you.
- ~ Ask others how they see you. We often hold over outdated beliefs about ourselves from earlier in our lives. Despite our achievements, that voice that says we’re not good enough may continue to run through our thoughts, so that we still feel a lack of confidence or self-esteem. People outside ourselves, who aren’t privy to our critical inner voice, can sometimes see our growth and new strengths better than we can.
- ~ Do something where the outcome is unpredictable. Try a new job or career. Ask someone out on a date. Try an art form or a sport you’ve never tried before. Give yourself permission to not be great at it.

Our brain receives billions of bits of stimuli every day. We couldn’t possibly consciously process it all, so our filters select where our attention goes. Have you noticed that when you wake up to something, you begin to see it everywhere? It’s like the pregnant woman who suddenly notices all the pregnant women around her.

By changing our filters and our expectations, we open ourselves to new possibilities. We begin to see things that may have been right in front of us before, but we hadn’t noticed. By reinforcing new belief systems and attitudes with new actions and habits, we can create new neuronal pathways and make those our paths of least resistance. By doing this, I’ve seen many of my formerly stuck clients tap into old dreams that got buried or new possibilities they hadn’t allowed themselves to think of before.

Whatever the “facts” of your world are telling you, change is always possible. It’s your birthright to pursue your dreams, and people are achieving their dreams every day, no matter what the conditions in the world. For Americans, “the pursuit of happiness” is even written into our Declaration of Independence. Hold the vision for what’s possible, and don’t let anyone talk you out of it.

We live in an incredible world filled with infinite possibilities. Why not claim your share!

Action Challenge

Pick an area where you've felt stuck. How can you approach it differently? Brainstorm ideas with a friend. Challenge yourself to try some of your ideas. Let it be fun!

Wise Words

"Think 'impossible' and dreams get discarded, projects get abandoned, and hope for wellness is torpedoed. But let someone yell the words 'It's possible,' and resources we hadn't been aware of come rushing in to assist us in our quest. I believe we are all potentially brilliant and creative – but only if we believe it, only if we have an attitude of positive expectancy toward our ideas, and only if we act on them." ~ Greg Anderson, *The 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness*

"Begin each day with the premise that anything's possible." ~ Paul & Sarah Edwards, *The Practical Dreamer's Handbook*

"Our thoughts are not merely reactions to events; they change what ensues." ~ Martin E.P. Seligman, PhD, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*

"Spend enough time around success and failure, and you learn a reverence for possibility." ~ Dale Dauten

"I dwell in possibility." ~ Emily Dickinson

Bookshelf



The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life ...
Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander



The Art of the Possible: The Path from Perfectionism to Balance and Freedom ... Alexandra Stoddard



Infinite Possibilities: The Art of Living Your Dreams ... Mike Dooley



Creating Affluence: The A-to-Z Steps to a Richer Life ... Deepak Chopra



Making Hope Happen: A Workbook for Turning Possibilities into Reality ... Diane McDermott, PhD and C. R. Snyder, PhD



Own Your Greatness: A Guide to Creating a Life with Boundless Possibilities ... Nora Lapitan



New Beginnings: A Notebook of Infinite Possibilities ... Running Press



Gifts for the Soul: A Guided Journey of Discovery, Transformation and Infinite Possibilities ... Dawn E. Clark

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Issue 74

Too Much, Too Fast

For much of our careers, it seems like we're pushing and hoping for greater successes. We become used to putting out a lot of effort for a lot less return than we hoped. But every once in awhile, our hard work pays off, and the universe brings us a gushing wave of success – new jobs, new opportunities, new relationships, new recognition. Even though it's what we've been dreaming of, when it really happens, it can be overwhelming and throw us off balance.

While this is what my friend Maria calls a "good problem," it's still something you need to manage. When a new abundance rolls into your life, it can tax you physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. After dealing with scarcity and struggle, perhaps for a long time, you find yourself faced with a new way of being.

You may want to grab onto every opportunity that comes your way, for fear that the deluge will end. You may find yourself with increased demands and responsibility. You may need to expand your self-image to see yourself in your new role. You may have to rework your schedule, or even your lifestyle. You may find yourself interacting with people in a different way, or with a whole new group of people.

When a lot of new success comes your way quickly, the first thing to do is to pause. Even if you're under pressure, there's value in taking time to regain your balance, to step back and get perspective and clarity. Imagine you suddenly get called to go on a trip and need to pack a suitcase. If you hurriedly toss things in, you'll get a lot less in, and when you arrive at your destination, you'll have to deal with the chaos. If you take the time to pack things in an organized way, it will be more manageable, and you're a lot less likely to forget something important. In the same way, when you try to haphazardly pack things into your life, you end up creating more chaos, instead of the order and sanity you want.

When you're faced with a lot of options, it's also important to make choices. If you've been through a dry spell, you may feel compelled to take every opportunity that comes your way. To continue the travel metaphor, when I go to a new city, I want to take in everything that city has to offer. But if I try to do that, I wear myself out racing from place to place and don't really enjoy any of it. Instead, I pick out the sights that are most important to me and schedule a reasonable amount of time to enjoy each one. That way, I have a richer experience, rather than just checking things off a list.

In the same way, you want to choose from among the opportunities that come your way. To make good choices, it helps to know your priorities – your life goals, values and needs. If you do this in advance, and preferably on an ongoing basis, when the deluge comes, you'll have some parameters to guide you in making the best choices. You'll have a clearer idea of which opportunities to grab onto now, which ones to put on the back burner and which to pass up. While you may cringe a bit at letting anything go, remember that by doing this, you'll have a deeper experience with the options you choose to keep, and you won't run yourself ragged trying to do it all.

It's also important to take extra-special care of yourself. With many new opportunities, you may need to put in more hours to get everything done. You may be drawing on new or little-used parts of yourself that you're still developing. You may feel stretched mentally and emotionally keeping up with the demands. Make sure you get adequate rest, and take time for fun and relaxation. Even if your new abundance is fun, it's helpful to step away from it briefly to allow your system to rest and recuperate.

Finally, build a good support system that will be there for you when your good fortune hits. It can be a great pressure valve to have a friend, family member or coach to whom you can express your overwhelm, as well as your excitement, and get support and ideas on how to cope with it. You may also need to get help with the daily tasks of your life, to free you up to give attention to your new opportunities. See if family members can pick up the slack, or investigate getting professional help.

When opportunities strike, revel in your good fortune. Go to the eye of the storm to center yourself and gain perspective, so that you can move forward in a calm, thoughtful way. Make wise choices, put new plans in place, then settle into the journey. Enjoy and celebrate every step of the way, not just when you reach your destination. You've earned it!

Action Challenge

Prepare for success by getting clear on your values and life goals. What would you regret not accomplishing during your lifetime? What values and principles guide your actions and choices? Sit down and list your values and goals. Revisit them from time to time to remind yourself what's most important to you.

Wise Words

"What brings us out of comfort and fear is imagination – creativity. Those who truly love danger aren't extreme athletes, triathlons, or mountaineers. Creative people plunge into disaster every time they do something new. Because every time they try something new, they risk everything that's familiar to them. They have to confront their incompetence and stupidity, feelings that all of us carefully avoid. That's the journey of power and danger." ~ John Tarrant

"Most people feel like a fraud when they assume a new role. Unaware that this is a normal experience, they fear being exposed. Such fear inhibits spontaneous creativity and undermines your ability to work at optimal speed. Accept that feeling, and unlock your creative responses to change." ~ Ronit Herzfeld

"Whether you are concerned about managing your work or your personal life or your leisure, success and satisfaction will depend on your inner thoughts. Your inner thoughts will help to determine your outer life ... and your inner life will affect how you react to your experiences." ~ Gillian Butler, PhD, Nick Grey, DClInPsych and Tony Hope, MD, *Managing Your Mind: The Mental Fitness Guide*

"Pray that success will not come any faster than you are able to endure it." ~ Elbert Hubbard

Bookshelf



Get What You Want! ... Patricia Fripp



Create Your Own Luck: 8 Principles of Attracting Good Fortune in Life, Love, and Work ... Azriela Jaffe



Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work ... John C. Maxwell



Overcoming Overwhelm: Dismantling Your Stress from the Inside Out ... Dr. Samantha Brody



The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You ... Elaine N. Aron, PhD



Outrageous Good Fortune: A Memoir by Michael Burke



The Secret to Attracting Luck: 50 Ways to Manifest Abundance and Good Fortune ... Richard Webster



Tao Paths to Good Fortune ... Solala Towler



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 75

I'm Worth It!: Taking a Stand for Who You Are

One of the questions that often comes up with coaching clients is, How can I become who I want to be when I don't believe I am that person? For example, they may be affirming, "I am a strong and powerful person," but in "real life," they're wimping out about standing up to a bullying coworker. They may know that that strong, powerful person is lurking inside them, but they don't know how to let it out.

In the world of personal development, when we learn a new idea, we learn it conceptually at first. We understand it intellectually, but we don't really "get" it. An inspiring teacher may tell us that we're lovable and deserve success and abundance, but our past experiences and our feelings about ourselves may tell us otherwise. How do we bridge that gap?

In order to live the new concept, it has to seep down into our gut, so that it becomes real for us. In some cases, that happens instantly, in an "aha" moment. But most often, it takes time living with the new concept and applying it, tentatively at first and then with greater confidence. After awhile, it becomes a natural part of us.

One way to internalize a new concept is to take a stand that that's who you are, and then act "as if." For example, a number of years ago, I had a woman friend and a boyfriend, both of whom I cared about, who treated me indifferently. They would accept my calls, but wouldn't initiate a call or call me back. After awhile, I got the message and ended both relationships, but it left my self-esteem in tatters. I made a promise to myself that I would never again get into a relationship, no matter how much I cared about the person, where there wasn't a balance of give and take. That promise has been tested many times over, but I now have people in my life who value my friendship and are happy to reciprocate. And my self-esteem is intact.

Spiritual teacher Caroline Myss reminds us that no one is going to go out of their way to empower you. It's something you have to do for yourself. We may feel that we need to wait for others to tell us who we are, but in truth, who we are comes from inside. Outside validation is merely a reflection of that and the icing on the cake.

So, when you're faced with a dilemma, ask yourself, What choice would I make if I really valued myself? If I deserved the best? What would the person I most admire do? And then make that choice. Take a stand that you are that valued person and act on it.

Reinforce your new stand with new self-talk. The voice in our head is like running an affirmation tape 24/7. Would you play a tape that told you that you were weak, incompetent, stupid and worthless? Would you say that to someone you valued? I think not. But that's exactly what you're doing when you keep saying those things to yourself. Work with affirmations and thought-stopping to put your mind-tape on a more positive track.

This may be scary at first. You may be afraid of losing people – and in truth, you may. But do you want the kind of friends who would shatter your self-esteem? Don't you know in your heart that you deserve better, even if you find it hard to believe or reinforce just yet?

Your worth is a given. It's one of your human gifts, and there's nothing you have to do to earn it. Take a stand for that, and then allow your self-esteem and self-image to rise up to meet it. As you take a stand for who you know in your heart you are, the universe will begin to shift around you, and your new truth will be validated. My only warning: don't be discouraged if it doesn't happen right away. Stick with it unflinchingly, and eventually, you will see results.

Action Challenge

Where in your life do you feel you need to stand up for who you are? What stand would you like to take? What action will you take to support that stand?

Wise Words

"It's a funny thing about life; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it." ~ Somerset Maugham

"The feeling of being valuable – 'I am a valuable person' – is essential to mental health and is a cornerstone of self-discipline ... because when one considers oneself valuable, one will take care of oneself in all ways that are necessary. Self-discipline is self-caring." ~ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*

"We cannot achieve more in life than what we believe in our heart of hearts we deserve to have." ~ James R. Ball, *Soar ... If You Dare*

"The principles you live by create the world you live in; if you change the principles you live by, you will change your world." ~ Blaine Lee, *The Power Principle: Influence with Honor*

Bookshelf



Empowerment: The Art of Creating Your Life as You Want It ... David Gershon and Gail Straub



Your Heart's Desire: Instructions for Creating the Life You Really Want ... Sonia Choquette



The Three Keys to Self-Empowerment ... Stuart Wilde



Creative Visualization: Use the Power of Your Imagination to Create What You Want in Your Life ... Shakti Gawain



The Mythology of Self Worth: Using Reason to Dispel the Fallacies That Trigger Needless Anxiety, Depression and Anger ... Richard L Franklin



Maximum Self-Esteem: The Handbook for Reclaiming Your Sense of Self-Worth ... Jerry Minchinton



Journey to Empowerment ... Maria D. Dowd



The Courage to Be Yourself: An Updated Guide to Emotional Strength and Self-Esteem ... Sue Patton Thoele



Soar ... If You Dare: Use Your Secret Powers For Success To Make Your Dreams Come True ... James R. Ball



Stand Up For Your Life: A Practical Step-by-Step Plan to Build Inner Confidence and Personal Power ... Cheryl Richardson

Issue 76

It's Spring ... Let's Celebrate!

I don't know about you, but for me, when spring comes, I feel my spirits lift. It's not that I get depressed in winter – nothing that extreme – but in spring, there comes a lightness and openness that invites new possibility. The spring equinox proclaims a rebirth of life after the fallow time of winter, a time of fertility and planting new seeds. There's an urge to celebrate.

We can use this time to allow ourselves to dream. We can create new beginnings and new projects, and celebrate those new successes that will be coming to fruition in the future.

Wait a minute ... celebrate successes that haven't even happened yet? Why would you do that??

When you're beginning something new, of course, you don't know what the outcome will be. But you do have a choice on how you will approach it. You can choose to go in with doubt and trepidation, or you can begin with excitement and positive anticipation. You can hold an attitude that whatever the outcome, it will be a win for you.

Quantum physics has shown that the expectation of the experimenter affects the experiment. If you've seen the film, *What the Bleep Do We Know!?*, you've learned that our thoughts and feelings affect what goes on around us, and certainly our perception of those events. When you visualize a successful outcome and start your project with joy and positive expectation, that will impact the results you get. Same thing if you have a negative expectation.

If that's too way out for you, let me make it more concrete. Let's say two equally talented artists have just finished a series of paintings and approach a gallery owner about having a show. Joe goes in with an air of confidence, shows his work and speaks enthusiastically about his vision. Sally, on the other hand, is timid and apologetic; the gallery owner feels uneasy around her and even begins to doubt the quality of the work. Who do you think is more likely to get a showing?

When we get excited about our projects, we naturally enroll other people. We feel more confident, and perhaps even do better work. If we're working with others, we can lift them up, too, with our positive attitude. While we still may fail to reach our objective, we can learn from the experience, redirect our efforts, renew our commitment and celebrate the next future success.

Your celebration can take any form you want. You might celebrate with a party, a dinner or a trip to a theme park. You may buy yourself that special something you've been wanting. You can adopt a ritual from your spiritual

or religious tradition, such as lighting a candle, offering a prayer or sharing your vision with supportive people who will add their positive energy to yours.

Your celebration doesn't have to be an outward one. If you feel uncomfortable announcing your success "prematurely" to your family and friends, then do it privately. You might do a visualization where you create a sacred space and invite in people who support you, spiritual figures that are important to you and anyone else you'd like to be there. You might even include one of your heroes, someone who inspires you.

Imagine a ritual or party where you commemorate your future success. Give thanks – the energy of gratitude attracts more of what you're grateful for. Add whatever other features you need to have it feel complete for you. Then, carry that feeling into the project with you. Revisit the meditation as often as you want, to renew that feeling.

If you truly don't believe you can succeed and celebrating feels inauthentic to you, then go back and look at what's getting in the way. Create a new strategy that feels doable to you and that you can get behind with enthusiasm. That might mean changing some aspects of your project or scaling it up or down to a size that feels right to you. If you still can't buy into it, I would recommend that you pick up one of many inspirational books or films that tell how others overcame tremendous odds to become successful. If they can do it, so can you.

So, you don't have to have achieved your success to celebrate. Use the uplifting energy of spring. Start your new project with the joy of celebration, and ride that wave through to a positive outcome, whatever that may be!

Action Challenge

What project are you facing with fear or dread? How can you frame it in a positive way and then approach it with an attitude of celebration?

Wise Words

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success." ~ Albert Schweitzer

"How we see and hold the full range of our experiences in our minds and in our hearts makes an enormous difference in the quality of this journey we are on, and what it means to us. It can influence where we go, what happens, what we learn, and how we feel along the way." ~ Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Everyday Blessings*

"Today a new sun rises for me; everything lives, everything is animated, everything seems to speak to me of my passion, everything invites me to cherish it." ~ Anne de Lenclos

"For the wise man, every day is a festival." ~ Plutarch

Bookshelf



Celebrate! ... Sheila Lukins



Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You ... Cynthia Kersey



Ready, Set, Goal!: Choose Your Goals, Stay Motivated, Celebrate Your Success ... Wendy Buckingham



Healing Celebrations: Miraculous Recoveries Through Ancient Scriptures, Natural Medicine & Modern Science ... Dr. Leonard G. Horowitz



Family Celebrations: Poems, Toasts and Traditions For Every Occasion ... June Cotner and Nancy Tupper Ling



Celebrations Around the World: A Multicultural Handbook ... Carole S. Angell



What the Bleep Do We Know!? (DVD)



Rudy (DVD)

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Issue 77

When People Don't Get You

Let's face it. Original, creative people are different. We have a unique vision for our work and for our lives. What's disheartening is that often, the people around us don't have a clue about what we're up to. When we let them know what we're thinking and planning, we get strange or concerned looks. They may even try to talk us out of it, citing all the obstacles we're likely to encounter.

When you get a new idea for something you'd like to do, it's not unusual for it not to be understood by the people closest to you. Creative people are, by nature, innovative; and innovation, while necessary and desirable, is not readily accepted at first. Cutting edge artists like Jackson Pollock, or pioneers in any art or science, break the mold. Until their genius is recognized, they often face opposition.

It's not just in the arts. If you're pursuing a nontraditional career path or find yourself in a relationship with someone outside your social circle, you may not get a lot of support. Your new choice may be sending you into a new life, and the people currently in your life may fear losing you. They may not understand why you would put yourself at risk. Or they may have had a similar idea themselves and rejected it, for fear of taking such a risk, and you're an uncomfortable reminder of what they thrust aside.

The easy way out for us would be to join the others and forget our dreams. The problem is, we can't. There's something in us that compels us to follow our calling, whether it be a creative vision or new career or life path. If we don't listen, we suffer physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

But following our vision also carries a price. It can challenge us in many ways. We may feel like an alien in our hometown. We may feel isolated, not knowing where to turn or who to turn to. We may not know how to get where we want to go and feel confused and overwhelmed.

But all is not lost. There are 3 things we can acquire to help us follow through on our dreams: a map for our journey, companions along the way and the courage to hold our vision.

The tricky part about finding a map is that each person's journey is different. But we can get useful guidance from a coach or mentor who's traveled their own path and can point us in the right direction and help us anticipate and navigate the obstacles. They can offer us hope and optimism. We can also take classes and read books that will help show us the way, not to mention the plethora of information we can track down on the Internet.

Once we get on the road, we'll meet fellow travelers. The best companions are other people who share your vision, or a similar one. Writing groups are a common way of finding this. You can find a local or virtual group, or create one of your own. Some people prefer a support group with various types of artists, so that there's less direct competition and more enthusiasm in supporting each other's successes. If you're moving into a new career, you're more likely to find support from the people you're meeting on that road, rather than the ones you're leaving behind. Go to professional meetings or take classes where you can connect with such people.

The courage to hold your vision will come from seeing possibility, even if it's never been done before in quite the same way. Along with the support of your kindred spirits, this may come from gathering information, creating a strategy that excites you and taking steps. As you connect with people, find the ones who are positive and optimistic. Also, utilize whatever supports you personally, such as a spiritual group or practice, or even going to the gym or doing yoga to stay in a good state of body and mind.

One last piece of advice: When you get a new idea, be selective about who you share it with. A new creation is like a delicate seedling; you don't want anyone trampling on it. It may feel strange withholding such information from your loved ones, but many an idea with great potential has been abandoned due to negative input when it was still fragile.

Oh, one more thing: I suggest that you not take out your frustration on those around you who don't get you. If they haven't experienced it themselves, they may not be capable of understanding what you're going through. If a quantum physicist began talking to you about superstring theory, you'd probably have no idea what they were talking about, and you might even think they were a little nuts. Remember that, be compassionate with those who don't get you, and don't judge the choices that they make. At the same time, don't let them stop you.

Give value to your dreams and creative ideas. You may feel your dreams are inconsequential, but they're not. If you've been given an idea or an opportunity, there's some reason for it that you may not be able to see yet. Each of us has the right and the privilege to follow our hearts and go where they lead us.

Our creations can take on a life of their own, and we have no idea where they will lead or who they will impact. They can take us into some unfamiliar territory, and we may feel alone in the wilderness for awhile. Have faith that you'll find new ideas and new traveling companions along the way. It will be challenging, but it's well worth it. The joy and excitement of seeing your

dreams come to fruition will sustain your hope and create new possibility for future creations and opportunities.

Action Challenge

Have you felt alone with your creative idea or new life path? Where can you find like-minded people who will understand your vision and support you in following through? Find at least 3 organizations, groups or individuals, and make contact with them.

Wise Words


"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great." ~ Mark Twain


"We need people in our lives with whom we can be as open as possible. To have real conversation with people may seem like such a simple, obvious suggestion, but it involves courage and risk." ~ Thomas Moore, PhD


"We don't always know what makes us happy. We know, instead, what we think should. We are baffled and confused when our attempts at happiness fail... We are mute when it comes to naming accurately our own preferences, delights, gifts, talents. The voice of our original self is often muffled, overwhelmed, even strangled, by the voices of other people's expectations. The tongue of the original self is the language of the heart." ~ Julie Cameron, *The Vein of Gold: A Journey to Your Creative Heart*


"Self-trust is the first secret of success." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf

 *Stand Up for Your Life: A Practical Step-by-Step Plan to Build Inner Confidence and Personal Power ...* Cheryl Richardson

 *Know Your Truth, Speak Your Truth, Live Your Truth ...* Eileen R. Hannegan, MS

 *True Coming of Age: A Dynamic Process That Leads to Emotional Stability, Spiritual Growth, and Meaningful Relationships ...* John T. Chirban, PhD, ThD

 *Where Do I Go From Here?: An Inspirational Guide To Making Authentic Career and Life Choices ...* Dr. Kenneth C. Ruge



The Perfect Wrong Note: Learning to Trust Your Musical Self ...
William Westney



Coming Home: The Return to True Self ... Martia Nelson



Point Zero: Creativity Without Limits ... Michele Cassou



*Fearless Creating: A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting and Completing
Your Work of Art ...* Eric Maisel, PhD

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Issue 78

What Inspires You?

Inspiration is a beautiful thing. When I feel down or anxious or creatively stuck, it feels great to put on an uplifting piece of music, listen to an encouraging motivational tape or read an empowering book.

I put the question out to the subscribers of this newsletter: What inspires you? The responses I received follow below. I invite you to explore these resources and see which ones would be inspiring to you.

But first, here are some samples from *my* inspiration “toolkit” ...

SONGS:



Elton John: “All That I’m Allowed” (from *Peachtree Road* album)



Patti Labelle: “Don’t Block the Blessings” (from *Flame*)



Carly Simon: “Life Is Eternal” (from *Have You Seen Me Lately*)



Expose: As Long As I Can Dream (from *Expose*)



Kenny Loggins: “Conviction of the Heart” (from *Leap of Faith*)



Bette Midler: “Wind Beneath My Wings” (from the movie *Beaches*)

MOTIVATIONAL TAPES/CDS BY ...



Louise Hay, such as: *Subliminal Affirmations for Positive Self-Esteem*



Marianne Williamson, such as: *Letting Go and Becoming*



Wayne Dyer, such as: *The Wayne Dyer CD Collection*

MOVIES:



Rudy, about an underdog who refuses to be deterred from striving for his dream



Whale Rider, about a girl who relentlessly pursues her destiny

BOOKS:



Unstoppable Women by Cynthia Kersey
(See Issue 79 for an interview with Cynthia!)



The Art of Possibility by Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander

And finally, my favorite **QUOTE**:

"Life is either a great adventure or nothing." ~ ~ Helen Keller



The Story of My Life by Helen Keller

And now to you ... What inspires you?

FROM DAVID M. CEJA ...

I thoroughly enjoy reading your newsletter. It makes me feel happy. (Thank you, David!)

Favorite quotes:

"People are like stained glass windows: they sparkle and shine when the sun's out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is light within." ~ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross

"Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success." ~ Albert Schweitzer



Reverence for Life: The Words of Albert Schweitzer

FROM DEBBIE G. ...

Being outside – in my garden, or the mountains, on warm and sunny days.

FROM MICHELLE LEWIS ...

One song that has been on my list for a long time comes to mind: "Closer to Fine" by the Indigo Girls. The lyrics are great.



From *Retrospective* by the Indigo Girls



Another song I find inspiring: "Beautiful Day" by U2

FROM BARBARA WALDBILLIG ...

Because I am exceedingly blessed in my life with terrific family and good friends, they provide many opportunities to explore my creative life. In addition, my enjoyment of classical music, especially Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert, makes that exploration special.



25 Beethoven Favorites



25 Mozart Favorites



Schubert: 8 Symphonies

There are special people:



Diane Ackerman and her book *Deep Play* (“a state of unselfconscious engagement with our surroundings” – her quote) and exploration of enchantment in our daily lives.

Georgia O’Keeffe, one of America’s greatest painters – viewing her flowing abstracts and her sensuous landscapes of lakes, mountains and her view of the sky is inspirational and gives endless pleasure.



Georgia O’Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place by Barbara Buhler Lynes, Lesley Poling-Kempes, Frederick W. Turner

FROM INARAE USSACK ...

Reading about other successful creative people is inspiring to me – being able to see their studios, learn about difficulties they have overcome and hearing about methods they use in their endeavors. For me, imagination and creativity can be infectious.

FROM CATALINA DIAZ ...

A favorite quote:

“Peace is not a relationship of nations. It is a condition of mind brought about by serenity of soul. Peace is not merely the absence of war. It is also a state of mind. Lasting Peace can come only to peaceful people.” ~ Jawaharlal Nehru



The Essential Writings of Jawaharlal Nehru



A favorite movie: *It’s a Wonderful Life*

FROM LYNN O. ...

In January this year, I was told that I had early stage breast cancer. I was scared to death and launched into a major self-research campaign.

What ultimately helped my “downs” was turning to God in prayer and using positive thinking and visualization. I watched a “healing” videotape by an herbalist [Dr. Schultze – see below] that really struck home. He said that every cell in our bodies contains a neuropeptide, and that means that every cell receives THOUGHTS from our brains – both good and bad thoughts – and acts according to that positive or negative thought. We can literally THINK ourselves WELL or SICK!

I also made other proactive changes: I changed my diet drastically; hired a Naturopath physician to get me started on supplementation; and reduced my workload, which was far too stressful.

After all the pathology results came back from my surgery, I did not have to take chemotherapy, and was told that I could consider myself “cured”! I continue to eat well, live well and think positively and thank God for allowing me to go through this illness in order to become a better person.



A book I recommend is *The Power of Intention* by Wayne Dyer ...



... and a tape set I recommend is *Natural Healing Crusade* by Dr. Richard Schulze. [now on YouTube]

FROM SUSAN JOHNSON ...

- ~ A walk on the beach with my dogs! (my best way to unblock)
- ~ A quote: “If you follow your heart, the only person you need approval from is yourself.” ~ Eva Gregory



The Feel Good Guide To Prosperity by Eva Gregory



A SheDaisy song, “Don’t Worry ‘Bout A Thing,” from the album *Sweet Right Here*



A Keith Urban song, “Who Wouldn’t Want to Be Me,” from the album *Golden Road*

- ~ My kudos file – every time someone sends me an email with a great response or feedback on me or my work, I put it in my kudos file. Then, on gloomy days, I can scroll through and read through and remember how great I am!

- ~ Talking to my best friend
- ~ Bubble baths

FROM NICOLE LERARIO ...

What makes me feel creative/strong/inspired:

- ~ Creating new tea blends
- ~ Wearing red
- ~ Stopping and listening to street musicians play
- ~ Writing (actual, handwritten) letters
- ~ Talking to my inspirational companions

FROM STEVE SEARS ...

- ~ Listening to certain Johnny Mathis songs – “The Touch of Your Lips,” “Poinciana,” “Drifting” and “I Thought of You Last Night” – as I drive to the New Jersey shore. It brings back memories of when my wife and I first dated.



Johnny Mathis Gold: A 50th Anniversary Collection



This Is Love/Ole by Johnny Mathis

- ~ The Delaware Bay and the tiny shores that its soft waters lap against
- ~ Dunes and dune grasses
- ~ Bookstores, where the words and wisdom of great minds surround me as I perfect my craft
- ~ A good cafe with good food, coffee and desserts
- ~ Travel anywhere, especially to a quiet countryside where nothing but grass, birds and monarchs exist
- ~ Meeting and learning about others
- ~ Free time with my family
- ~ My 14-year-old daughter goes to a private academy that challenges the students. When I saw her making such great strides, I decided I wanted to make strides myself.

FROM KRISTIN WEAVER ...

- ~ Prayer – always



The song, “Stardust We Are,” by The Flower Kings

- ~ Lyrics (in particular):
"Stardust we are / See how we shine.
Stardust we are / Close to divine."
- ~ The love of family and friends



I hope, now that you've read of other people's sources of inspiration, that you'll be inspired to add a few to your own inspiration toolkit!

Action Challenge

Everyone could use a little inspiration. This week, share your favorite sources of inspiration with at least 3 people.

Wise Words

"When inspiration does not come to me, I go halfway to meet it." ~ Sigmund Freud

"If we are to trust the reports of creative thinkers and artists, congenial surroundings are often the source of inspiration and creativity. They often echo Franz Liszt's words, which he wrote on romantic Lake Como: 'I feel that the various features of Nature around me ... provoke an emotional reaction in the depth of my soul, which I have tried to transcribe in music.'" ~ Manfred Eigen

"Whatever your discipline, become a student of excellence in all things. Take every opportunity to observe people who manifest the qualities of mastery. These models of excellence will inspire you and guide you toward the fulfillment of your highest potential." ~ Tony Buzan

"There never was a great soul that did not have some divine inspiration." ~ Marcus T. Cicero

Bookshelf

See the article above for lots of recommendations.

Issue 79

Unstoppable: An Interview with Cynthia Kersey

Cynthia Kersey wears many hats. The author of the new book, *Unstoppable Women: Achieve Any Breakthrough Goal in 30 Days*, is also a coach, speaker, consultant and expert in the field of human potential. As CEO of Unstoppable Enterprises, she and her company deliver products and services to help people improve performance, achieve success and enhance the quality of their lives.

I was excited to discover that Cynthia and her work embody what I love to teach myself: to find your passion and then pursue it unstoppably. She is all about encouraging people to find the courage to respond to their callings by discovering role models who have succeeded against all odds. Reading the inspiring stories in *Unstoppable Women* left me feeling empowered and moved to tears by the tenacity of these amazing women.

(Men: The principles in this book apply just as much to you! If you feel a little left out, pick up a copy of Cynthia's first book, *Unstoppable*, for stories about unstoppable men.)

I had the pleasure of interviewing Cynthia about her book and her work ...

SHARON GOOD: Cynthia, very often, authors and teachers speak about a challenge that they've overcome themselves or something that's personally meaningful to them. How did you come to the "unstoppable" concept?

CYNTHIA KERSEY: That's a very insightful question. I was raised in the Midwest by parents who weren't risk-takers. I had these big dreams and goals, and my mother said, "Be realistic." So, I followed my mother's path, as a secretary, and I got fired from my first job and was demoted from my second job. So, obviously, following somebody else's path didn't work for me.

So, I decided to try a career a little less detail-oriented, and I got hired at Sprint Communications. I started as a telemarketer and worked my way up to become a national account manager. While working a full-time job, I went back to school, and I got my degree and became a student of what enables people to be unstoppable. I'd always read stories about people who were unstoppable – people like Disney, who was on the verge of bankruptcy every 18 months for 30 years – and those people were an inspiration to me.

After a successful ten-year career at Sprint, I decided that I wanted to write a book about people who'd been unstoppable and what I had learned through all those years of following their examples. Now understand, I'd

never written anything more than a college term paper, so I had no logical reason to think I could even write a book, much less get it published, much less make a living doing it.

SG: So, there was always some sense in you that there was a greater purpose, or something that you needed to be doing that was not connected to your background or your upbringing or what people thought you *should* do.

CK: I learned at a very young age that Cynthia means “reflector of light.” As I got really clear about my purpose – which is to encourage others to believe in themselves more deeply and become all that God intended them to be – I started to identify what kinds of projects would be in keeping with that kind of purpose. Writing a book was what I came up with, because I’ve always loved stories about unstoppable people.

Once I got clear on what my purpose was, and then figured out what would be consistent with my passion and what I was good at, I quit my job, cashed in my entire life savings, downsized my life, sold the big house and leased one half the size, so that I could be unstoppable in creating something that was really meaningful for me.

SG: Wow, that took guts!

CK: Yes, it did. It’s like, burn all the bridges behind you, so that you just have to move forward.

SG: And you made it work. In *Unstoppable Women*, you provide a structure to “Achieve Any Breakthrough Goal in 30 Days” (the subtitle of the book). Is structure really important in achieving your goals?

CK: Absolutely. People try to make too many changes at once, and they get overwhelmed and they quit. So, what I found is that the best way to create change in your life – and research supports this – is that you do it one step at a time. And a structure is critical to insure that you take your one step, because a lot of people know *what* to do, but they don’t get it into the schedule and they don’t have accountability.

So, in *Unstoppable Women*, we talk about breaking it down into that one step, planning it into your Create Your Day Planner, having a partner that holds you accountable, and all of these structures that support you in honoring your word to yourself.

SG: I love the idea of taking small steps. We have this myth that the people who are successful take these huge leaps – the proverbial “overnight success” – and in truth, it’s really a step-by-step process.

CK: Yes, it is. One of the important components of *Unstoppable Women* is to stop the giving-up cycle, and people quit when they take on too much. They get overwhelmed, they get discouraged, and then they quit, and it significantly damages their self-esteem.

Even the busiest woman has the time to take a single step. And in doing so, it helps build her self-esteem, it helps build her confidence, and it creates a foundation that will enable her to create *lasting* change in her life.

SG: You use the term “success imprinting.” What is that?

CK: Every single time you do something that you thought was difficult – for example, if you’ve never run before in your life and you do your first 5K – that sends a success imprint to your brain that you could do it again, and the next time, it’ll be easier. Each time you deal with a difficult customer or you finish a project that you thought was difficult, you’re creating a success imprint.

And conversely, we have “failure imprints,” so each time we quit, each time we give up, each time we don’t honor our word to ourself, we send a failure imprint to our psyche that says we’re not good enough, we’re not worthy, we can’t make the change we want.

And what’s true is that there’s enough evidence in our life to support that we’re really disciplined *or* that we’re a big flake. We’ve all been both. So, we have to draw on our success imprints, on what’s really possible for our lives, and have that move us forward, as opposed to our failure imprints.

SG: That leads into another issue that you talk about: how we interpret things. We can take the same situation and interpret it in different ways.

CK: I think it’s *all* about how we interpret things that happen in our lives. So, let’s say that you want to get on an eating plan and lose 10 pounds. I have this process called “raising your unstoppable quotient,” based on Dr. Albert Ellis’s “A-B-C” model. An ADVERSITY is anything that knocks the wind out of your sails, like, “I went off my eating plan and ate buffalo wings and nachos.” The next step is the BELIEF: How do I interpret the Adversity? What do I make that mean?

We have 2 voices: a voice of faith and a voice of fear. If we’re listening to our voice of fear, we might interpret that: “I blew it again, I’m never going to lose weight, I’m so undisciplined, why bother?” And the result of that Belief, the CONSEQUENCE, is that I’m going to quit. And I might as well go eat some Haagen-Dazs while I’m at it.

And so, what we need to do is DISPUTE the Belief, dispute the meaning that we attach to it that made us stop. Because again, we can come up with

beliefs that empower us or stop us. So, you go back to that Belief and you say, "Okay, how can I look at this in a different way that's more empowering and will keep me energized? It's one day, it's one meal. I've already been doing this for a week. I'm on track. Just get back with the program." And by disputing it, the final result is ENERGIZATION: I continue to move forward.

I use this, Sharon, constantly, every single day. Whenever I feel sad or I feel disappointed, I'll go back to, "What happened, and what am I making something mean? How am I interpreting that?" And as soon as I can give it a different interpretation, a more empowering interpretation, I'm energized and continue to move forward.

SG: That's a great model to work with. You use a lot of role modeling in the book, just incredible stories of these amazing women who overcame obstacles that I couldn't even imagine. I find that so empowering, because I feel like, if they can do it, I have these little, pitiful obstacles in my life compared to what they've done.

CK: Exactly.

SG: But I also come across some people who look at these models and say, "Well, they were stronger than me, or they were tougher." They put those people in another category and say, "They can do that, but I can't." What would you say to people like that?

CK: Well, first off, whenever any conversation is going on in your mind like that, that's your voice of fear talking to you. If you want your life to look different, it's critical that you enable new beliefs that will allow you to move forward, to give you a way to look at things differently. Our beliefs drive our behavior, and if you believe that you don't have what it takes, or your circumstances are holding you back, nothing is going to change.

Secondly, I've interviewed enough unstoppable people over the last 10 years to say unequivocally that unstoppable people get frustrated, disappointed, discouraged, and even have moments of depression, and yet they don't quit. So, it's not that they're so different. They just don't make it mean that, when they have difficulties, it's "game over." They don't make it mean, "I'm not good enough." They might think it just for a moment, but they'll dispute it, and they'll continue to move forward.

So, if anybody has any belief that holds them back – and we all do – we can change it through success imprints, looking at other times when we overcame things, when we showed up and we were disciplined, and then finding other models of possibility. If somebody else did it, it means it's possible that I can do it as well.

SG: It's like creating a collection of tools for yourself, so that when you face that setback or that adversity, you have tools that you can call on to deal with it, to pull yourself out of it.

CK: That is exactly it! So, instead of just wallowing in it, you go, "Hmmm, what just happened here?" You become aware. Awareness is a huge first step, and this book helps people get an awareness of what stops them, what beliefs come up for them, how they sabotage themselves.

I do a lot of coaching, as I noticed you do. People are now making a commitment to change all the things that come up for them, and I think what *Unstoppable Women* does is help give people the tools to look at things differently, so they can create a new result in their life.

SG: It's exciting when you see somebody who's been stopped before make that choice that they're not going to allow these things to stop them anymore, and they change the beliefs, and they deal with the adversity, and they start getting new results.

CK: It is exciting. You look at the story of Michele Hoskins. She was a small manufacturer in Chicago, making her great-great-great grandmother's honey cream syrup and distributing it locally. She got this dream to distribute this syrup on every table in 1700 Denny's restaurants nationwide. Michele was not *remotely* prepared to manufacture and distribute her product nationwide, but she believed that after she got the contract, she'd figure out how to make it happen.

That belief drove her behavior. So, what did she do? Every Monday morning at 10:30, she picked up the phone, called Denny's corporate office and talked to anybody who would talk to her. For 2 years, she talked to receptionists, secretaries, diversity, marketing, and fulfillment, and they all promised to call her back. But no one did.

After 2 years of calling every week, Denny's restructured and got a new CEO. Of course, everybody knew about Michele; her reputation was all over the company. And the new CEO asked, "Why aren't we giving this woman an opportunity?" She ended up getting a \$3 million contract delivering her great-great-great grandmother's honey cream syrup, because she believed she could do it and she kept taking action.

SG: There's that persistence again, not quitting despite 2 years of rejection.

CK: Exactly.

SG: Toward the end of the book, you say, "You are now a different person than when you took your first step." People forget that in the process of

pursuing their goal or dream, they're going to grow, so they don't have to have it all in place at the beginning. They'll acquire what they need along the way.

CK: That's exactly it. Each day, when we get a new insight, when we gain new awareness, when we come up with different strategies, we're different. We can make decisions from where we are today, as opposed to the lies that we told ourselves 30 days ago.

SG: Or even make decisions based on who we know we're becoming. It's not about having it all together before you make a move, but looking at the person you're going to be in another 30 days, having faced those challenges.

CK: Definitely. That's really where we want to go.

SG: That takes a little courage right there. You tell the story of Zoe Koplowitz, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis at age 25 and went on to win the title "slowest woman ever to complete the New York City Marathon." She said that "looking stupid is an inherent part of risk taking and goal achievement." That's something that stops people: the fear of looking foolish.

CK: No doubt.

SG: I loved your own story about when you climbed the pyramid, El Castillo, in Cancun, which is quite steep. You were okay going up, despite your fear of heights, but then, coming down, it was really scary, and you had to sit on your butt and go down a step at a time. That may look foolish, but to me, it was courageous.

CK: Absolutely. It's the paradox of success. What's courageous for me may not be courageous for you. But the point is that each time you put yourself out there and you stretch and you take that one step, you've created an unstoppable moment. It's being less attached to exactly what success looks like, and just continuing to be open, to do the work, and see how it unfolds. The triumphs, the success imprints, building our self-esteem is always about when we overcome something to get it. That's how we grow in our confidence. So, if we're not having to overcome, where's the learning? Where's the lesson? If you inherit some big trust fund, while you may look successful, you don't feel it, because you didn't have to do anything for it.

SG: That's a really good point. A myth that's being busted now is that you have to have self-esteem and courage *before* doing something, and you actually get it *by* doing something.

CK: You're absolutely right, Sharon. That is where it grows.

SG: People get scared, and they think that's a bad thing. But if you're not feeling at least a little fear, you're not challenging yourself enough.

CK: I agree. Whenever you try to make any change, you're going to be fearful. That can be good, because at least you notice that you're pushing yourself, and not making it mean, "I'm afraid, so I shouldn't do it." Fear is always going to be there, so don't make it mean, "I shouldn't do it, I'm not good enough." It doesn't mean any of that. It just means, "I'm feeling uncomfortable."

SG: And, as you said, it's by overcoming fear that you build your self-esteem and your courage.

Cynthia, thank you so much for sharing your unstoppable wisdom with us. Is there anything you would like to add?

CK: One thing ... I think the key to being an unstoppable woman is, help yourself, help somebody else.

To learn more about Cynthia, visit her websites: <https://cynthiakersey.com> and the Unstoppable Foundation: <https://unstoppablefoundation.org/>

Action Challenge

Cynthia Kersey's motto is, "I refuse to be around people who don't recognize my brilliance." This feels like an audacious statement to many of us. But having people around us who believe in us helps us to be unstoppable. Who are the people in your life who support your brilliance? Who doesn't? Choose one of the following actions:

- ~ Spend more time with the supportive people in your life. Where can you find more people who will recognize your brilliance? Perhaps an artists' support group?
- ~ Spend less time (or no time) with the people who undermine your dreams and your confidence. How can you "upgrade" the negative people in your life so that they will become more supportive? What requests do you need to make of them?

Wise Words

"It's not the events of our lives that shape us, but how we respond to those events." ~ Cynthia Kersey

"Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records." ~ William A. Ward

"Early on, I discovered that the road to success is paved with rejection. 'No' is not forever. No is only 'no' that day from that person. You can always go back to the same person tomorrow with new information. If you're committed and you're dedicated, you'll eventually find a way to turn that 'no' into a 'yes'." ~ Lyn St. James

"Far better is it to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy nor suffer much because they live in the gray twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat." ~ Theodore Roosevelt

Bookshelf


 *Unstoppable Women: Achieve Any Breakthrough Goal in 30 Days ...*
Cynthia Kersey

 *Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You ...* Cynthia Kersey

 *Overcoming Destructive Beliefs, Feelings, and Behaviors: New Directions for Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy ...* Albert Ellis

 *The Road to Success is Paved with Failure ...* Joey Green

 *Great Failures of the Extremely Successful: Mistakes, Adversity, Failure and Other Stepping Stones to Success ...* Steve Young

 *How They Achieved: Stories of Personal Achievement and Business Success ...* Lucinda Watson

 *The Best Year of Your Life: Dream It, Plan It, Live It ...* Debbie Ford

 *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life ...*
Martin E. P. Seligman, PhD

Issue 80

Who Am I?

One of the challenges we face as we grow is a shifting sense of who we are. As we learn new skills, take on new roles and become more experienced, the person we were becomes constricting, like a tight-fitting suit. We feel comfortable with our old self, but at the same time, we start chafing at the limitations. We want to become something more.

An outdated self-image can hinder us from moving forward into becoming the person we can be. If I see myself as the shy outcast I was as a child and suddenly find myself a famous actor or artist, being showered with attention, it can shake my foundations. I may feel like a fake and doubt my ability to handle my new life and the new opportunities and accolades that come with it.

Who we are is not fixed and solid; it changes as we grow. We all have a large cast of sub-personalities living within us. When we're growing up, we unconsciously bring forward the parts of our personality that bring us love and approval and submerge the ones that don't. So, the shy person always has the powerful one living quietly in the background, waiting to be noticed. The fearful or insecure person has a strong, confident persona waiting patiently for its cue.

Over time, we become comfortable with the personality we've developed. It feels homey to us, and people who know us expect us to act in certain ways. We may also feel that who we are going forward has to be a logical progression from who we were in the past. When we take a big leap, we don't feel like ourselves, and people react to us strangely. They may try to pull us back into our old selves, sometimes in hurtful and discouraging ways.

The nature of life is to always keep growing, so we can either resist the change or flow with it and have some fun. As we begin to blossom, we can consciously call forth the latent parts of ourselves, and then reinforce them with new actions. So, that shy person can bring out her people-lover or her "inner Tony Robbins." She can then become more social, start speaking in front of small groups or audition for a community theatre.

We can further enhance our new self-image by giving ourselves a style makeover, with a new hairdo and a new way of dressing. As the old ways and environments become more uncomfortable, we may find ourselves gravitating to different types of people and activities that are more aligned with our new self.

As you can imagine, this life makeover can be scary or uncomfortable. You may be doing things you don't feel competent at. You may step into new activities that initially embarrass you and elicit strange reactions from people. The important things are: 1) to do it gradually and 2) to find a support system where you can get validation for your new self.

Start with baby steps. As a budding public speaker, for example, you can start by doing a presentation for 3 close friends in your living room, work up to joining Toastmasters or doing a talk at a local library, and grow from there. If you're moving into a new career or a personal pursuit, such as painting or playing an instrument, start by taking beginners' classes to gain some skill, build confidence and meet other like-minded people, who can then become part of your support system.

While most of us, at least at some point, look to others to define us, the truth is, we all create ourselves. You're limited only by your imagination and your courage. As you begin stepping out of your comfort zone, the exhilaration you'll feel will spur you on to bigger steps, and you may find yourself breaking out in other areas of your life as well.

Who you are is a lifetime exploration. Your essential self will always be there – and you'll discover a myriad of ways to express it – and you'll bring out exciting, and sometimes surprising new aspects of yourself as well. Becoming your new self can be empowering and exhilarating. Experiment, take small steps and be open to surprises – you can't even imagine the person you could be in 10 or 20 years!

Action Challenge

Do something to change your self-image. Wear a color or style you would never dare to wear, but would love to. Challenge yourself to try something that scares you, like grabbing the mike at the karaoke bar or painting a self-portrait. Give yourself permission to fumble or feel like a fool!

Wise Words

"Our lives can be powerfully shaped by what we long to become. I believe the dream of what might be is more important than the record of what has been." ~ Greg Anderson

"To be authentic is literally to be your own author (the words derive from the same Greek root), to discover your own native energies and desires, and then to find your own way of acting on them." ~ Warren G. Bennis

"You are the product of your own brainstorm." ~ Rosemary Konner Steinbaum

"Congratulate yourselves if you have done something strange and extravagant and broken the monotony of a decorous age." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf



Who Am I?: The 16 Basic Desires That Motivate Our Actions and Define Our Personality ... Steven Reiss, PhD



Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?: Insights on self-awareness, personal growth and communication with others ... John Powell



Awakening the Heroes Within: Twelve Archetypes to Help Us Find Ourselves and Transform Our World ... Carol S. Pearson



The New Personality Self-Portrait: Why You Think, Work, Love and Act the Way You Do ... John M. Oldham, MD, and Lois B. Morris



The 16 Personality Types: Descriptions for Self-Discovery ... Linda V. Berens and Dario Nardi



The Big Book of Personality Tests: 90 Easy-To-Score Quizzes That Reveal the Real You ... Salvatore V. Didato, PhD



Embracing Our Selves: The Voice Dialogue Manual ... Hal Stone, PhD and Sidra L. Stone, PhD

Issue 81

Emotional Habits

Have you found that whenever you're thrown off center by a bad experience or bad news, or when you're really tired or not feeling well, you automatically fall into a "default" emotion, such as fear, anxiety, despair, anger, sadness or depression?

It can be debilitating to try to be creative and productive when your emotions are dragging you down. After finding myself falling into despair over and over again for several years, often with no apparent cause, I finally questioned what was going on. I began to think of this automatic response as an "emotional habit."

If you're like me, you look to your emotions to take the "temperature" of the day. If you wake up feeling good, then it's a good day; if you're feeling anxious, then you tend to feel precarious all day. While it's great to be in touch with your feelings, emotional habits can lead you down the wrong path. They're based on past experiences and conditioning and persist even when there's no logical reason to feel that way.

As children or adults, we go through an experience, or a series of experiences, that set our emotional meter. If something harmful happened to us, then fear may become our watchdog. Our mind rationalizes that if we're always afraid, we'll catch any potential offender before something happens. The problem is, 99.9% of the time, there's nothing to be afraid of, but our system is still on red alert. This can be a huge energy drain.

The good news is, we don't have to be at the mercy of our emotional habits for life. We can change them, just as we do any other habit. The film *What the Bleep Do We Know!?* talks about how we become biochemically addicted to our emotional patterns. Neuronal paths are created, like ruts in a dirt road. In order to create new patterns, we have to make a conscious effort to redirect our emotions until a new habit is created.

I started to pull myself out of the pit of despair by looking back at my history. I saw that during my most challenging times, the many things that I had feared had never happened – none of them! I had gotten into an emotional habit of waiting for the boom to fall on me, and even though it never did, I had created an emotional rut of fear and despair that continued long past the potential danger.

In continuing to look back, I saw that whatever happened, I had been able to handle it, and, in fact, my life kept getting better! As I began to trust that things would always somehow work out, I began to relax. As the fear and

despair lost their grip on me, my life kept getting even better, and I gathered greater evidence that things were fine and I could handle whatever challenged me.

Here are some suggestions for getting yourself out of your own emotional habits:

- ~ First, notice that you're in an emotional habit.
- ~ Take stock. Is there any current reason to feel that fear or despair or sadness?
- ~ If the answer is "yes," what can you do about it? Start taking steps toward alleviating the cause of the feeling.
- ~ If the answer is "no," look to your thought patterns. Feelings are preceded by thoughts. Often, our feelings happen so quickly that we don't notice the thoughts that are generating them. What are you saying to yourself to keep yourself frightened or sad or angry? How can you change that inner dialogue?
- ~ If you find yourself imagining disastrous futures, turn your imagination to better use and start visualizing positive futures, even if you have to force yourself to make them up at first. Remember, we're breaking an ingrained habit, and it may take some effort.
- ~ Create affirmations that you can write down and use as antidotes to your negative thought patterns. For example, if your recurring fear is losing your job and being homeless, try saying, "I have great skills, I bring a lot to any company, and I can always find a job." "I can handle it" is a good all-around affirmation.
- ~ Use your power of choice to make choices that will lead you toward the positive thoughts and positive futures you're envisioning.

As you use these strategies, your emotional habit will begin to lift and show up less frequently. It may still come up in times of stress, but when it does, it will generally be lighter, and you'll have the tools to deal with it.

While we can't always control the feelings that pop up, we can manage them and change the flow of the river. By making conscious choices and using our thoughts to redirect our feelings, we can change our negative emotional habits into positive, uplifting ones.

Action Challenge

Start to become aware of your emotions. Do you have a "default" emotion? Next time it occurs, stop and take a deep breath. What can you say to

yourself at that moment to shift to a more uplifting emotion? Practice this every time you go into your emotional habit.

Wise Words

"You can't expect to prevent negative feelings altogether. And you can't expect to experience positive feelings all the time... The Law of Emotional Choice directs us to acknowledge our feelings but also to refuse to get stuck in the negative ones. ~ Greg Anderson, *The 22 Non-Negotiable Laws of Wellness*

"Our genetic heritage endows each of us with a series of emotional set-points that determines our temperament. But the brain circuitry involved is extraordinarily malleable; temperament is not destiny." ~ Daniel P. Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*

"One day ... the thought occurred to me that being unhappy was easy ... and that it took no courage, effort, or greatness to be unhappy... True achievement ... lay in struggling to be happy. To this day, when I am unhappy I tell myself that I am taking the easy way out, that happiness is a battle to be waged and not a feeling to be awaited." ~ Dennis Prager, *Happiness is a Serious Problem: A Human Nature Repair Manual*

"Life is a grindstone. But whether it grinds us down or polishes us up depends on us." ~ L. Thomas Holdcroft

Bookshelf



Raising Your Emotional Intelligence: A Practical Guide ... Jeanne S. Segal



7 Steps to Emotional Intelligence ... Patrick E. Merlevede, Denis Bridoux and Rudy Vandamme



The Emotional Intelligence Quick Book: Everything You Need to Know to Put Your EQ to Work ... Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves



Emotional Alchemy: How the Mind Can Heal the Heart ... Tara Bennett-Goleman



You Can't Afford the Luxury of a Negative Thought ... Peter McWilliams



The Van Gogh Blues: The Creative Person's Path Through Depression
... Eric Maisel, PhD



Affirmations for Artists ... Eric Maisel



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 82

Keeping Your Spirits Up ... And Making a Difference in the World

'Tis the season to be jolly ...

Or so the song goes. While some of us find the holiday season to be joyous and others depressing, this has been a particularly challenging year to stay cheerful. It was about a year ago that our world experienced the tsunami in southeast Asia. Since then, we've experienced devastating hurricanes in southeastern United States, an earthquake in Pakistan and the loss of lives through war and terrorism. Not a pretty picture.

While many of us have volunteered or donated money or goods to assist those impacted by these terrible events, we may still feel powerless to have any significant impact. The immensity of the problems in the world make us feel small. From there, it's easy to fall into hopelessness and despair.

Even though most of us don't have a million dollars to donate or medical skills to offer, each one of us matters and has something we can contribute. It may seem like a drop in the bucket, but remember that the vast ocean is made up of a multitude of tiny drops. By doing what we can, and joining our efforts with those of others, we can keep our own spirits up and perhaps make more of a difference than we know.

Start by sharing your creative gifts with others to help them express their pain and lift their spirits. You might feel that creating art or music or theatre is unimportant in times of crisis, but they're more important than you can imagine. What do most people do when they're feeling down? They listen to music or look at great art or seek out meaningful or uplifting entertainment to heal their souls. I remember, several years ago, seeing footage of Afghanistan and being shocked to find out that music was banned from the country. Pay attention this week every time you hear music. Imagine a world without it. Pretty desolate.

Look for places in your own life that you can heal. It's easy to wish for peace on the other side of the globe; it's a challenge when it's in your own backyard. I know from personal experience that it's hard to feel warmly toward a neighbor who's being noisy and disrespectful of your peace.

If your boundaries are being violated in some way, rather than returning it in kind, seek out ways to resolve the conflict that respect the dignity of the other party. In my case, my other neighbors and I used the authorities in our apartment building to enforce the rules, and eventually we came to peace with the offending party. Had we treated them the way they were treating us,

even if they became quieter, there would be a lingering resentment. Instead, with time and effort, we have restored peace and goodwill to our floor.

Work with your spiritual path. Use prayer or visualization to send healing to the people and places on earth that are hurting. This may not seem like much, but even scientific experiments have proven that prayer has impact. Reading scripture or other inspirational books or listening to spiritual tapes will also lift your spirits and renew your hope.

Don't be afraid to turn off or limit your exposure to the news. The constant stream of devastating reports can be depressing. If you want to stay in touch, find one appropriate newspaper or broadcast. Trust me, if there's something you really need to know, the information will reach you. Instead, find fun programs or uplifting movies, or turn off the TV and read, listen to music or spend time with people you enjoy.

Making the world a better place is a one-on-one job. You may not be able to directly impact the macrocosm, but you can certainly make a difference in the microcosm of your own individual world, and the effect will ripple out. You have no idea when a small, seemingly insignificant gesture can turn someone's day, or their life, around.

At a recent seminar, teacher-author Caroline Myss shared the story of a man who was planning to kill himself. As he was crossing the street that day, he made eye contact with a driver stopped at the light, and she smiled at him. Something switched inside him, and he decided to live. This is an extreme story, but we've all had experiences where a smile has lightened our day, and the person who smiled at us probably had no idea how much it meant to us.

By keeping your own spirits up, you're adding that positive note to the collective energies of the world. Think of yourself as a candle lighting another candle. When you make someone's day better, that person will, in turn, pass it on. Be a light to the world, and trust that it makes a difference, even if you can't see it.

Action Challenge

What can you do this week to make a difference in someone's life and lift your own spirits? This can be anything from taking steps toward resolving a major conflict with a family member to smiling at the grocery clerk. Push yourself to go outside your comfort zone with this.

Wise Words

"Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does." ~ William James

“So many people feel powerless. They feel that they don’t make a difference. But great things have been done by ordinary people who have a sense of purpose and a commitment to living out of that purpose. People can make an extraordinary difference from their knowledge and their own inclinations and interests. That is available to all of us.

“You, too, can make an extraordinary difference. You can live from the highest sense of purpose that you can imagine and have that show up in all aspects of your life, in your work, in your community, in your country, and in your world.” ~ John Denver

“You may feel like dwelling on your limits or your fears. Don’t do it... A perfect prescription for a squandered, unfulfilled life is to accommodate self-defeating feelings while undercutting your finest, most productive ones.” ~ Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*

“It’s important to feel that you’re expected to make a difference – and that you’re qualified to do so. Innovation requires a fundamental belief that individuals are important.” ~ Robert Dennard

Bookshelf



Invisible Acts of Power: Personal Choices That Create Miracles ...
Caroline Myss



These Are the Gifts I'd Like to Give to You: A Sourcebook of Joy and Encouragement ... Douglas Pagels



I Hope You Dance ... Mark D. Sanders and Tia Sillers



The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living ... His Holiness The Dalai Lama and Howard C. Cutler, MD



The Happiness Makeover: Overcome Stress and Negativity to Become a Hopeful, Happy Person ... M. J. Ryan



Joy, No Matter What: Make 3 Simple Choices To Access Inner Joy ...
Carolyn Hobbs



Five Good Minutes: 100 morning practices to help you stay calm & focused all day long ... Jeffrey Brantley, M.D. and Wendy Millstine



One Makes the Difference: Inspiring Actions that Change our World
... Julia Butterfly Hill



Nothing's Too Small to Make a Difference ... Wanda Urbanska and
Frank Levering



*Make a Difference: America's Guide to Volunteering and Community
Service ...* Arthur I. Blaustein

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Issue 83

Do It Yourself

There are times in our careers, whether in the arts or otherwise, when we feel frustrated with the opportunities that are coming our way. We feel disempowered waiting for someone to come make us an offer that will get us out of our rut and thrust us, perhaps into the “big time” or just into something more fulfilling and more lucrative.

As creative people, validation is important to us. We want our work to be noticed and recognized. When someone hires us, commissions or buys our work, or chooses to publish us, we feel we’ve gotten the stamp of approval from “them.” And certainly, for most of us, our creativity is, at least in part, about connecting with others, not just creating in a vacuum.

But there comes a time when we have to have the courage to step out and make our own opportunities, rather than mournfully waiting to be discovered. We have to take the risk of making ourselves visible – perhaps suffering criticism, but hopefully, getting noticed by the powers that be. I’ve done this myself a couple of times with positive results – the first during my acting career.

The apartment complex I live in, which is a few blocks from the Broadway theatre district, is a community of performing artists. Back in the 1980s, a group of us, tired of waiting to be recognized, banded together and produced, directed and acted in a series of showcases that gave us the opportunity to demonstrate our talents, both as entertainment for our community and so that talent agents could come see us perform. I can’t say that my acting career took off as a result, but some good opportunities did come out of it.

An unexpected benefit was that the skills I learned as a producer served me well when, a few years later, I became a book publisher. And those efforts *did* land me a publishing contract with a larger publishing house. By publishing myself, I put my book in places where people in the trade would see it, and one up-and-coming publisher liked it and made me an offer.

And I’m in a lot of good company. Many well-known writers started out as self-publishers, including:

- ~ Ken Blanchard, PhD and Spencer Johnson, MD – *The One-Minute Manager*
- ~ James Redfield – *The Celestine Prophecy*
- ~ Molly Katzen – *The Moosewood Cookbook*

- ~ Richard Nelson Bolles – *What Color Is Your Parachute?* was first published at a local copy shop in 1970, commercially published in 1972, and was on the *New York Times* best-seller list for 288 weeks
- ~ Tom Peters – *In Search of Excellence*
- ~ Irma Rombauer – *The Joy of Cooking*

Not to mention Virginia Woolf (who published her own and others' books through her Hogarth Press), Beatrix Potter (*Peter Rabbit*) and Margaret Mitchell (*Gone With the Wind*)!

Many successful film directors, writers and actors started their careers, or made a name for themselves, by creating their own projects.

- ~ Matt Damon and Ben Affleck catapulted their budding acting careers to stardom when they wrote and co-starred in the popular film, *Good Will Hunting*
- ~ John Waters, whose *Hairspray* was a successful film and is currently a hit Broadway show, began by writing, directing and producing *Pink Flamingos*
- ~ Steven Soderbergh, who wrote, directed and edited *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, went on to direct *Erin Brockovich* and *Ocean's 11*, among many others
- ~ Writer/director Robert Rodriguez went from *El Mariachi* to the popular *Spy Kids* series

Successful actors often form their own production companies as a route to gaining access to projects that really excite them. These include such notables as Drew Barrymore, George Clooney, Robert Redford and Susan Sarandon.

Some of our best-known teacher/speaker/writers also took their careers in their own hands:

- ~ Visionary Marianne Williamson began her career by doing lectures on *A Course in Miracles* in her living room. She went on to write several successful books, and was honored when Nelson Mandela chose her words for his inaugural speech.
- ~ Wayne Dyer, today a best-selling author and speaker, didn't do so well at first. He bought copies of his failing book, *Your Erroneous Zones*, from his publisher, packed them in the trunk of his car, and traveled the country doing talk radio shows and selling books. The rest is history!

Current technology has enabled many people to produce their own music or spoken CDs and podcasts. With the Internet, you can create your own marketing outlet and sell your products online.

~ A talented young singer named Shawn Pander produced his own CDs and sells them from his website. Shawn got great exposure when he was featured on the *Dr. Phil* show.

On the business side, one of the best ways to advance your career is to initiate new projects or introduce new ideas, rather than just waiting to be told what needs to be done. Look at a problem or need your company or department has. See how you can address that problem or need, and write a proposal that you can present to your supervisor. And if you see an opportunity for a unique product or service, you could even start your own business!

So, don't hang around waiting to be discovered. If you're an artist, find a small gallery, library or coffee house that would love to dress up its premises by showing some original art, and create a showcase for your work. Raise some money and produce your own CD or publish your book. Band together with your friends. Pool your resources to create opportunities for your work to be seen, as I did with my neighbors a couple of decades ago.

By taking ownership of your work and getting it out there, you can create visibility and momentum that could take a lot longer to achieve if you waited for someone else to give you the opportunity. And who's going to get behind your work more enthusiastically than you? Go for it!

Action Challenge

What's one action you can take to make your work more visible? What step can you take in the next week to get the ball rolling on that? Who can you join forces with to do it together?

Wise Words

"You don't have to sit on top of a mountain to discover what's right for you. You always know in your heart what you need to do. But you do have to ask yourself if you're willing to make choices. Put yourself in a position where you're making choices about your life, rather than letting other people make those choices for you. That's what balance is all about." ~ Liz Dolan

"Dependent people need others to get what they want. Independent people can get what they want through their own efforts. Interdependent people

combine their own efforts with the efforts of others to achieve their greatest success." ~ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

"Follow the path of the unsafe, independent thinker. Expose your ideas to the danger of controversy. Speak your mind and fear less the label of 'crackpot' than the stigma of conformity." ~ Thomas J. Watson, Sr.

"If you want to see your plays performed the way you wrote them, become President." ~ Vaclav Havel, playwright and former president, Czech Republic

Bookshelf



Dan Poynter's Self-Publishing Manual: How to Write, Print, and Sell Your Own Book



Start Your Own Self-Publishing Business ... Entrepreneur Press



How To Start And Run A Small Book Publishing Company ... Peter I. Hupalo



How to Start a Faux Painting or Mural Business: A Guide to Making Money in the Decorative Arts ... Rebecca Pittman



How to Produce a Successful Crafts Show ... Kathryn Caputo



The Fine Artist's Guide to Marketing and Self-Promotion ... Julius Vitali



Fine Art Publicity: The Complete Guide For Galleries And Artists ... Susan Abbott



Jumpstart Your Awesome Film Production Company ... Sara Caldwell



Producing, Financing, and Distributing Film: A Comprehensive Legal and Business Guide ... Paul A. Baumgarten, Donald C. Farber and Mark Fleischer



Documentary Filmmakers Speak ... Liz Stubbs



Making Independent Films: Advice from the Filmmakers ... Liz Stubbs and Richard Rodriguez



Radio Syndication: How to Create, Produce, and Distribute Your Own Show ... Scott B. Deweese



The Real Business of Photography ... Richard Weisgrau



Podcasting: How to Start a Podcast and Create a Profitable Podcasting Business ... Amanda Mayo



Building the Successful Theater Company ... Lisa Mulcahy



Producing Theatre: A Comprehensive Legal and Business Guide ...
Donald C. Farber



Successful Syndication: A Guide for Writers and Cartoonists ...
Michael Sedge



The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People ... Stephen R. Covey



Choice: Choosing the Proactive Life You Want to Live ... Stephen R. Covey



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 84

Reinventing Yourself

With the popularity of “makeover” shows these days, it’s hard not to think about what it would be like to do a total makeover on yourself. Imagine waking up tomorrow morning and being the person you’d love to be and having the life you’d love to have!

A total makeover may be too extreme for most of us, but what about reinventing yourself? What would it be like to start living the life you’d love to live and becoming the person who belongs in that life?

Early in our lives, many of us were guided, or pushed, onto a particular path. As kids, we were all given labels of some sort. You may have been the smart one, the artistic one, the athletic one, the lazy one, the computer nerd. These labels can become our identity, and we then make career and life choices based on that identity.

Or perhaps you fell onto a life or career path. Opportunities came your way that were easy to grab onto. One led to another, and one day you woke up, looked around and asked, “How did I get here?”

Or you may have lived a fantastic and joyous life, but your once-exciting choices have become routine – you’ve grown all you can and taken all the juice from them you can. They no longer hold the challenge or attraction that drew you earlier in your life, and it’s time to find something new.

Your desire to change may also be a natural life evolution. As you get older, you also grow in experience and wisdom. The things you’ve done in the past no longer challenge or interest you. Think about your first or second job and what it would be like doing that now. The time comes to take on new and bigger challenges, rather than coasting on what’s easy and familiar. That could mean moving to a higher level or a whole different path.

Whatever the reason, at some point, it comes time to reinvent yourself. It may come about as a natural growth and evolution, or it may be a choice to catapult yourself into a new life and a new self. You may want to explore a new career, move to a different location, try out new relationships, activities and behaviors. With so many options and opportunities open to us, there’s no reason to stay stuck for a lifetime in something you’re bored with at best, or miserable in at worst.

Reinventing yourself can be exciting and scary. While your new path may be intriguing, making changes can be uncomfortable. Here are some tips to smooth the way:

- ~ Take it at your own pace. You may want to take a leap, or you may want to plan and prepare. Honor your own timing, rather than how fast or slow you or someone else thinks you should go.
- ~ Look at where you want to go. (If you're not sure, working with a life or career coach can be a huge help.) Then, look at what it will take to get there. Do you need to go back to school? Gather information? Do research? Make new business contacts or meet new friends? Save money?
- ~ If you're in a situation you absolutely hate, and your transition plan will take some time, look at an interim step. You might want to look for a different job in the same industry or find a different career where you could use your "transferable skills" to make a short-term leap. You may want to build new friendships before you let go of old ones that don't quite fit anymore. Or you might take vacation trips to new locations before you consider moving there.
- ~ Deal with the flak. Chances are, you'll get some negative feedback, or even downright sabotage, from your family and friends. People are resistant to change. Most of them would prefer you to stay who, what and where you are. You may need to be patient while others adjust to your new self and lifestyle and, sad though it may be, let go of those who aren't willing to take the journey with you. Most of all, don't let anyone talk you out of doing what you know in your heart is the right thing for you.
- ~ Remember that reinventing yourself means creating a new identity. When I quit acting after 25 years, it hit me that it wasn't just about not going to auditions or subscribing to *BackStage* anymore. It also meant that I needed to redefine who I had been since the age of 14. Be gentle with yourself, and move into that new identity by hanging out with people in your new life or career, and maybe by dressing and acting in new ways. (See Issue 53 about updating your self-image.)

Whatever your age or circumstance, you're not stuck with who you were in the past. We often feel like who we're becoming has to be a linear progression from who we were – that it has to "make sense." But we're always growing, and taking a leap into a new life is okay to do. In fact, it may be getting you back onto a track you reluctantly detoured from many years ago.

Dare to dream who and what you could become, and then take steps to make it happen. It's a great adventure!

Action Challenge

When you take away all the excuses and limitations, who is it that you would really like to be? Make a list of the characteristics of that person. What 3 steps can you take this month to bring you closer to that?

Wise Words

"Human beings have an inalienable right to invent themselves." ~ Germaine Greer

"If the next generation is to face the future with zest and self-confidence, we must educate them to be original as well as competent." ~ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*

"The more of it [our vision] we can describe, the clearer we also become about the vision's unknown aspects. Our intuitive drive to fill these blanks or unknown aspects will eventually take over and become a powerful force to guide us with a remarkable sense of certainty into an uncharted future." ~ Kurt Wright, *Breaking the Rules: Removing the Obstacles to Effortless High Performance*

"Every step you take should increase, not decrease, the breadth of your opportunities." ~ Andy Tuck

Bookshelf



Reinventing Yourself: How To Become The Person You've Always Wanted To Be ... Steve Chandler



The Complete Idiot's Guide to Reinventing Yourself ... Jeff Davidson



Reinventing Yourself: Becoming the Person You Want to Be ... Barnes Boffey



Inventing the Rest of Our Lives: Women in Second Adulthood ... Suzanne Braun Levine



On Becoming an Artist: Reinventing Yourself Through Mindful Creativity ... Ellen J. Langer



Second Acts: Creating the Life You Really Want, Building the Career You Truly Desire ... Stephen M. Pollan and Mark Levine



The Third Age: 6 Principles for Growth and Renewal After Forty ...
William A. Sadler, PhD



Between Trapezes: Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease ...
... Gail Blanke

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Issue 85

A Working Writer: An Interview with Steve Sears

Steve Sears is a long-time subscriber to Living the Creative Life. I was excited to learn that Steve had transitioned into a professional writing career, and I asked him to share his strategies and insights with his fellow Creative Lifers.

SHARON GOOD: Steve, I'd like to start by getting the arc of what kind of work you were doing before and how you transitioned into writing.

STEVE SEARS: I had been a computer operator for 19 years. It's a full-time profession; I work 39 hours a week, Saturday, Sunday and Monday. I've never worked more than four days a week in the past 17 years, so I was always afforded extra time to pursue other interests or a part-time profession. But I never really kicked the writing life into gear until my heart attack nine years ago.

SG: Had you started writing before that?

SS: I always did write. I wrote for my high school paper. I submitted some poems to magazines. But I was very sporadic with it. I was raising a family – my daughter is 15 now. I always considered my days off my days off, and I didn't want to be chained to a desk writing poems.

But I knew that I always had it in me to do something. Prior to the heart attack, I sat back and said, What would really make me happy? And I thought I should write more often, maybe something other than poetry. And then the heart attack happened. When I came out of it, I said to myself, Let me try and do something with my writing. During my three months of disability, I was able to contribute to the local weekly newspaper op-ed columns. I was paid nothing, but I didn't care, because I loved doing it so much.

I also got my first paid job as a writer, doing book reviews for a national poetry journal. It didn't net me much in the way of payment, but it got my name in a national magazine, and it gave me a taste of the life outside my job. It was exciting – I was interviewing the people who had written the poetry books that I was reviewing. And with the op-ed pieces, I had creative license to state my views on things. It was a very exciting time for me.

SG: So, initially, you just tried to get published as much as possible to get your work out there. How did you land that first job reviewing poetry?

SS: I had submitted some poems to the *Candlelight Poetry Journal*. In starting this journal, this gentleman was looking for book reviewers. I told

him I had done a few reviews for a writers' group. Wondrously enough, he loved what I wrote, and he started publishing them and paying me.

So, at that particular time, I was doing the op-eds for the local paper, the book reviews for the *Candlelight Poetry Journal* and some stuff for the writers' group. Unfortunately, that momentum died when I had to return back to a regular job. It wasn't the job. It was my lack of happiness returning to what was necessary at that time in my life because I was raising a family.

SG: So, it was difficult to find time to write and work and raise your family?

SS: It's not so much that it was difficult to find the time. The fact of the matter is, I began to procrastinate. The full-time job was only three days a week, but it disheartened me enough to where I curtailed my writing activity, even though I did have projects.

SG: What turned that around for you?

SS: Saying to myself, The only way out is up. The company that I was working for was losing clients, and it looked as though we were all going to lose our jobs. I said to myself, If I'm going to be out of a job, I want to be prepared either with my own business or to step into a writing job.

I started writing for a local monthly called *Life and Leisure*, out of Upper Montclair, New Jersey. Originally, I started writing an opinion column. Then he said, "We're going to start writing ad pages." I said, "You know what? Toss ad pages at me. Toss everything at me." He said, "Well, I have a local chiropractor who needs articles ghostwritten, and I have a writer currently doing that, but he's always late with his articles and he doesn't work like you." I said, "Throw that at me, too."

SG: So, there was a good work ethic there that was helpful in getting you work.

SS: Yes, and to his credit, he threw everything at me. It gave me some valuable experience. I also hooked up with two writing mentors who also gave me experience.

Then, around the summer of 2004, I decided, now is the time to step outside my comfort zone and get my stuff out there. I started SGS Write and the website. I was writing for *Life and Leisure*, contributing all sorts of things. Then, I hooked up with a regional magazine called *Blue Ridge Country*.

I visit North Carolina every year, so I subscribed to the magazine. One of the articles was about a writer who traveled country roads in the mountainous area of Virginia and went to Civil War spots, visited country delis, focused on

the music they have down there. I called the magazine and left a voicemail saying, "That's a wonderful article."

Ironically enough, the article I complimented was the editor's article. She called me and said, "I'd like to have you freelance for me sometime." I said, "I'm down in North Carolina every year. I'll be glad to contribute something. What do you need?"

She said, "How about some dining and travel?" I said, "That's right up my alley. That's what I've written for *Life and Leisure* newspaper. What you want, you got." And I contributed to her magazine. At that time, my portfolio wasn't huge. So then, I had something regional, something local regularly.

SG: So, it sounds like you're doing lifestyle pieces now.

SS: For magazines, yes. I do a variety of things. Just last night, I turned in my latest article about Spring Lake for *MAR Magazine* out of Red Bank. I actually went to them last November to discuss how to better market their magazine in northern New Jersey. I thought so much of it, I wanted to help them out.

The first question the publisher asked me is, "What do you write?" I said, "Well, I'm currently writing for a monthly in Montclair, and I write for a regional out of Virginia." Then, we started talking about New Jersey, and she said, "I'm having a brainstorm here. One of the things that people complained about with our first issue was, we didn't have enough cultural stuff or enough New Jersey information. I want you to be my New Jersey writer." And I just about fell off the couch, especially when she mentioned the payment that I would get per piece. And I said, "You got it!"

And that started a slew of activity, where I started writing for a lot of different magazines throughout the state. Then I said, You know what? Now that I'm doing this national and regional stuff, let me see if I can get some projects on the corporate end. The biggie was *Entrepreneur* magazine. I wrote up a public relations firm out of Red Bank. It was only a small piece of 150 words, but it was huge exposure.

SG: At this point, are you doing a lot of pitching, or are people finding you from the work you've already done?

SS: Both. I get a lot of return work from magazines that I've worked with before, and I do a lot of pitching. I have a writing mentor who said, "You're never going to make a living in this business as a writer if you continue working for magazines." He was suggesting that I push more the corporate work.

Is the money the most important thing to me right now? No. There are corporations out there that will pay \$100, \$125 an hour, and I'm trying to

hook up with them. But this magazine stuff is exciting for me. I've seen my byline. I've met interesting people that I never would have met. I've learned stories that I never would have learned. I've taken my family on trips. Money is important, but fun is, too. I currently have the safety net of a full-time job. Am I working to get away from there? Sure I am. But right now, I want to have fun.

SG: It sounds like you're taking your career up another notch to a higher level.

SS: This is stepping stone stuff. This is for myself and Lucille, my wife, because we're in this together. We're learning. I've had my successes and I've had my failures, and I've learned from every one. And in a sense, too, Stefanie, my 15-year-old daughter, is learning, too. I want to build something that she can step into if she so chooses.

SG: You've talked about your support system. You mentioned your mentors, and you mentioned your wife, Lucille.

SS: I have a few writing mentors who offer me different things – these people are successful. A lot of it I accept; a lot of it I don't.

SG: Are these formal mentoring relationships that you have or just people that you've connected with?

SS: Coaching relationships, which I've paid for. They've been very helpful, but I also realize that what they tell me isn't worth a hill of beans unless I act on what they say that I think may be beneficial. Having Lucille here encourages me not to slack off and procrastinate, because we're doing it together now. There's power in numbers. What she brings to the table is phone etiquette, and she's good clerical-wise. All of this is important.

SG: So, you're really treating this as a business and being professional about it, but balancing that with doing jobs you enjoy.

SS: That is correct. I got off the phone today with a young woman who had some health issues that turned into financial issues. I care about the work I'm doing for her, and we're going to mutually agree on what is affordable for her.

SG: It sounds like you've found a really good balance, that you have a passion for doing the work, and you want to make money at it. You want to be professional, and you want take into consideration people's needs and build relationships.

SS: I will get nowhere doing none of the above. It's all about building relationships, it's all about being professional. It's all about being firm when I have to be, but it's also about being caring when I have to be. I promised myself when I started this business that number one, I would take responsibility for everything that went into it, and number two, I would operate it with integrity and be honest. And I do.

SG: How did you learn about the business part of this? Did you find forms? Did you make them up yourself?

SS: I never operated from a contract. The only written thing that I operated on was from emails to people, until I got some advice from Chris Morrow, who is a professional freelancer on the west coast. I read an article by her regarding fee agreements. She said, "If you have a fee agreement, you and the client feel comfortable going in. You work honestly."

And "fee agreement" sounds better than "contract." So, I developed my own fee agreement, which is basic stuff – the number of hours, the estimate, what's to be done, my name and the client's name. It's in writing, and it protects both myself and the client. It's one of the things that makes me more of a professional, including the website, the business cards, any sales letters I send out. The business is two parts: it's marketing and it's doing the work.

SG: So, you need to be a businessperson as well as an artist. Steve, you said you were looking eventually to being a full-time writer. Do you have a game plan?

SS: This past year, one of the things I did was to write out goals, and yes, I have mapped out a game plan.

SG: Are you thinking in terms of eventually transitioning to doing the computer work part-time and then phasing it out?

SS: Yes. Right now, I'm actually enjoying doing the computer work for 39 hours a week and doing this four days a week. I'm not ready to go part-time there until I establish the writing a little bit more.

SG: Do you have a projection of how long you expect that to take based on your current results?

SS: I'm taking it very, very slowly. I'm looking at maybe five years down the road.

SG: You've got a family, so you're being sensible about it and very practical.

SS: My daughter goes to a very expensive private academy. She's doing so well there, I'm not going to pull her out. And I still have the mortgage on the house. And yes, every positive move that I make in the writing business has me slowly but surely traversing the roads away from the computer job. Right now, I'm paying off my debts, and I'm saving my money, trying to build a cash reserve on the side.

SG: It doesn't sound like you're suffering though. You're enjoying the computer job, you're enjoying the writing and you have goals for the future.

SS: The only con is, I lose my weekend. My daughter is taking part in something on Sunday, I'm going to get there late. I can't go to church. Does it bother me? Sometimes yes, there are certain things I miss.

But a lot of my networking takes place on weeknights, where I don't have to worry about going to a job the next day. I've been able to meet with people while they're at their desks instead of waiting until after hours. This is the perfect schedule to build this business.

SG: That's great.

SS: Somebody said it perfectly – the planets have aligned for me. My boss is very understanding. My wife was having issues at the office where she worked. I said, Come home and help me build the business. Next day, my boss offered me the three-day shift.

Sharon, it's win-win. Do I have negative moments? Yes. Do I have my despairs and my disappointments? Yes. But for the most part, things have worked out for me.

SG: It's exciting to hear. You really deserve the success. You've really put yourself out there, and it's really starting to come back for you.

SS: It's been a ball. I love constructing with words. I love being contacted by somebody saying, "I need a press release for this event. Can you do it?" I love magazine editors saying, "We want you to go here, interview these people and take your family," and coming home and doing the assignment. It is the best life. And my wife and daughter see it, too. I'm able to take them, and they're doing things that they would never be able to do until I was financially comfortable with this.

SG: So, there are some non-financial benefits that you're getting.

SS: There are huge non-financial benefits. I can go to a Borders near my job and open up a New Jersey magazine and see my byline in there. Right smack on the magazine shelf. I can sit down and have a cinnamon bun with a cup of coffee and read my article.

And you know what's even better? The confidence level. I can pick up a magazine now, look what's written and say, You know what? I can do that and better, and I've done it. It is a fantastic life.

My ultimate with this business is to live comfortably, be healthy, inspire my family and enjoy it. I'm ahead of where I was a year ago, and in 2006, I'm going to do things I never did in 2005.

SG: It's like, just keep pushing the envelope. It's about persistence. It's not about hitting the target every time, but to keep coming back. Steve, if somebody came to you and they wanted to do what you've accomplished, what advice would you give them?

SS: Just do it. Because if you remain in your comfort zone and say, "Someday I'm going to do it," you're not going to do it. If you want to be a magazine writer, decide what you want to write. Learn about the querying process. Read a lot of magazines. Compliment editors about the magazine. Say, "You've got a bang-up magazine here, and I can contribute to it, and this is what I've done."

Step out of your comfort zone and do it. Don't be afraid to put your written word in front of an editor's eyes and on a page. I'm telling you, it's worthwhile. People would love to read what you've written.

SG: So, what do you see in your future?

SS: I'm not where I want to be, but it's the journey. I'm having a ball right now. Is it monetarily satisfying? For what I've done, I think it is. I've done things this year that I've never, ever done before.

SG: And there's so much more to come! Steve, thank you for sharing your journey with us. I look forward to hearing about more of your successes!

Action Challenge

Have you been putting off starting your creative career? What are 3 steps you could take this month to get it going?

Wise Words

"What I find is that I can write and do other things. When the creative urge seizes one – at least, such is my experience – one becomes creative in all directions at once." ~ Henry Miller

"A professional writer is an amateur who didn't quit." ~ Richard Bach

"Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don't feel I should be doing something else." ~ Gloria Steinem

"Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up." ~ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*

Bookshelf



Complete Idiot's Guide to Publishing Magazine Articles ... Sheree Bykofsky and Jennifer Basye Sander



How to Write Articles for Newspapers and Magazines ... Dawn B. Sovia



The Successful Writer's Guide to Publishing Magazine Articles ... Eva Shaw, PhD



Writer's Digest Handbook of Magazine Article Writing ... Michelle Ruberg, editor



Starting Your Career as a Freelance Writer ... Moira Anderson Allen



You Can Write for Magazines ... Greg Daugherty



How to Become a Fulltime Freelance Writer: A Practical Guide to Setting Up a Successful Writing Business at Home ... Michael A. Banks



The ASJA Guide to Freelance Writing: A Professional Guide to the Business, for Nonfiction Writers of All Experience Levels ... Timothy Harper, editor



Writers Market

Issue 86

Time

There's no getting around it: We live in a busy world. Everyone I know – clients, friends, everyone – has more to do than they can accomplish in any given day. We're going all the time, with jobs, emails, family, friends and other pursuits. We don't even get to rest on weekends, and we go back to work on Monday still tired. As a result, we're always rushed and frazzled, dealing with cluttered spaces and cluttered minds.

And yet, with so much to do, we're always trying to cram in even more. We fear that if we don't keep going, we'll fall irreparably behind, so we keep pushing ourselves to do and achieve. It's like a merry-go-round that we can never get off, and even the adrenaline rush wears thin after awhile.

So, what can we do about this?

What I'm going to ask you to do is counterintuitive. With so much to do, the tendency is to want to do more, to work harder. Instead, I'm going to ask you to slow down and do less. But how (I hear you asking) will I get everything done?!

Before we get into some practical suggestions, let me put your mind at ease. As a sometime reader of quantum physics (now you know what I do in my spare time!), I've learned that time is relative. (Remember Einstein's Theory of Relativity?) Psychologist George Pransky, who has studied the process of thinking, asserts that when we slow down our thinking, we actually slow down time!

So, when we slow ourselves down, we can actually be *more* productive. We know that creativity happens when you slow down. How often have you slaved over a project, only to get your best ideas when you're taking a walk or a shower? I recently read about a study that found that European workers, who generally have 2 - 3 times as much vacation time as Americans, were more productive. Running yourself into the ground, and depleting your physical and mental resources, is not productive, and certainly not much fun.

We have to begin by changing our thinking. Bigger is not always better. You don't *have* to have the top-of-the-line everything. You don't *have* to strive to be at the top of the ladder, with all the responsibility that comes with it. You may find a comfortable spot in the middle of the ladder, or choose to get off the ladder altogether and live a calmer, simpler life. Some folks in Europe even started a Slow Food Movement (www.slowfood.com)!

Look at what really matters to you, and make some choices. Carl Honoré, author of *In Praise of Slowness*, lived the busy, hectic life of a journalist. A turning point for him was when he was actually considering using a book of “2 minute bedtime stories” for his young son. It made him realize what was really important to him.

There are also some practical steps you can take.

- ~ Put some time-saving systems into place, like automatic bill paying and family schedules.
- ~ Use calendars and to-do lists to remind you when things need to be done. Break down big projects into steps, and schedule those steps on your calendar.
- ~ Delegate whatever you can. New helping professionals like virtual assistants and professional organizers are proliferating. They’re well worth the investment.
- ~ Let go. You don’t have to read every email or piece of paper that comes across your desk. Information is readily available, so there’s a pretty good chance that if you need something, you’ll be able to find it.

Short of running off to a deserted island, we have to accept that this is the way life is, and do what we can do to make it easier on ourselves. It’s about balance – handling our responsibilities and enjoying our achievements, but also finding time for relaxation and fun.

I would love to tell you that there’s a magic formula to make this happen, but the truth is, it’s going to take some work. There are many things pulling at us, and we have to make the choice to get off the merry-go-round. Change doesn’t happen through wishful thinking. You have to be the change you want, to start putting it into place now.

It starts with an attitude shift, followed by action. Start with baby steps and work your way up. It may be scary at first to let go of the hectic pace, but once you start, I think you’re gonna like it!

Action Challenge

Is there something you’ve been wanting to do, but haven’t been able to find the time? This week, find at least one hour to get that started, and then find that hour every week to keep it going. If an hour is too much, start with 15 minutes and work up from there.

Wise Words

“Guard well your spare moments. They are like uncut diamonds. Discard them and their value will never be known. Improve them and they will become the brightest gems in a useful life.” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“Recognize that neither technology nor efficiency can acquire more time for you, because time is not a thing you have lost. It is not a thing you ever had. It is what you live in. You can drift or you can swim, and it will carry you along either way.” ~ James Gleick, *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything*

“The best reason to take your time is that this time is the only time you’ll ever have. You must take it, or it will be taken from you. It is telling that the phrase ‘taking your time’ is synonymous with slowing down. If we want to live life fully, we do best to slow down. I don’t suggest that we turn back the clock, trying to retrieve a bygone era when life was slower. We couldn’t, even if we wanted to. We should revel in our electronically supercharged, unbounded world.

“But, to make the most out of this new world, to avoid feeling overbooked, overstretched, and about to snap, to make modern life become better than life has ever been, a person must learn how to do what matters most first. Otherwise, you will bulldoze over life’s best moments. You won’t notice the little charms that adorn each day, nor will you ever transform the mundane into the extraordinary.” ~ Edward M. Hallowell, MD, *Crazybusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap!: Strategies for Handling Your Fast-Paced Life*

Bookshelf



The Tortoise Workbook: Strategies for Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace ... Sharon Good



Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America ... John De Graaf, editor



Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More ... John D. Drake



Take Back Your Time: How to Regain Control of Work, Information, and Technology ... Jan Jasper



Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress-Free Productivity ... David Allen



Mind Management Not Time Management: Productivity When Creativity Matters ... David Kadavy



Take Time for Your Life ... Cheryl Richardson



In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed ... Carl Honoré



Slow Food Revolution: A new culture for dining and living ... Carlo Petrini in conversation with Gigi Padovani



Busy Mind: How Your Mental Speed Affects Your Life ... George Pransky (audio)

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Issue 87

The Trap of Self-Pity

Picture this: You've set a goal. You're pursuing a dream. You're taking steps toward it. You feel like you're working hard, you're trying things, and yet, nothing seems to work. You can't understand why.

While fear is a big deterrent for many people, fear is usually pretty "in your face." When you're scared, you're very aware of it. There's something else – something you may think of as harmless – that may be what's really getting in your way.

If I had to name the biggest hidden impediment to getting ahead, I would have to say it's self-pity. You're working toward a goal and you hit an obstacle. You feel deflated. You say to yourself, "Why bother?" And you give up, or make half-hearted, ineffectual attempts to keep going.

The trap of self-pity is that it feels soooooo good. Who hasn't enjoyed throwing a good pity party at one time or another? But self-pity can really drag you down. And what's worse, it can be addictive, and it can become your default emotion when things get tough. For a time, it soothes a wounded ego, but ultimately, it's going to keep you stuck and frustrated. It can prevent you from expressing your precious creativity and sharing it with the world.

Self-pity is running rampant these days. We're living in a time and place that sets a very high bar. We look around and rate ourselves by the images we see on TV. By comparison, we're too old, too fat, have too many wrinkles, don't have a gorgeous partner who adores us, have no talent, and aren't fabulously wealthy and successful.

The media tends to portray a glossed-over version of reality. It seems like everybody looks great, has a fabulous relationship, and is amazingly successful. And it comes to them effortlessly. It's very easy to start feeling sorry for yourself for how inadequate you feel compared to all these people – even though what we're seeing of them is not real.

Here are a few antidotes for self-pity:

- ~ Take stock of your reality. If you weren't comparing yourself to others, how would your life rate? Which areas look pretty good? Which areas would you change? What steps can you take to do that?
- ~ Change the way you talk to yourself. People who are mired in self-pity generally have thoughts like:
 - Nothing works for me.

- I've failed again!
- People must think I'm a loser.

Instead, think positive, but realistic thoughts:

- I'm still learning. Each time I get it wrong is one step closer to getting it right.
 - It didn't work this time, but I'll keep going until it does.
 - I'm so proud of myself for sticking with this!
- ~ Get your attention off yourself. Think, instead, how you can use your gifts and talents to serve others. Think about how fortunate you are compared to millions of people in the world who go to bed hungry, or who don't have the freedom to express their creativity.

You may have to get tough with yourself. Once self-pity settles over you, it's very hard to shake. Start by becoming aware of when you fall into self-pity. Catch yourself in the act. Then, stop what you're doing. Notice your thought process – very often, it's taken on a life of its own. By a deliberate act, stop the thought process. If you need to, say "Stop!" out loud. Then, consciously redirect your thoughts down another path. This can be tough at first, but the more you do it, the easier it will get.

And count your blessings. We get a lot of support these days to focus on what's wrong with us and where we fall short (by whose estimate??). Instead, be grateful for all you've got. Acknowledge yourself when you do take a step forward. And forgive yourself when you don't get the result you want.

Self-pity will still come up at times, but by practicing these techniques, you'll see it for what it is and send it on its way before you sink too deep. Pity parties can be fun, but how about aiming for a *real* party celebrating all the successes you'll have when self-pity is no longer part of your daily fare!

Action Challenge

In the coming week, every time you find yourself falling into self-pity, say to yourself (out loud or silently), "Stop!" Say it again if necessary. Then, consciously choose to redirect your thoughts to something positive, like, "I'm going to make this work. I know I can do it." Then, take an action to support that new direction.

Wise Words

"Self-pity is easily the most destructive of the nonpharmaceutical narcotics; it is addictive, gives momentary pleasure and separates the victim from reality."

~ John W. Gardner

"Rebellion against your handicaps gets you nowhere. Self-pity gets you nowhere. One must have the adventurous daring to accept oneself as a bundle of possibilities and undertake the most interesting game in the world - making the most of one's best." ~ Harry Emerson Fosdick

"Self-pity in its early stages is as snug as a feather mattress. Only when it hardens does it become uncomfortable." ~ Maya Angelou

"This is interesting to me: On one hand you have just feeling happy: I don't mean, like, laughing and giddy, but feeling light, like you're free. And on the other hand, you have murky discomfort, whiny self-pity. And I personally know the steps to get to both." ~ Tobey Maguire

When asked, "Has exile helped you? Have you found strength in it?" ...

"Oh yes! Without a doubt, I can try to tell you why. When, at some point in our lives, we meet a real tragedy - which could happen to any one of us - we can react in two ways. Obviously we can lose hope, let ourselves slip into discouragement, into alcohol, drugs, unending sadness. Or else we can wake ourselves up; discover in ourselves an energy that was hidden there, and act with more clarity, more force." ~ His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Bookshelf



Optimal Thinking: How to Be Your Best Self ... Rosalene Glickman



Discipline: Training the Mind to Manage Your Life ... Harris Kern and Karen Willi



Ultimate Guide to Mental Toughness: How to Raise Your Motivation, Focus and Confidence Like Pushing a Button ... Daniel Teitelbaum



Get Out of Your Own Way: Overcoming Self-Defeating Behavior ... Mark Goulston and Philip Goldberg



When Misery is Company: End Self-Sabotage and Become Content ... Anne Katherine



Freedom from Self-Pity ... Lazaris (audio)

Issue 88

Your Inner Rebel

Over the last couple of decades, psychology has shown us that each of us has many “voices” within us. That may conjure up the image of *Sybil*, where Sally Field played a woman with multiple personalities. For most of us, though, these “sub-personalities” are smoothly integrated. They function like an orchestra, with each voice chiming in when called upon by the situation.

Through the work of John Bradshaw and others, we’ve become aware of some of these parts, such as the Inner Child and the Inner Critic. The part I’d like to address here is the Inner Rebel. The Rebel may show up when things are not going your way, when you’re feeling bored or trapped, or when you feel you’re the victim of an injustice.

The Inner Rebel can get you in trouble, acting up like a petulant teenager when it doesn’t get its way. It may come out as, “Nobody’s going to tell me what to do.” It may talk back to the boss or lash out at someone you care about. The release of pent-up energy may feel good at the time, but it can damage a relationship or cost you your job.

The Rebel can also be a powerful, positive part of you. It can be the part that refuses to accept the status quo or to settle for less than it knows is possible. It can be the part that refuses to be told that you can’t follow your dreams or that stands up for injustice, to yourself or others. It can be the vehicle for your unique creative voice.

We want to nurture that positive aspect of the Rebel, but we also need to accept that it comes with a “dark” side. We can make friends with it by acknowledging and addressing its concerns: It hates being stuck in drudgery or feeling a loss of freedom, and it reacts (sometimes without thinking) to the residue of negative childhood experiences that left us feeling enraged and powerless.

You may need to appease the Rebel by giving it a reward for completing an unpleasant, but necessary task that it doesn’t want to do, or even by just acknowledging that it’s not happy. The rebelliousness may also be a red flag that you’re ignoring something you need – something you’re denying yourself because of an outmoded belief or a constricting situation you need to leave.

The trick with the Rebel is to rebel *for* something, not just *against*. The Rebel without a cause is just lashing out because it feels trapped or disempowered. A Rebel *with* a cause can be a powerful force for good, not only in your life, but in others’.

Many great artists were considered rebels in their time. Let your Inner Rebel empower you to stand up for your creative ideas and not let anyone deter you from your vision. Make it your ally, and let it give you the courage to be the unique individual and artist you are, wherever or however that artistry is expressed.

Action Challenge

For the next week, notice when your Inner Rebel comes out. Write down 3 ways that it's coming out positively and 3 ways that it's coming out recklessly. With the latter, look at what the Rebel is asking for and how you might work with it to avoid it coming out in ways that will harm you or your relationships.

Wise Words

"Every man who has shown the world the way to beauty, to true culture, has been a rebel, a 'universal' without patriotism, without home, who has found his people everywhere." ~ Chaim Potok

"He neither walks with the multitude nor cheers with them. The writer who is a real writer is a rebel who never stops." ~ William Saroyan

"Poetry is man's rebellion against being what he is." ~ James Branch Cabell

"A little rebellion now and then is a good thing." ~ Thomas Jefferson

Bookshelf



Born to Rebel: Birth Order, Family Dynamics, and Creative Lives ...
Frank J. Sulloway



Rebel Without a Crew: Or How a 23-Year-Old Filmmaker With \$7,000 Became a Hollywood Player ... Robert Rodriguez



Rebels on the Backlot: Six Maverick Directors and How They Conquered the Hollywood Studio System ... Sharon Waxman



The Rebel Rules: Daring to be Yourself in Business ... Chip Conley



Nonconformity: Writing on Writing ... Nelson Algren



The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt ... Albert Camus



How to Disagree Without Being Disagreeable: Getting Your Point Across with the Gentle Art of Verbal Self-Defense ... Suzette Haden Elgin, PhD



Embracing Our Selves: The Voice Dialogue Manual ... Hal Stone, PhD and Sidra L. Stone, PhD

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Issue 89

Learning to Endure

Sometimes, life is just hard. We have goals and dreams, and we're taking steps toward them, but we keep hitting obstacles. It seems to be taking forever to make any progress. Very often, the question comes up: How long should I keep doing this? Is it a sign that I should quit and do something else?

When you're passionate about something, it can be extremely frustrating to keep hitting roadblocks. Shouldn't your passion and commitment bring you success? What's a reasonable amount of time to keep going? What do you do when your passion is overshadowed by discouragement?

When you're working hard at something and it doesn't seem to be happening, you can certainly evaluate what's going on:

- ~ Do I have limiting beliefs that are blocking my success?
- ~ Are the steps I'm taking effective ones?
- ~ Are my fears keeping me from doing the hard, but necessary steps?
- ~ Am I putting energy into something I really don't want to do?

Sometimes you're doing everything right, but it's just not happening. What that may be is "divine timing." As much as you might want something to happen NOW, that greater intelligence may have a better idea of the optimal time for your hard work to come to fruition. When that's the case, the best thing you can do is keep going and learn to endure, to stick it out as long as it feels right to do so.

I can hear you groaning as I say the word "endure," but it's not such a bad thing. Athletes train to build endurance. When we build inner endurance, we build the strength of our character and learn to go the distance with our dreams and goals. Very often, the things we want most are also the path to our greatest growth. The lessons we learn along the way are invaluable and often strengthen us for bigger, more exciting challenges in the future.

How do you know when to keep going and when to quit? It's an inside job. You have to get quiet and tune into your inner voice. What is it telling you?

When I was an actress, I hit many bumps along the road and had my fair share of discouragement. Periodically, I would check in and ask myself, Do you still want to do this? The answer kept coming up, "Yes." Until one day it didn't. That's the day I decided to quit. But at that point, I had been doing it for 25 years and felt that I had squeezed out of it everything I could.

It's hard walking into the unknown – investing your time, energy and money, not knowing what the outcome will be. We live in a very results-oriented, “are-we-there-yet” culture, and if we don't reach our goals, we feel we're failing. But, at the risk of repeating a cliché, the journey matters as much as, if not more than, the destination.

If you feel you're on the right track, just keep putting one foot in front of the other. From time to time, remind yourself why you're doing this, and renew your joy and passion. Avoid the temptation to work yourself into exhaustion, thinking that you're just not working hard enough.

Do your best work, give it time, and when the rewards finally do come, they'll be that much sweeter.

Action Challenge

Where in your life are you feeling discouraged? Are you making your best effort there? If so, what can you do to renew your enthusiasm? If not, what can you do to bring new energy there? Or is it time to reevaluate and change direction?

Wise Words

“When all kinds of trials and temptations crowd into your lives, my brothers, don't resent them as intruders, but welcome them as friends. Realize that they come to test your faith and to produce in you the quality of endurance. But let the process go on until that endurance is fully developed, and you will find you have become men of mature character, men of integrity with no weak spots.” ~ James 1:2-4, Holy Bible

“Beyond talent lie all the usual words: discipline, love, luck – but, most of all, endurance.” ~ James Baldwin

“We are made to persist. That's how we find out who we are.” ~ Tobias Wolff

“Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.” ~ Marie Curie

Bookshelf



Stick to It!: The Power of Positive Persistence ... C. Leslie Charles



Patient Persistence ... Adele M. Gill



Stick With It: A Scientifically Proven Process for Changing Your Life – For Good ... Sean Young, PhD



Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You ... Cynthia Kersey



When the Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life's Sacred Questions ... Sue Monk Kidd



The Boy Who Invented Television: A Story Of Inspiration, Persistence, And Quiet Passion ... Paul Schatzkin



Left To Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust ...
Immaculee Ilibagiza

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Issue 90

Attitude of Gratitude

As the year comes toward its end, it feels natural to take stock – to look at what we've accomplished, what we didn't accomplish, what we're satisfied and disappointed with. Most of us have a lot to be grateful for, and yet, our view often goes to what we didn't get and what's missing in our lives.

We live in the midst of abundance. Few of us ever go hungry or find ourselves without a roof over our heads. We live in relative safety. We're wealthier than most people in the world, yet we often don't take joy in what we have. Rather than appreciating our abundance, we live from a place of scarcity.

There's a quotation that resides on my refrigerator:

"Sometimes

I go about pitying myself

And all the while

I am being carried on great winds

Across the sky"

~ Chippewa Indian

In this past year, I've seen TV programs where orphans in Africa or refugees from Katrina received gifts of small, basic necessities and felt great joy and gratitude for them. When I see that and read my quote, I think, How dare I feel sorry for myself because I didn't get a plasma TV this year! How dare I not be grateful for the safe, comfortable home I have! For the delicious, healthy food I eat every day! For the caring people I have in my life! For the opportunities to do work I love!

The media bombards us with constant images of the rich and famous. So many people aspire to be as young and thin as Brittany Spears, or as wealthy and successful as Oprah or Bill Gates. When they don't reach those standards, they feel they've failed.

At the same time, we have the tragic images of the horrors in Iraq, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and so many other places where people are fearing for life and limb on a daily basis. When we see those painful images, we can use them as a reminder to be grateful for all we have, instead of dwelling on what we don't.

Then, take it a step further. Make a contribution or volunteer time with an organization that helps people less fortunate than you. There are many to choose from. Here are some:

- ~ Women for Women: www.womenforwomen.org
- ~ Feed the Children: www.feedthechildren.org
- ~ Oxfam International: www.oxfam.org/en/
- ~ American Red Cross: www.redcross.org
- ~ The UN Refugee Agency: www.UNHCR.org
- ~ World Central Kitchen: <https://wck.org/>

It's time for an attitude shift. We need to let go of our self-pity and our unreasonable standards and acknowledge how fortunate we really are. Take time every day to appreciate the many riches you have, and find opportunities to help those less fortunate than yourself.

It's a choice. You can focus on your blessings, or you can focus on your scarcity. And where you focus will determine the quality of your life. As the French novelist Colette said: "What a wonderful life I've had! I only wish I'd realized it sooner."

Action Challenge

Where in your life have you been experiencing scarcity? Is it in money? Time? Opportunities? What do you have in that area that you can be grateful for? For the next 7 days, begin and end the day by giving thanks for that. Then, create a vision, with joy, of the new things you'd like to bring into your life.

Wise Words

"Appreciation is the highest form of prayer, for it acknowledges the presence of good wherever you shine the light of your thankful thoughts." ~ Alan Cohen

"For me, giving thanks is a sign of appreciation and gratitude that also brings about a deep sense of peace." ~ Wally Amos

"Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow." ~ Melody Beattie

"Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend." ~ Melody Beattie

Bookshelf



Gratitude: A Way of Life ... Louise L. Hay



Gratitude: Inspirations by Melody Beattie



Attitudes of Gratitude: How to Give and Receive Joy Every Day of Your Life ... M. J. Ryan



Words of Gratitude for Mind, Body, and Soul ... Robert A. Emmons and Joanna Hill



Life Lessons: Gratitude ... Lenore Skomal and the LifeLesson Foundation



Count Your Blessings: The Healing Power of Gratitude and Love ... Dr. John F. Demartini



Gratitude Works: Open Your Heart to Love ... Katherine Scherer and Eileen Bodoh



The Simple Abundance Journal of Gratitude ... Sarah Ban Breathnach



The Life-Changing Power of Gratitude ... Mark Reklau



Inspirations: A Gratitude Journal

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Issue 91

Having a Bad “Tortoise” Day

Those of you who know me know that I’m a self-proclaimed “Tortoise.” I’m ambitious, and even a little driven, but ... I’m not a high-energy person, and that’s often frustrating when I have a lot of things I want to accomplish.

I’ve written books and done classes on “Being a Tortoise in a World of Hares.” I have lots of strategies for dealing with “Tortoise-ness.” It all sounds cute on paper, but when I’m having a Bad Tortoise Day, it’s still tough.

Here’s how I handle it:

- 1) I beat myself up. I know I shouldn’t have stayed up that extra half hour reading *The Devil Wears Prada*, but I did, and now I’m exhausted and facing a packed day of work to do.
- 2) I try and push myself to work through it, thinking I’ll waste time if I stop for a nap or take the day off, and it’ll all come crashing down on me.

As you may have guessed, this is not how I’m advising you to handle it!

We tend to think that the person who wrote the self-help book has it all together. The truth is, the challenge continues. I’ve gotten better at prevention, but I still have my Bad Tortoise Days. The difference is that I get over beating myself up a lot more quickly (I’ve got it down to a few seconds!), and I have a lot of strategies to handle it. Here are a few:

- ~ Prevention is the best “medicine”: Don’t take on more than you can handle. There are so many fun and exciting experiences out there, along with all the obligatory ones, that it’s hard to say “no.” Say it anyway. Make some good choices about what you’re capable of taking on.
- ~ Know your priorities. When you know what’s important to you, you can make better choices. It’s especially important, with all the information overload coming our way, to be able to hit the Delete button on things that don’t really matter to us, however interesting they might be.
- ~ Keep a schedule. When you see things on paper, you get a clearer picture. I use a digital calendar, where I can “colorize” different types of appointments. My own coach had me put in “Down Time” in bright green, to make sure to take it.
- ~ Take that nap. Or use that meditation tape. While it may feel like a waste of time, you’ll actually feel more refreshed and be more productive.
- ~ Build in periods of rest. If you know you’ve got a busy time coming up, pencil in a few vacation days, so you can recuperate. If you’ve got a busy evening, sleep in an extra hour in the morning.

If you're a Tortoise like me, it's something you need to learn to live with. Sure, it's frustrating not having the energy to do all the things you'd love to do. But by making good choices, and being gentle with yourself, you can actually accomplish a lot more than you thought you could. And you'll come out of it feeling revitalized, rather than exhausted.

Action Challenge

Where in your life do you need to slow down? Once you've identified the area, take it a step at a time. If you're working too hard, for example, cut back just half an hour a day to start, or choose just one day to leave work at 5 o'clock. The fear is that things will fall apart if you don't work so hard, but I bet you they don't!

Wise Words

"Lasting accomplishment ... is still achieved through a long, slow climb and self-discipline." ~ Helen Hayes

"Slow down and enjoy life. It's not only the scenery you miss by going too fast – you also miss the sense of where you are going and why." ~ Eddie Cantor

"The much-maligned midday nap can be profoundly rejuvenating. Some corporations have even found that the productivity of their employees goes up when they are allowed to nap." ~ Christiane Northrup, MD

"These two threads that run through our life – one pulling us into the world to achieve and make things happen, the other pulling us back from the world to nourish and replenish ourselves – can seem at odds, but in fact they reinforce each other." ~ Arianna Huffington, *The Sleep Revolution: Transforming Your Life, One Night at a Time*

"Slow and steady wins the race." ~ Aesop

Bookshelf



The Tortoise Workbook: Strategies for Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace ... Sharon Good



The Type-Z Guide to Success: A Lazy Person's Manifesto for Wealth and Fulfillment ... Marc Allen



The Importance of Being Lazy: In Praise of Play, Leisure, and Vacations ... Al Gini



How to Be Idle: A Loafer's Manifesto ... Tom Hodgkinson



In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed ... Carl Honoré



Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America ... John De Graaf



The Lazy Way to Success: How to achieve more by doing less ... Ella Summers



Sloth: The Seven Deadly Sins ... Wendy Wasserstein

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Issue 92

True Prosperity

When I say the word “prosperity,” what’s the first thing that comes to mind? I’m betting that it has something to do with money. In our “lifestyles of the rich and famous” culture, we’ve been taught that the sign of true success is fame and money. For most of us, words like “prosperity,” “abundance” and “wealth” conjure up images of winning the lottery and having palatial houses, luxury cars, elegant wardrobes and lots of stuff.

But true prosperity is much broader than just money and material things. It’s a state of mind. You may have a lot of money and all the material goods that life has to offer, and still not be happy. There are people who are extremely wealthy, and yet they feel impoverished. They have a lot of *things*, but they’re lacking in other areas, and the money and stuff are never enough for them to feel fulfilled.

True prosperity is about appreciating what you have and feeling rich in any number of areas of your life. Who do you think is wealthier: a teenager in America who has everything, but feels bored and resentful and always wants more, or a poor African child who treasures her loved ones and who’s ecstatic at the opportunity to get an education and create a better life?

True prosperity is an inside job. Recently, a program called *The Secret* has sparked intense interest and conversation. One aspect of the philosophy is that when you enjoy and feel gratitude for all you have, rather than focusing on what’s lacking, you create a resonance that attracts more of what you want. If you get the “stuff,” but you don’t treat it with gratitude and appreciation, you won’t enjoy it. Your focus will remain on what you *don’t* have.

So, let’s expand your wealth. Let’s look at the many areas in life where you can experience prosperity.

~ **Your creativity!**

Where do you get to express your creativity? This can be in one or more of the arts, or even in cooking, decorating or other forms. Do you enjoy your creativity, rather than agonizing over it? Where do you find it fulfilling to be creative in the way you approach other areas of your life?

~ **Loving relationships**

Do you have a great spouse or partner? Wonderful kids? Fabulous friends? Interesting colleagues? Do you take the time to appreciate them

(and express that appreciation), rather than judging them and dwelling on how they bug you?

~ **Health and well-being**

Are you strong, healthy and vibrant, to the best of your ability, both physically and emotionally? Do you enjoy and celebrate your good health, or do you obsess over every ache and pain? Do you value your joys and successes, or do you lapse into self-pity at the drop of a hat?

~ **Your environment**

Do you have a home that's comfortable and welcoming for you and your guests? If it's not ideal, do you appreciate what you have and do your best to fix it up in ways that make it pleasurable for you to be there? Do you have a work space that's pleasant and functional? Do you appreciate and maintain your vehicle, however modest it is?

~ **Talents and interests**

What are you great at? What do you love doing? Do you have hobbies or pursuits you're passionate about? Do you give yourself time for activities that are just for fun?

~ **Career**

Do you have work where you get to express your gifts and talents? Are you doing something you love? If not, what can you do to find a more satisfying career or bring more passion to the one you have?

~ **Spirituality**

Do you have a rich spiritual life, whether it's through a traditional religion or one you've crafted yourself? Do you give yourself time to feed your soul, through spiritual practice, expressing your creative passions or enriching your mind?

~ **Personal development**

Do you love to learn new things? Do you continually develop and grow as a person?

~ **Abundance on all levels**

Besides money, do you have an abundance of fun? Friends? Opportunities to learn and grow? Do you take advantage of the resources that are available to you in your community?

~ A great life!

Do you look forward to getting up every day? Do you live in a place that feels good to you? Do you feel connected to people you enjoy? Do you enjoy both work and leisure time? Do you feel good about yourself?

When you experience joy in any number of these areas, that's when you truly feel prosperous. Begin by shifting your focus to all that you *do* have, rather than dwelling on what's missing. *Really* appreciate your good fortune; find all the things you can be grateful for. And, of course, you can work on those areas that you want to "beef up."

Make the commitment to go forward from this day on appreciating and enjoying your life. Allow your joy to attract more of what you want and make your life even better. To quote our old friend Mr. Spock, "May you live long and prosper!"

Action Challenge

Where would you like to increase your true prosperity? Choose one of the areas listed above, and come up with 5 action steps you can take in the next month to improve that area.

Wise Words

"The real measure of your wealth is how much you'd be worth if you lost all your money." ~ Unknown

"The fact remains that the overwhelming majority of people who have become wealthy have become so thanks to work they found profoundly absorbing. The long term study of people who eventually became wealthy clearly reveals that their 'luck' arose from accidental dedication they had to an arena they enjoyed." ~ Srully Blotnick

"If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never. And what wine is so sparkling, what so fragrant, what so intoxicating, as possibility!" ~ Soren Kierkegaard

"All prosperity begins in the mind and is dependent only on the full use of our creative imagination." ~ Ruth Ross

Bookshelf



True Prosperity: How to Have Everything ... Yehuda Berg



Real Prosperity: Using the Power of Intuition to Create Financial and Spiritual Abundance ... Lynn Robinson



Creating True Prosperity ... Shakti Gawain



Receiving Prosperity: How to Attract Wealth, Success and Love into Your Life ... Louise Hay (audiobook)



The Secret ... Rhonda Byrne



The Science of Success: How to Attract Prosperity and Create Harmonic Wealth Through Proven Principles ... James Arthur Ray



Law of Attraction: The Science of Attracting of More of What You Want and Less of What You Don't Want ... Michael Losier



The Dynamic Laws of Prosperity AND Giving Makes You Rich ... Catherine Ponder



Absolutely Effortless Prosperity ... Bijan Anjomi



Chinese Style: Living in Beauty and Prosperity ... Sunamita Lim

Issue 93

What Does It Take to Make a Change?

There are many times in our lives when, by choice or necessity, we make a change. The change may be an exciting one or a challenging one. Either way, we're creatures of habit, and often change can take some effort.

In today's world, change is a given. It's often thrust upon us, whether we like it or not. Many of us change jobs every 2 to 3 years, if not more often. The store that we've shopped at consistently for decades suddenly closes, and we need to find new outlets. With each change, our routines are thrown into upheaval, and we need to adapt.

There are also times when we *want* to make a change. We may know we want the change, but not what direction it should take. Even if we know, maybe we don't know how to go about it, or it's scary. With the constant change we face these days, we may simply be in "change overload."

With so much change out of our control, it seems we need to be ready to change directions at all times. When it's possible, choosing change before it's thrust upon us, and preparing for the change, can alleviate much of the fear and uncertainty.

Here are a few steps you can take when change is on the horizon:

~ **Find the passion.**

Perhaps you hate your job, but you don't know what else you could do. Finding something you're passionate about is great fuel for change. If you're going toward something that's meaningful and exciting to you, you're more likely to weather the ups and downs of change.

~ **Tap into your courage.**

Any change, whether chosen or imposed, takes courage. You're moving into new, unknown territory. Even if it's an exciting change, there will be unknown factors and new challenges. Remember, courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to face the fear and move ahead anyway.

~ **Get clarity and focus.**

It's important to be clear about the change you want to make and the direction you want to go. Many people want a new career, to move to a new location, or to enter into a new relationship, but they're not clear about what that will look like. If you're not sure what you want, chances are you'll be more frightened and even reluctant to take steps in the direction you think you want to go. When you've done the soul-

searching and the research, and you're clear about your direction, you're much more likely to move forward with confidence and motivation.

~ **Be willing to take a calculated risk.**

Any change requires some risk. In order to swing to the next trapeze, the trapeze artist has to, at some point, let go of the first one. I'm not advocating taking a blind leap. If you do your preparation and feel confident that you're moving in the right direction, it's easier to take a well-prepared leap of faith.

~ **Create a new habit.**

When we do something repeatedly, we create pathways in the brain, similar to the ruts that wagon wheels make in dirt roads. When you make a change, you're creating new pathways. Left to our own devices, we'll generally default to the familiar "ruts." Creating new habits takes conscious, repeated effort. You need to become conscious about reinforcing the new habit, and then do it over and over until it becomes the new default path.

~ **Be willing to change yourself.**

Many people want big changes in their life, but they don't want to change themselves or their lifestyles. If you want your life to change, you need to look at what you need to *do* differently and how you need to *be* differently, in order to bring that change into your life. You need to, as they say, "be the change you want."

~ **Be patient and persistent.**

Change takes time. It may be awhile before you achieve your objectives. You may fall back into your old, familiar habits before the new habits take hold. Keep up your efforts on a regular basis for however long it takes. If you "fall off the wagon," dust yourself off and get back on track.

~ **Let go of the past.**

To make a change, you need to create out of who you're becoming, rather than who you've been. Your change may not make sense – becoming an actor after spending time and money on law school isn't logical, but it may be exactly what your soul is calling you to do. Keep your eye on your vision, rather than your history.

~ **Try new things.**

Be willing to experiment. Each experiment may not succeed, but you'll learn from each one and have more clarity about where you really want to go.

~ **Create a safe haven.**

If you have a lot of change in your life, it's reassuring and grounding to have at least one area that remains constant. For me, it's my apartment of 30 years, which has been my anchor through many career changes. For you, it may be your job, your family, your friends, your hobbies or your spirituality.

~ **Just start.**

You don't have to know where you're going to take the first steps. Once you get on the path, new pathways will open up to you that you couldn't see when you were standing at square one. It's helpful to start out with a game plan, but give yourself the freedom and flexibility to explore those new opportunities, rather than rigidly sticking to your plan.

Change can be both exciting and challenging. Try some of the strategies above. Be patient and persistent. In time, you'll surely get to enjoy the fruits of your work!

Action Challenge

In what area of your life would you like to make a change? Take some time to write or journal your vision – the new reality you would like to create. Now, look at the article above. Which of the strategies is most challenging for you? What can you do to strengthen yourself in that area? Where can you find support?

Wise Words

"We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are." ~ Max De Pree

"People can't live with change if there's not a changeless core inside them. The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value." ~ Stephen Covey

"Each of us is born with two contradictory sets of instructions: a conservative tendency, made up of instincts for self-preservation, self-aggrandizement, and saving energy, and an expansive tendency made up of instincts for exploring, for enjoying novelty and risk – the curiosity that leads to creativity belongs to this set. But whereas the first tendency requires little encouragement or support from outside to motivate behavior, the second can wilt if not cultivated.

"If too few opportunities for curiosity are available, if too many obstacles are put in the way of risk and exploration, the motivation to engage in creative

behavior is easily extinguished." ~ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention*

"Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf

-  *Between Trapezes: Flying Into a New Life with the Greatest of Ease ...* Gail Blanke
-  *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain: How a New Science Reveals Our Extraordinary Potential to Transform Ourselves ...* Sharon Begley
-  *Thinking for a Change: 11 Ways Highly Successful People Approach Life and Work ...* John C. Maxwell
-  *Making a Change for Good: A Guide to Compassionate Self-Discipline ...* Cheri Huber and Ashwini Narayanan
-  *Why Courage Matters: The Way to a Braver Life ...* John McCain with Marshall Salter
-  *The Courage to Create ...* Rollo May
-  *The Courage to Be ...* Paul Tillich
-  *Identifying and Managing Project Risk: Essential Tools for Failure-Proofing Your Project ...* Tom Kendrick, PMP
-  *Smart Women Take Risks: Six Steps for Conquering Your Fears and Making the Leap to Success ...* Helene Lerner
-  *Are You Ready to Love Your Job: Make a Great Living Through Soul Search, Research and Job Search ...* Maggie Mistal

Issue 94

Working Smarter

When I was a kid, we heard about how emerging technology was going to bring us the 4-day work week. As we now know, just the opposite happened. With most people being “wired” to the office with cell phones and Blackberries, it seems like you’re never away from work.

Most of us grew up with a belief system that if you work longer and harder, you’ll be more successful. Many companies are more concerned with how many hours you’re putting in than how productive you actually are. But when you’re working 60 hours a week, how much longer and harder can you work?? And what if you’re trying to develop your creative work on the side? Where do you find the time and energy to do that?

It seems we’ve hit a wall with how hard and how much we can work. We’re exhausted and depleted. Fortunately, there’s a new paradigm that’s coming forth to turn this around: Work smarter, not harder. By being strategic and focused, and by having clear goals that you’re passionate about, you can be successful and still have a balanced lifestyle, with time for yourself and the things that are meaningful to you.

Marc Allen (www.marcallen.com) is proof that you don’t have to be a workaholic to succeed. At the age of 30, Marc decided to try an experiment: he would create a successful publishing business working no more than 30 hours a week. He only worked when he felt like it and kept affirming that he was creating a successful company in an easy and relaxed manner, in a healthy and positive way. Within a year, Marc began to see that his experiment was working.

Marc went on to co-found the New World Library with Shakti Gawain (remember – she’s the author of the best-selling book, *Creative Visualization*). With no background in publishing, they built the company from a small start-up with no capital to one of the best known independent publishers. Marc, who began composing at the age of 16, has also written and published several albums of music.

So, how can we follow in Marc’s footsteps? I know it’s possible, because I was able to create a 3-day-a-week desktop publishing job that gave me a good income while I spent time building my publishing company. And when I got laid off from that job, I found another that held me over until I was ready to move into coaching full-time.

It’s about following your passion and changing your beliefs. As a career coach, I see a lot of people who come in saying they’re passionate about

something, but they read statistics about how hard it is and everyone tells them they shouldn't give up their secure job (which they hate). There's a lot of negative feedback around us. To move past that, we need to be strong and believe in ourselves.

I know your next question: If I don't believe I can do this, how can I turn that around? It's not about taking a blind leap. You experiment and test it out, step by step. As you begin to experience some success, you formulate new beliefs, and it gives you the courage to take the next step.

Here's a strategy you can work with:

~ **Dream**

You need to have a picture of where you want to be. Give yourself time to dream and imagine that vision. In order to do that, you need to know what's important to you. How do you define success for yourself? Sure, you want to pay your bills, but there are other things that may be more important to you than making tons of money, such as: time to do your creative work, time to start a business doing something you love to do, time with your family, time to play or time to stay in great shape.

When you know your priorities, you can make more effective and satisfying choices. Many people have chosen to simplify their lives – and reduce their expenses – to have more freedom and not be a slave to their jobs.

~ **Believe**

Look at the beliefs that are holding you back, such as: "I need to work 60 hours a week to put my kids through college," or "I have to please my employer to keep my job, so I have to fit in my painting or writing when (if) I can find the time."

Now, turn those around to create affirmations for yourself. A couple of my favorites are: "The less I work, the more money I make," "The more fun I have, the more money I make," and "When I do what I love, money comes to me easily and abundantly." And a couple from Marc Allen: "Everything I need gets done easily and effortlessly," and "Opportunity is everywhere."

~ **Intend**

Turn your desires and visions into an intention. The difference between a wish and an intention is focused desire and action. Have a game plan. The more concrete you can make it, the more easily you'll believe you can do it. If you don't know all the steps, start with what you do know.

~ **Prepare**

What do you need to do to minimize the risk? For most people, having enough money in the bank to support themselves for 6 to 12 months gives them tremendous freedom and security. If you know your expenses are covered, you can feel more comfortable taking a risk. Sacrifice some of your indulgences, and sock the money away into a high-interest account.

Also, prepare your loved ones. Get them on your team. They don't have to love what you're doing – in fact, it may scare them – but it's harder to be successful at this if you're fighting them. Create your strategy together. Once you have a plan and it feels less frightening, your partner may even want to do this too!

Think about anything else you need to do to move forward with confidence – any loose ends you need to tie up or anything you want to have in place to make you feel safer taking the risk.

~ **Act**

Action is what will turn your vision into a reality. You only have to know the first steps – subsequent steps will reveal themselves to you as you move forward. Take actions consistently. If you need to, put them in your calendar. For example, if you've been working long hours and want to start cutting back, mark off in your calendar time for your creative work, your family, leisure time, etc., and treat it as a serious commitment.

~ **Follow Through**

Once you've got your plan in the works, it's important to follow through. It's easy to fall back into old habits. Be clear on what your boundaries are. If you've determined that you'll leave work by 6 PM (or quit working if you're self-employed), it's important to do that, except in a dire emergency. That way, you're giving your employer – and more importantly, yourself – the message that you mean business. Work to your best ability during your work hours, but when it's time to leave, leave. Tasks expand to fill the time allotted for them. Work efficiently, get it done, and then go have fun. Make it easier by scheduling something fun to do and putting it in your calendar.

It's also okay to make course corrections as you go. Once you begin taking steps, new insights and opportunities will come to you. Stay current, and reevaluate your direction from time to time.

For many of us, our work is an important part of our lives. But even if you love your work, you need time away to rejuvenate and feed body and soul.

It's about balance. There's an old adage that nobody looks back on their life and wishes they had worked more. Take the time to think about what's important to you, and create a strategy to have a life that includes all of that. And do it now, while you can, so you're not regretting it later. Let Marc Allen be your model, and work smart, not hard. Enjoy your work, but also give priority to the other things that matter to you, and make time for them.

I want to emphasize that this process does take guts and persistence. You're bucking a well-entrenched system, and you might get a lot of flak from your family and friends. You may go through scary times when it doesn't look like it's working. This is a bold path. Whether you feel ready for it or not, start dreaming, planning and preparing. When the time is right, start taking steps. Then, stick it out, however long it takes. In time, you'll find yourself in a joy-filled place you could have only imagined before!

Action Challenge

What would you like your life to look like 5 years from now? What is your ideal scenario? Write it out in the present tense. For example: "I am writing my third best-selling book. I have a beautiful home by the water. I spend time every day meditating. I take an exciting trip somewhere in the world at least once each year. Everything I want comes to me easily." And so on. Dream big. Allow yourself to imagine. Have fun!

Wise Words












"The trouble with so many of us is that we underestimate the power of simplicity. We have a tendency, it seems, to overcomplicate our lives and forget what's important and what's not. We tend to mistake movement for achievement. We tend to focus on activities instead of results. And as the pace of life continues to race along in the outside world, we forget that we have the power to control our lives regardless of what's going on outside." ~ Robert Stuber

"You can be lazy and still be persistent – and once you learn how to do that, you can accomplish a great deal." ~ Marc Allen

"Many people in the United States and throughout the industrialized nations misguidedly believe that the only way to have what we want is to work hard and long. There is an alternative: Be who you are first. When you focus on being first, this lets you do what you want to do, which lets you have what you need. We need to allow ourselves to be first; the rest will follow." ~ Patrick Williams, EdD, MCC

"Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen." ~
Ralph Waldo Emerson

Bookshelf

-  *The Type Z Guide to Success with Ease: A Lazy Person's Manifesto for Wealth and Fulfillment ...* Marc Allen
-  *Visionary Business: An Entrepreneur's Guide to Success ...* Marc Allen
-  *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich ...* Timothy Ferriss
-  *As You Think ...* James Allen
-  *Take Time for Your Life ...* Cheryl Richardson
-  *How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life ...* Alan Lakein
-  *Time Tactics of Very Successful People ...* B. Eugene Griessman
-  *The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-Create Your World Your Way ...* Dr. Wayne W. Dyer
-  *Slowing Down to the Speed of Life: How To Create A More Peaceful, Simpler Life From the Inside Out ...* Richard Carlson and Joseph Bailey
-  *The Secret ...* Rhonda Byrne
-  *The Law of Attraction: The Basics of the Teachings of Abraham ...* Esther and Jerry Hicks

Issue 95

Uncertainly Creative: Inspired by Alan Alda

I've been a fan of Alan Alda's since I was a teenager, when I saw him in *The Apple Tree* at the Mineola Theatre on Long Island. I loved his TV show, *M*A*S*H*, and always admired his activism on behalf of women. My admiration grew further after reading his latest book, *Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself*. Along with his humor – which is evident from his book titles – Mr. Alda shares wisdom gleaned from many years of richly living life and learning from his triumphs and tribulations.



This new book includes the texts of several commencement addresses that Mr. Alda gave at various colleges over the years. In one, he encourages the graduates to contribute their creativity to the world and to allow themselves to be “uncertainly creative.” What an intriguing phrase! When you think about it, doesn't true creativity include an aspect of stepping into the unknown, not knowing what will emerge?

Years ago, I had the opportunity to edit a book on film acting. As a theatre actress, I rarely went on the stage without at least some rehearsal of my role. I was shocked to find out that film actors generally don't “set” their performances. They do their homework on the role, learn their lines and then allow the scene to emerge organically, as they interact with their fellow actors. What courage that takes! And what exciting work comes out of it!

Being creative means having the audacity to face that blank canvas or page or stage and to plunge in, even when you have no idea where it will go. It means being open and trusting enough to get in the flow and allow it to take you in uncharted directions that can be both exhilarating and scary.

And here's the kicker: You don't *want* to know what's going to happen, whether in life or in art! Creativity happens in the surprises, the paths you go down, not knowing where they will lead. Having everything be certain and predictable might give you a sense of peace for awhile, but wouldn't it eventually become stagnant and boring?

New forms don't come from following the tried-and-true path. Being uncertainly creative means allowing the wild ideas to come forth and putting them out into the world. Our greatest artists and inventors had the courage to face rejection and ridicule, to honor their creative impulses and introduce once-radical ideas that have brought more beauty or comfort into the world.

We need to get comfortable walking into the unknown. Lench Archuleta, a Yaqui Indian spiritual teacher, tells about the times he would put his kids in the car, and they would set out to get lost, spontaneously taking whatever turn appealed to them in the moment. The adventure was in finding their way back.

Even in writing this article, I started with a phrase that inspired me, but I had no idea where it was going to go. As I lived with the question, "What does it mean to be uncertainly creative?", ideas began to show up, either spontaneously or sparked by things I came across in my environment.

To be truly creative, we need to actively and courageously invite uncertainty into the process, to learn to be comfortable with not knowing where our creativity will lead us. Alan Alda has boldly walked into many challenges. Starting from childhood, he was encouraged to explore, which, he says, "gave me the nerve to go places that scare me, but where I find excitement and adventure."

It is by intentionally going to those scary places that we create art, and lives, that are exhilarating and that enable us to fulfill our purpose: to contribute our unique talents and ideas to a world that is longing for them.

Action Challenge

What are the places that scare you most? Pick one that you're willing to venture into. List 5 steps you can take to move in that direction in the next month.

Wise Words

"If we begin with certainties, we shall end in doubts; but if we begin with doubts, and are patient in them, we shall end in certainties." ~ Francis Bacon

"There is a time for departure even when there's no certain place to go." ~ Robert Frost

"Uncertainty and mystery are energies of life. Don't let them scare you unduly, for they keep boredom at bay and spark creativity." ~ R. I. Fitzhenry

"The more of it [our vision] we can describe, the clearer we also become about the vision's unknown aspects. Our intuitive drive to fill these blanks or unknown aspects will eventually take over and become a powerful force to guide us with a remarkable sense of certainty into an uncharted future." ~ Kurt Wright, *Breaking the Rules: Removing the Obstacles to Effortless High Performance*

Bookshelf



Things I Overheard While Talking to Myself ... Alan Alda



Never Have Your Dog Stuffed: And Other Things I've Learned ... Alan Alda



The Creative Spirit ... Daniel Goleman, Paul Kaufman and Michael Ray



The Writing Experiment: Strategies for Innovative Creative Writing ... Hazel Smith



Expect the Unexpected or You Won't Find It: A Creativity Tool Based on the Ancient Wisdom of Heraclitus ... Roger von Oech



Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius ... Michael Michalko



Sparks of Genius: The 13 Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People ... Robert and Michèle M. Root-Bernstein



Creative Decision Making Using Positive Uncertainty ... H.B. Gelatt and Carol Gelatt



Career Guide for Creative and Unconventional People ... Carol Eikleberry, PhD with Carrie Pinsky, MEd



Working Identity: Unconventional Strategies for Reinventing Your Career ... Herminia Ibarra

Issue 96

What I Learned This Year

As each year comes to an end, I find myself looking back to assess what I accomplished. This year in particular has been one of huge inner and outer exploration for me, and I'd like to share some of what I learned.

~ **An experience is worth a thousand pictures.**

I've probably seen thousands of pictures of Egyptian art. But when I saw my first actual relief carving at Abu Simbel, I was awestruck by its beauty. It's been 20 years since I stood atop the Leaning Tower of Pisa, but the experience is still vivid for me, in a way that no picture ever could be.



~ **Travel really does broaden your horizons.**

Experiencing a culture is very different from reading the news or watching a documentary. From afar, it's very easy to buy into the touted beliefs about people who are different from you. Traveling in Egypt, I often felt apprehensive or uncomfortable – not because I felt I was in danger, but because I felt strange and didn't know what the expected behaviors were.

But the Egyptians I met were warm, friendly people who loved their families, cherished their traditions, and went out of their way to make me feel welcome. In the future, I'll think twice before judging someone based on their national or religious affiliation.

~ **The arts really do connect people across national and cultural lines.**

One of the highlights of my trip to Egypt was visiting a girls' high school. During our visit, we stopped in to listen to choir practice. We all sang along to "Do-Re-Mi," and some of the girls came off the risers and danced with us. It was an exhilarating experience to connect with these darling girls heart to heart, across lines of age, culture, religion and nationality.



~ **Some of your gifts may not blossom till later in life.**

When I was young, everyone tried to push me into being a teacher, but I had no desire to teach in the public school system. Now, so many years later, I'm teaching public workshops for adults and training life coaches. I'm really good at it, and I absolutely adore it!

~ **There's a lot more to me than meets the eye.**

I've been working on personal development for 25 years, but in recent years, I've grown into a person I never imagined I could be. Even though I know myself well, I've come to believe that I have unrevealed qualities and capabilities that will emerge over time. I can't tell you how exciting that is to me!

~ **Getting older doesn't mean going downhill.**

This year, I did some "wellness" work. This involved some dietary changes and putting some new habits in place. As a result, I have greater vitality and feel stronger. While it doesn't make me as energetic or lithe as I was in my youth, I wouldn't trade all the fantastic experiences I've had and the wisdom I've gained for a younger, thinner body. I'm still strong and healthy, and I anticipate many more exciting adventures yet to come!

Self-reflection is so important to our growth and development as human beings! But living in such busy times, it's often hard to find the time. As a coach, I find that often, my clients have endless to-do lists and never feel they're accomplishing anything. Taking time to take stock of your growth and accomplishments is an important step in moving forward. When you see and acknowledge how far you've come, it gives you the impetus to take on new challenges with the optimism that you can achieve them.

And it just feels so darn good to feel good about yourself!

Happy new year!

Action Challenge

Take time to reflect on all the things you learned this year – about yourself, your accomplishments and ways you've grown. Look for the little nuances as well as the big things. Do this in several sittings – once you begin to think about this question, ideas will emerge over time.

Wise Words

"On this shrunken globe, men can no longer live as strangers." ~ Adlai E. Stevenson

"Resolve to be thyself: and know, that he
Who finds himself, loses his misery." ~ Matthew Arnold

"We know what we are, but know not what we may be." ~ William Shakespeare

"It's surprising how many persons go through life without ever recognizing that their feelings toward other people are largely determined by their feelings toward themselves, and if you're not comfortable within yourself, you can't be comfortable with others." ~ Sydney J. Harris

Bookshelf



The Adventure of Self-Discovery: Dimensions of Consciousness and New Perspectives in Psychotherapy and Inner Exploration ... Stanislav Grof



The Journey Called You: A Roadmap to Self-Discovery and Acceptance ... Dr. Julie Donley



The Playful Way to Knowing Yourself: A Creative Workbook to Inspire Self-Discovery ... Roberta Allen



Journal to the Self: Twenty-Two Paths to Personal Growth ... Kathleen Adams



Soul Catcher: A Journal to Help You Become Who You Really Are ... Kathy and Amy Eldon



List Your Self: Listmaking as the Way to Self-Discovery ... Ilene Segalove and Paul Bob Velick



Creative Expression: Creativity and Self Exploration ... Jennifer Freed, PhD



The Higher Self: The Magic of Inner and Outer Fulfillment ... Deepak Chopra, MD (audiobook)



Spiritual Growth: Being Your Higher Self ... Sanaya Roman



Optimal Thinking: How to Be Your Best Self ... Rosalene Glickman



Encounters in My Travels: Thoughts Along the Way ... Dixie Lee Harris

Issue 97

Who Do You Want to Become?

Growing and changing is a natural part of our human development. We know this. When we're thinking about what's next for us, though, we tend to look back at our history to see what the next logical step is. But we may have dreams and passions we want to pursue that are not a linear outcome of what we've done before, so they don't feel doable. What do we do then?

Instead of creating our future out of our past, we can look at who we want to become. Usually, when we're looking toward our future, we think about what we want to do. But what about looking at who we want to be? Life is not just a string of accomplishments. It's a process in which we gain knowledge and experience and develop who we are.

When I was younger, I didn't think much about who I was becoming. I knew I wanted to be an actress from the age of 14, and I didn't care why. I pursued that path without further thought until I was in my 30s and found myself on a path of personal and spiritual growth. The question, How can I best serve? began to creep into my mind. While I realized that actors perform an important service, it wasn't the right kind of service for me anymore.

My next step was a foray into the world of publishing. I had no background in this field, but it was an opportunity to develop my writing skill and publish books that brought valuable tools and information and heart-warming stories into the world. It was a huge challenge to run a business and be responsible for bookkeeping and marketing and inventory. I grew tremendously and was proud of the books we published, but eventually, it ran its course and a new opportunity arose.

After 7 years of publishing, I happened upon an article about life coaching. We were still in the thick of publishing, and I certainly didn't need another career, but it kept tugging at me. After completing what turned out to be our last book, I enrolled in a coach training course. I loved it! This wonderful new profession – my new “best way to serve” – continues to allow me to have an even more direct, positive impact on people's lives. In working with my clients, as well as teaching and writing, I learn and grow every day.

In looking back, my career path makes a lot of sense. My acting experience has helped make me a better teacher and speaker. I continue to write and publish self-help materials that support my coaching focus. But as I began each new career, I had no idea why I was drawn to it or what it would bring. I only knew that I needed to step into a new challenge that would develop who I was as a person and a professional.

As we move to each new stage of life, a new sense of purpose is revealed to us. The things we did and who we were become a size too small, and we need to break out and seek new direction. It may be the logical next step from what we've been doing, or it may be a radical change. Either way, our new path calls on us to be willing to let go of the comfort of the old, familiar ways and open to learning new skills and new ways of being.

In the words of Shunryo Suzuki-Roshi, a 20th century Japanese Zen priest: "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few." Although you may have decades of life experience behind you, approach your new stage with beginner's mind.

By letting go of relying on what you already know – about life and about yourself – you'll discover wonderful new aspects of yourself that will move you forward in your development, as well as your accomplishments, and open new worlds. And down the line, when the time is right, yet another new and mysterious path will be revealed to you!

Action Challenge

Make a list of at least 10 adjectives that describe who you want to become in the next 5 to 10 years. Take one of these adjectives. What steps can you take in the next month to become more of that? In the next year?

Wise Words

"The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it." ~ John Ruskin

"There are no great limits to growth because there are no limits of human intelligence, imagination, and wonder." ~ Ronald Reagan

"Growth demands a temporary surrender of security." ~ Gail Sheehy

"I began to have an idea of my life, not as the slow shaping of achievement to fit my preconceived purposes, but as the gradual discovery and growth of a purpose which I did not know." ~ Joanna Field

"Career satisfaction doesn't come from what you do. It comes from who you get to be while you're doing it." ~ Laura Berman Fortgang

Bookshelf



Who Am I?: The 16 Basic Desires That Motivate Our Actions and Define Our Personalities ... Steven Reiss, PhD



Driven: How Human Nature Shapes Our Choices ... Paul R. Lawrence and Nitin Nohria



I Think, Therefore Who Am I? ... Peter Weissman



Who Are You?: 101 Ways of Seeing Yourself ... Malcolm Godwin



The Temperament Discovery System ... David M. Keirse, Richard Milner and Vince Wood



Are You Ready to Succeed?: Unconventional Strategies to Achieving Personal Mastery in Business and Life ... Srikumar S. Rao



Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes ... William Bridges



Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life ... Gail Sheehy



The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom ... Angeles Arrien



Second Acts: Creating the Life You Really Want, Building the Career You Truly Desire ... Stephen M. Pollan and Mark Levine

Issue 98

Using Creativity to Lift Your Fears

There's no doubt, we are living in difficult times. We're constantly warned to be vigilant of terrorist attacks. Banks are closing and the stock market is a roller coaster ride. Storms and tsunamis are battering coastlines. When we look around us, there's plenty of evidence to make us fearful.

What makes it worse is when our imagination takes hold, and we begin to envision desperate futures. Our fear escalates, and we start to make fearful choices. Before long, we feel mired in fear, with no resolution in sight.

It's in times like this that our creativity can be our greatest ally.

When we're in the midst of fear, it often doesn't occur to us that our bleak images of the future are not real – they come from our imagination! So, why not harness that same imagination to envision positive futures?

It may take some work to pull yourself out of the downward spiral, but the effort can help you refocus your energies, be more productive and feel more optimistic. Here are some ways you can do that:

- ~ Journal all your fears and negative thoughts. Getting them out of your head and on paper often helps you to calm down and see more clearly.
- ~ Now, write out affirmations that reflect the future you want to create. Take each of your negative thoughts and turn them into a positive. It's okay if you don't believe them yet.
- ~ Put your affirmations in places where you see them frequently – on the bathroom mirror, around your computer monitor or laptop keyboard, on the dashboard of your car or over the kitchen sink.
- ~ Use your creative imagination to write out a positive, exciting vision for your future. If you're more visual, create a picture or dream board. You can also record your vision, or have someone record it for you. Read, look at or listen to your vision at the beginning and end of each day, when your subconscious is most open.
- ~ Limit your exposure to sensationalized news. Trust me, if there's something you really need to know, that information will get to you. Instead, feed your soul with positive, uplifting programs.

So now, you've pulled yourself out of the fear and gotten more grounded. The next step is to practice responding to situations with creativity, rather than panic and fear.

- ~ If you hear bad news or feel frightened, before you do anything, stop and breathe. Taking 10 breaths deep into your belly will do wonders to dispel the anxiety.
- ~ Do a reality check. What's really true about this situation? People often respond emotionally, making up their own "facts," and fear is contagious. Remember – 99% of the things we worry about never happen.
- ~ Don't give away your power. Take the time to think things through for yourself, rather than buying into what everyone else is saying. The majority isn't always right, and what's true for someone else may not be true for you.
- ~ Make a list of 5 – 10 ways that you could handle any situation. This will give you options you can choose from, and you'll be able to make creative choices, rather than just reacting out of panic and doing the first thing that comes to mind.

Whatever you do, don't let the fear shut you down. Keep moving forward with your dreams and goals, even if you need to modify them or lengthen the time line. Rather than going into survival mode, continue to focus on creating your positive future. The crisis will pass, and you'll be in a better place by continuing to take steps forward.



For additional support and information, see the following past issues:

Issue 54: Transition and Change

Issue 55: What Really Matters

Issue 68: Dealing With Turmoil

Issue 72: Moving Ahead in Troubled Times

Issue 82: Keeping Your Spirits Up ... And Making a Difference in the World

Issue 89: Learning to Endure

Action Challenge

What's your vision for yourself and your world? Take time to write, draw or compose a piece that's uplifting for yourself and others.

Wise Words

"The art of living lies less in eliminating our troubles than in growing with them." ~ Bernard M. Baruch

"We can either be scared or thinking of ways to reshape things." ~ Judy Crookes

"Every calamity is a spur and valuable hint." ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

"The heart prefers to move against the grain of circumstance; perversity is the soul's very life." ~ John Updike

Bookshelf



The Impossible Will Take a Little While: perseverance and hope in troubled times ... Paul Rogat Loeb



Hope in Troubled Times: A New Vision for Confronting Global Crises ... Bob Goudzwaard, Mark Vander Vennen and David Van Heemst



Beyond Rationality: The Search for Wisdom in a Troubled Time ... Kenneth R. Hammond



A Way Forward: Spiritual Guidance for Our Troubled Times ... Anna Voigt and Nevill Drury



Creativity Revealed: Discovering the Source of Inspiration ... Scott Jeffrey



Out of Our Minds: Learning to be Creative ... Ken Robinson



Your Soul's Compass: What Is Spiritual Guidance? ... Joan Borysenko, PhD and Gordon Dveirin, EdD



Presence: Human Purpose and the Field of the Future ... Peter Senge, C. Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski, Betty Sue Flowers



A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future ... Daniel H. Pink

Issue 99

The Value of Values

As the year comes to an end and a new one begins, it's natural for our thoughts to turn to, What do I want in the coming year? In making these choices, we want to come from a place of clarity. But as we move through these chaotic times, we may feel we're being swirled around in a storm of confusion. We get all kinds of conflicting information from TV, newspapers, the Internet and our friends. How can we possibly evaluate our next steps from a clear place?

Before we do anything, we need to find a quiet place, both outside and within ourselves. Get away from the media and other people, even for a short time. Go into meditation or take a walk in the park. It's only by quieting the multitude of inner and outer voices that we can open ourselves to receiving clear guidance, wherever we may believe it comes from.

We also need some kind of compass for making the best choices and decisions. One of the best I know of is our values. Our values are a set of principles and standards by which we live. They determine what's truly important to us in our lives and provide a set of criteria by which we can make the best life choices.

You may feel you already know your values, and that may be true. But in times of stress, it's not uncommon to forget our values and react from fear. To prepare, take the time to write down your values. Clarify that each of these is a true value for you, not something you feel you *should* value or that the people around you value.

Put your list aside for a few hours or days, and come back to it with a fresh eye. You may find that a value that you thought was yours was one that you adopted decades ago, but no longer rings true for you. If so, take it off your list, or reframe it in a way that feels good to you.

Keep working on your list until it feels authentic. It may be a work-in-progress that you revisit annually. Review your list often to keep it fresh in your memory. You may want to include it as part of your morning and evening rituals.

When the time comes to make a decision, pull out your list. See how your options weigh against your values, and then make the appropriate choice. Making value-based choices may not always be easy, but they will be the ones that serve you best in the long run. As you make choices that are aligned with your highest principles and standards, your life will become a greater reflection of your highest values.

So, take some time to go inside and reflect. Work with your values to set new goals and visions for the coming year. Use your list of values as a compass to keep you on track, and then set about making this coming year the best ever.

Action Challenge

Do an inventory of your values. Make a list. Check it twice. (Santa made me say that!) Put your list aside. Come back to it and look at each value.

When you think about this value, how does it make you feel? Is it a good feeling? If not, look at where this value comes from. Is it one that belonged to your family or a peer group? Does it still work for you? If so, keep it. If not, cross it off the list.

Continue going through each value, until your list feels authentic for you. Then, refer to it regularly.

Wise Words

"People can't live with change if there's not a changeless core inside them. The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about and what you value." ~ Stephen Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*

"Life's up and downs provide windows of opportunity to determine your values and goals. Think of using all obstacles as stepping stones to build the life you want." ~ Marsha Sinetar, *To Build the Life You Want, Create the Work You Love*

"Nothing is given to man on earth – struggle is built into the nature of life, and conflict is possible – the hero is the man who lets no obstacle prevent him from pursuing the values he has chosen." ~ Andrew Bernstein

"Authentic values are those by which a life can be lived, which can form a people that produces great deeds and thoughts." ~ Allan Bloom

Bookshelf



Values Clarification ... Dr. Sidney B. Simon, Dr. Leland W Howe and Dr. Howard Kirschenbaum



What Matters Most: The Power of Living Your Values ... Hyrum W. Smith



What Are Your Goals: Powerful Questions to Discover What You Want Out of Life ... Gary Ryan Blair



A Question of Values: Six Ways We Make the Personal Choices That Shape Our Lives ... Hunter Lewis



Character Is Destiny: The Value of Personal Ethics in Everyday Life ... Russell W. Gough



Understanding Human Values: Individual and Societal ... Milton Rokeach



Balancing Individual and Organizational Values: Walking the Tightrope to Success ... Ken Hultman



Managing by Values: How to Put Your Values into Action for Extraordinary Results ... Ken Blanchard and Michael O'Connor

Issue 100

The Age of Speed

No one would deny that we're living in a world that's getting faster every day. Everyone I know is running on all cylinders trying to keep up with it all. Most of us spend time figuring out how to slow things down, to avoid the constant overwhelm that many of us experience. Why would we ever consider speeding things up?

When Vince Poscente's book, *The Age of Speed*, fell into my hands, I – a self-proclaimed Tortoise in a World of Hares™ – was duly skeptical. But as I began reading the book, I discovered that Poscente makes a great point: It's not about applying speed across the board, but choosing where to use it to your advantage.

With so much on our plate, there are certain things we *want* to do quickly. If we can spend less time on routine, insignificant tasks, it gives us more time for the things that really matter. A few years ago, I went to a talk given by Carl Honoré, the author of *In Praise of Slowness*. One of the things that inspired his book was when he realized that his life was so jam-packed that he was reading 2-minute bedtime stories to his young son. Time with loved ones is one of the things that you *don't* want to speed up!

We can restore the quality of our lives by using speed selectively. Many of my clients want to pursue a new career path, a passion or a fabulous relationship, but they can't find the time to devote to it. By being more efficient with necessary, but repetitive tasks, we can make more time for the things that warrant our full attention.

Makes sense, right? The problem is, when we do clear up some time, we tend to fill it up with more insignificant tasks – email, surfing the Web, watching reality TV. Our society puts a high value on productivity. When we're doing something that's personally satisfying, but doesn't forward our career, we feel guilty and soothe ourselves by just keeping busy.

We need to prioritize the things we both *need* and *want* to do. Begin by getting clear on your authentic purpose. This is a whole conversation in itself, but start by taking some time to explore what you want to both give to others and experience for yourself as you live your lifetime. Based on that insight, what activities will benefit most by receiving your full focus? Which tasks can you automate or multitask without sacrificing enjoyment?

Speed doesn't mean compromising quality. By automating your monthly bill-paying or cleaning the house while listening to beautiful music, you're not losing any value. And by accomplishing those tasks more quickly, you'll

open up valuable time for doing the things that are meaningful to you and require your full attention.

Speed is here to stay. Rather than fighting it, why not use it to your advantage to create time for the things that really matter to you. Learn to ride the wave, and you'll find the overwhelm of speed beginning to lift.

Action Challenge

Make a list of all the tasks you do during a typical week, as well as activities you would like to add to your life. Which ones would benefit from your full attention? Which ones could you speed up without losing quality? Look at the second list and see how you might automate those tasks. Then, schedule time for meaningful pursuits into your calendar.

Wise Words

"Speed is scarcely the noblest virtue of graphic composition, but it has its curious rewards. There is a sense of getting somewhere fast, which satisfies a native American urge." ~ James Thurber

"Efficiency is doing better what is already being done." ~ Peter Drucker

"One trouble with developing speed reading skills is that by the time you realize a book is boring you've already finished it." ~ Franklin P. Jones

"I took a course in speed waiting. Now I can wait an hour in only ten minutes." ~ Steven Wright

Bookshelf



The Age of Speed: Learning to Thrive in a More-Faster-Now World
... Vince Poscente



The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich ... Timothy Ferriss



What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful ... Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter



The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything ... Stephen M. R. Covey with Rebecca R. Merrill



The Dip: A Little Book That Teaches You When to Quit (and When to Stick) ... Seth Godin



In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed ... Carl Honoré



Take Time for Your Life ... Cheryl Richardson

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Issue 101

What I Learned as an Actress

Nowadays, many people are contemplating a change of career. In the process, there's sometimes a regret at leaving behind a career that you invested a lot of time in. But nothing ever goes to waste. Every life experience informs future experiences.

I recently had the pleasure of running into a gentleman I worked with during my days in the theatre. (That's me in *The Pied Piper*.) In current times, this gentleman is "between engagements" and I'm self-employed. We talked about how our work in the theatre prepared us to handle so many aspects of our lives and careers with courage and optimism. I'd like to share some of our insights.



~ **Be self-reliant.**

Whether you're self-employed or in a salaried position, knowing that you can take care of yourself, no matter what happens, gives you tremendous freedom. As an actor, you know that no job is forever. You learn to keep your skills sharp and to use a variety of skills to make a living. Think about the many skills you have that could turn into career opportunities or side jobs.

~ **Don't take rejection personally.**

Going to job interviews can be intimidating. For an actor, it's all in a day's work. In order to survive and succeed, you have to learn to overcome fear of rejection. The truth is, there are usually numerous factors that go into a hiring decision. As an actor, you may lose a job, not because of a lack of talent, but because your hair is the wrong color, or because you're too short (or tall), or because the director went with someone they had worked with previously. It's okay to take a little time to lick your wounds, but you need to keep getting out there to eventually succeed.

~ **Represent yourself authentically.**

As an actor, your first contact with a potential employer is often through your picture and resume. Sometimes, actors send pictures that are outdated, don't really look like them or show them all "duded up," in a way they don't look in real life. When they show up in person looking completely different, they might be all wrong for the part. While you want to present yourself in your best light, you need to be your authentic self. People want to know that what they see is what they're

going to get. This goes for your resume, your online presentation and the way you show up at an interview or meeting, as well as in your personal relationships.

~ **Be your own best advocate.**

It's not about bragging. But if you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else? Learn what your strengths are, and don't be afraid to share them with self-assurance.

~ **Define success your own way.**

When I tell people that I was an actress, they usually ask if I was on Broadway. I wasn't. It would have been nice, but the truth is, working in a musical children's theatre company that was like a family was perfect for me. There's a lot of influence out there to define success in a certain way. But if you achieve someone else's definition of success, chances are, it won't be fulfilling for you. Take the time to think about what would make you feel happy and fulfilled, and then go for it.

~ **Don't give up.**

There's a phrase in show business: the "overnight success." But many "overnight successes" were working at their craft for 20 or 30 years before they hit the big time. Be honest with yourself about what you want, and then go for it heart and soul. I did my best as an actress, and when it was no longer satisfying me, I left with no regrets. After 25 years in that business, I was able to apply that persistence to my subsequent careers, and I would have to say that that has been my "secret" to success.

Even though I haven't been on a stage in almost 20 years, my time in the theatre helped me to build character and an ability to weather change and uncertainty that have served me well. As you look back on your own career path, take stock of your triumphs and challenges, and use them as springboards to move into your future with greater strength and confidence.

Action Challenge

Look at past experiences, whether work or personal. What did you learn from those experiences that has served you in your life? What are you learning now that will serve you in the future?

Wise Words

"Each of us has, and uses in every moment of the day, a power of intuitive intelligence that enables us to understand, to speak, and to cope skillfully

with our everyday environment. Somehow that intuition summarizes everything we have ever experienced and done, and enables that summary to shape our present decisions." ~ Huston Smith, *Why Religion Matters*

"You have only one source of creativity – your own unique talents, skills, perspectives, and experiences. You can't be creative with someone else's stuff, because creativity, by definition, is the process of translating who you are into some outward manifestation. It doesn't matter whether that is a painting, an ad campaign, a holiday dinner, a business report, or the raising of a healthy child. The creative process can be applied to all of our activities, eventually yielding a truly creative life." ~ G. Lynne Snead and Joyce Wycoff, *To Do Doing Done!*

"You have to be willing to grow. Growth is different from something that happens to you: You produce it. You live it. The prerequisites for growth are the openness to experience events and the willingness to be changed by them." ~ Bruce Mau

Bookshelf



All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten ... Robert Fulghum



Success Built to Last: Creating a Life that Matters ... Jerry Porras, Stewart Emery, Mark Thompson



Actualizations: You Don't Have to Rehearse to Be Yourself ... Stewart Emery



Straight Talk for Success ... Bud Bilanich



Breaking Into Acting for Dummies ... Larry Garrison and Wallace Wang



Promoting Your Acting Career: A Step-by-Step Guide to Opening the Right Doors ... Glenn Alterman



Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business ... Bonnie Gillespie

Issue 102

What Guides Your Life?

Nowadays, life often feels like we're living in the middle of a whirlpool. We're battered about by constant change and crisis. We turn on the news and hear frightening reports from every corner of the globe. We go on the Internet and see contradictory information about anything and everything.

In the midst of such a maelstrom, how can we effectively guide our lives and stay centered? How can we make good choices when we don't know who or what we can rely on?

When we're living with such instability and chaos, we have a choice: We can manage our lives by our passions or our problems.

When we manage life through our problems, we don't have to think. We're compelled to focus on "putting out the fires" caused by sickness, work crises, financial instability, dysfunctional relationships, fears and the like. We just take the next step to keep our heads above water. This may not be a pleasant existence, but it does create a sense of structure and direction for our lives.

But just getting by is not enough. Survival itself may feel like an accomplishment, but our dreams get lost in the bargain. Ultimately, it doesn't make for a very fulfilling life.

To live our lives creatively, we need to make our passions a priority – our values and principles, the things that bring us joy and greater freedom, and our creative expression, whether it comes through an art form, a business, in-depth study of a subject or some other pursuit that makes you feel alive and excited.

There was a story going around the Internet a few years ago that went something like this: A professor had a big jar on his desk. He put several big rocks into the jar and asked his students if the jar was full. The students said "yes." He then proceeded to add as many small rocks as he could. Again, the students said the jar was full. The professor then added pebbles, sand and water.

The moral of the story is that if the professor hadn't put the big rocks in first, the jar would have been taken over by the small rocks, pebbles, sand and water. In the same way, if we don't put our attention and energies into our passions first (the "big rocks"), our time and attention will be dominated by problems and crises (all the other stuff).

To live a life focused around the "big rocks," we first need to discover what they are.

~ **What are your values and principles?**

Spend some time thinking about what's important to you – creative expression, family and friends, being of service, living a healthy life, making choices that are aligned with your integrity, helping those in need. How can you live more in alignment with those values?

~ **What are you passionate about?**

Is there a cause that's dear to you? Is there something that you would regret not doing? This could be a world cause, such as the environment or sustainable farming, or using your gifts and talents for personal gratification and as your contribution to the world.

~ **What brings you joy?**

Think of the things that you love – your work, the people in your life, creating something beautiful or delicious, immersing yourself in a hobby. How can you bring more of these into your life? When we make time for joy, we also have a greater sense of freedom and a zest for life.

When you're in touch with these important aspects and focusing on them, problems and crises take their rightful place, rather than dominating your attention. Your life is richer and you follow a path that expresses your values, passions and joys, rather than just fixing what's broken. And miraculously, when you're living a joyous life, the problems just seem to get resolved. What a nice way to live!

Action Challenge

Make a list of 100 things that bring you joy. What steps can you take to bring more of those things into your life?

Wise Words









"Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to circumstances." ~ Bruce Barton

"You are not here merely to make a living. You are here in order to enable the world to live more amply, with greater vision, with a finer spirit of hope and achievement. You are here to enrich the world, and you impoverish yourself if you forget the errand." ~ Woodrow Wilson

"In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it." ~ Robert A. Heinlein

"When you are grateful, fear disappears and abundance appears." ~ Anthony Robbins

Bookshelf

-  *A Question of Values: Six Ways We Make the Personal Choices That Shape Our Lives ...* Hunter Lewis
-  *In Search of Values: 31 Strategies for Finding Out What Really Matters Most to You ...* Dr. Sidney B. Simon
-  *What Matters Most: The Power of Living Your Values ...* Hyrum W. Smith
-  *What Matters Most: Living a More Considered Life....* James Hollis
-  *What's Next?: Follow Your Passion and Find Your Dream Job ...* Kerry Hannon
-  *The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life ...* Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander
-  *The Practical Dreamer's Handbook: Finding the Time, Money, & Energy to Live the Life You Want to Live ...* Paul & Sarah Edwards
-  *I Could Do Anything If I Only Knew What It Was: How to Discover What You Really Want and How to Get It ...* Barbara Sher with Barbara Smith

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Issue 103

Success from the Slow Lane

Stop the world, I want to get off!

Have you found yourself saying this, as the pace of life whizzes by you? The rapid changes of the last decade are affecting everyone, but are especially dizzying to “Tortoises” – those of us who have big dreams and ambitions, but who move more slowly than most.

I began to call myself a Tortoise when I realized that despite my passion for my work, I just didn’t have the energy to keep up with my colleagues. I’m just naturally a slow-paced person. Other Tortoises are challenged by limited time, health issues or the slowing down of aging.



Like many Tortoises, I wasn’t willing to give up doing what I love because I couldn’t make it to the top of my field. To support my drive to achieve and find satisfaction in my work and my life, I developed a series of strategies to help me maximize the energy I have.

Being a Tortoise in a World of Hares™ doesn’t mean you can’t achieve. You just do it from the “slow lane.” To do so, it’s imperative to use your resources wisely. Two ways to do that are to connect with your authentic self and to make good choices.

It’s very tempting to look outside yourself and succumb to all the hype about how to succeed in life. But if you try to keep up with someone else’s pace, at best, you’ll achieve, but you’ll be too tired to enjoy it; at worst, you’ll debilitate yourself. Tortoises don’t have energy to spare, so we need to be true to ourselves and succeed on our own terms.

All people, Tortoises or otherwise, are most successful when they heed their inner guidance. There’s no “one size fits all” in life, and we each have to find our own way. That means setting aside time for introspection, and then learning to listen to the “still, small voice” of your intuition.

As a Tortoise, your inner voice may speak very differently than the voices you hear around you. It may take courage to act in ways that are antithetical to what your friends, family and coworkers expect of you. In the beginning, you may need to keep your plans to yourself, confiding only in one or more trusted advocates who “get” you and are willing to encourage and support you. You can learn to validate yourself, rather than looking for outside validation. Ultimately, the success you’ll achieve will speak for itself.

Once you're clear on what you want, you need to make choices. Tortoises don't have the energy to throw everything against the wall and see what sticks. We need to make strategic choices, and then focus on those choices, rather than trying to do everything.

The most effective choices are what I call "growth choices," rather than "fear choices." A growth choice is one that will challenge you; a fear choice is one that keeps you safe, but limits your potential. Teacher/author Caroline Myss says that when you need to make a choice, the one that scares you is usually the one that will bring you the most growth. Get quiet and think about an option you're considering. For me, when it's a growth choice, even if it's scary, my body feels open and expansive. A fear choice makes me feel tense and constricted.

Another "slow lane" strategy is to look at the scale of your dreams. You may envision being an international motivational speaker, but are unable to travel. Instead, see how you can express that dream within your local community and virtually. If you want to start your own business, keep it small and manageable, rather than feeling you have to continually grow it.

We also need to make choices about where to spend our time. With the advent of smartphones and tablets that keep us tapped into information sources 24/7, it's crucial that we beware of information overload. These devices can become addictive – we like to feel connected all the time and fear missing something crucial – but they can burn us out. Set boundaries around how much time you'll spend on electronic devices, and unsubscribe from emails and texts that are a waste of your time.

Finally, make sure to get the rest you need. Be careful not to overschedule yourself. If you push yourself to the limit, even if you manage to eke out the work, it won't be your best or most creative. And you may pay for it by spending the next day in bed. (I call that "dash-and-crash.") By taking your time, you may accomplish less and it may take longer, but isn't that better than overwhelming and paralyzing yourself and ending up with a stack of unfinished projects?

So, start by taking some quiet time to go within and see what's authentically true for you. Then, make powerful choices that support achieving your goals, while honoring your needs. Remember, slow and steady wins the race. By following these Tortoise principles, you'll amaze yourself (and others) with your accomplishments, and you'll enjoy the process a lot more.

Action Challenge

Think of a big goal that you would like to achieve. What's one baby step that you could take in the next week to get that going or move it forward?

Wise Words

"The great French Marshall Lyautey once asked his gardener to plant a tree. The gardener objected that the tree was slow growing and would not reach maturity for 100 years. The Marshall replied, 'In that case, there is no time to lose; plant it this afternoon!'" ~ John F. Kennedy

"Slow down and enjoy life. It's not only the scenery you miss by going too fast – you also miss the sense of where you are going and why." ~ Eddie Cantor

"The trees that are slow to grow bear the best fruit." ~ Moliere

"Slow and steady wins the race." ~ Aesop

Bookshelf



The Tortoise Workbook: Strategies for Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace ... Sharon Good



The Tortoise Guide: Starting and Building a Private Practice ... at Your Own Pace ... Sharon Good



In Praise of Slowness: Challenging the Cult of Speed ... Carl Honoré



Downshifting: How to Work Less and Enjoy Life More ... John D. Drake



Take Back Your Time: Fighting Overwork and Time Poverty in America ... John de Graaf, editor



The Type-Z Guide to Success: A Lazy Person's Manifesto to Wealth and Fulfillment ... Marc Allen



The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere, and Join the New Rich ... Timothy Ferriss



The Art of Non-Conformity: Set Your Own Rules, Live the Life You Want, and Change the World ... Chris Gillebeau



The 80/20 Principle: The Secret to Achieving More with Less ...
Richard Koch



The Power of Slow: 101 Ways to Save Time in Our 24/7 World ...
Christine Louise Hohlbaum



Powerful Choices, Powerful Life ... Sharon Good

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Issue 104

The Coaching Approach

It was only a decade or so ago that the word “coach” brought to mind a guy in a sweat suit with a loud voice and a whistle. Now, having a Life Coach is de rigueur for the up-and-coming in their personal and professional life.

Life Coaching involves a specific skill set that is used not only in individual coaching, but has infiltrated the business world and positively impacted personal relationships. Coaching has helped thousands of people around the world to see greater possibilities for themselves, clarify new goals and follow through to achievement with the support of their coach. Working with a coach, people can make significant changes in their lives that they couldn't manage by themselves.

Coaching has taken off in business as well. A study of Fortune 1000 companies that use coaching showed an increase in productivity, improved customer service, increased retention of senior people and improved relationships with managers, co-workers and clients.

Kathleen Calcidise, former Chief Operating Officer (Retail) for Apple, stated: “When managers become manager-coaches, almost anything is possible. I've seen productivity jump, people start working toward common objectives, and good performers become great... The challenge in dealing with employees today is to coach them, not to constrain them.”

Employees who are empowered rather than ordered around feel more valued and fulfilled. In turn, they contribute their creativity and productivity to the company's bottom line. In their book, *The Coaching Revolution: How Visionary Managers Are Using Coaching to Empower People and Unlock Their Full Potential*, authors David Logan, PhD and John King say:

“Just a few decades ago, good leadership was defined as the ability to give and receive orders... Today, managers are giving up the old ‘command and control’ model for the coaching model... Those managers who are hiring or becoming coaches for the people they manage are seeing their careers take off.”

Coaching positively impacts other types of businesses as well. One of my coaching students, who I'll call John, was a lawyer who was feeling stale after conducting over 8500 mediations. During the coaching training, John said that the language of coaching started “seeping” into his mediations. Not only did he become a more effective mediator, but he began to enjoy the process again.

The coaching approach becomes a way of life that can also change relationships. I've heard many of my coaching students say that when they started applying coaching principles and skills when communicating with their families and friends, their relationships improved dramatically.

So, what is it about coaching that makes it so powerful? Here are a few of the principles of coaching that are helping people to shine both personally and professionally:

~ **Listening**

Coaches learn to put their personal agendas aside and listen deeply. Usually, when we're in a conversation with someone, we're thinking about what we want to say next, which is often a comparable story about ourselves or advice to help the other person. As a result, the speaker doesn't feel heard and either pushes for more attention or resists what you want them to do. Most of us crave being listened to without interruption, and when we get that, we feel more appreciated, and new ideas and solutions naturally come forth.

~ **Respecting**

Coaching is about change, and change happens when we can tell the truth about where we are, feel validated in who we are, and receive encouragement and support to take the next steps. Coaches are trained to listen from a non-judgmental place. We hear all kinds of personal stories, and we need to create a safe space for our clients to share their stories truthfully and feel respected, no matter how embarrassing their thoughts, feelings or actions may be.

~ **Empowering rather than controlling**

In life, we often try to control people to do what we want them to do. The truth is, you can't control anyone but yourself (and even that is sometimes hard!). Coaches are trained to support clients in coming up with their own best solutions, rather than giving them advice. If we do make suggestions, we offer them freely, and then let the client make their own choices.

~ **Seeing the best in people**

People often respond to what we expect of them. If we expect the worst, we'll get it. But if we expect great things, we'll get that. The film, *Stand and Deliver*, tells the story of a dedicated teacher who takes a group of students who are on the verge of dropping out and inspires them to excel in calculus, building their self-esteem in the bargain. When we see the best in people, we give them a vision of something greater and empower them to strive to be their best selves.

As you can see, using coaching skills can have a broad impact on your life and your work. The skills are easy to learn, and with practice, they become second nature. You'll soon find yourself relating to people in a more open and positive way. And the bonus is, when you approach life using the coaching approach, the world becomes a better place, for both yourself and those you inspire.

Action Challenge

Have you thought about becoming a coach? Take a step now. Read a book or sign up for an introductory session at a coach training school.

For more information about coaching, finding a coach and training to become a coach, check out the International Coaching Federation. (<https://coachingfederation.org>)

Bookshelf

-  *The Heart of Laser-Focused Coaching: A Revolutionary Approach to Masterful Coaching ...* Marion Franklin, MS, MCC
-  *Co-Active Coaching ...* Henry Kimsey-House, et al
-  *Coaching Skills: The definitive guide to being a coach ...* Jenny Rogers
-  *Using Coaching Skills to Get Powerful Results ...* Sharon Good
-  *The Coaching Revolution: How Visionary Managers Are Using Coaching to Empower People and Unlock Their Full Potential ...* David Logan, PhD and John King
-  *Becoming a Professional Life Coach: The Art and Science of a Whole-Person Approach ...* Patrick Williams and Diane S. Menendez
-  *Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills ...* Tony Stoltzfus
-  *Creative Marketing Tools for Coaches: Use Your Natural Gifts to Attract Your Ideal Clients ...* Sharon Good

Issue 105

Building a Dream

We hear a lot these days about finding your passion, living your dream. Even in a challenging economy, many people are no longer satisfied with just a steady paycheck (as desirable as that is). We want work that we enjoy doing, where we can use our gifts and talents and create a lifestyle we love.

Building a dream can be done. I've done it. But it takes a certain perspective and commitment. What often gets in people's way are certain beliefs or myths.

- ~ I will leap right into my fully-realized dream.
- ~ If I can't do it right now, I never will.
- ~ I need to know exactly how I will achieve my dream before I start.
- ~ I need a lot of money to achieve my dream.
- ~ I need to be at the perfect life stage to achieve my dream.

The truth is, most dreams take time and effort to build. Young people take it for granted that they need to learn skills and get experience to achieve their goals. More mature adults often think that if they don't already have the specific skill set to do something new, they're stuck doing what they always did. As someone who started new careers at 40 and 47 (and will probably start something new at 70!), I can attest that it's never too late to follow a new path.

~ **Begin by defining your dream and why you want it.**

Create a picture of what you want, in words or images. As you're putting together your vision, be aware of which words and images excite you. If you want to do something because it will look good on your résumé or please someone else, you won't have the drive to stick it out when the going gets rough. I find that when people are clear on *why* they want something, they're more likely to connect to their motivation and follow through. Make sure you'll enjoy the process, and not just achieving the goal.

~ **Assess your assets.**

What do you already have in place that will contribute to your dream goal? What's lacking, and what will it take to acquire the missing pieces? You may be surprised at how much you already have going for you. And when you define what you still need, you can more easily strategize how to get it.

~ **Be strategic in your planning.**

You may have an inspiring idea, but other commitments are demanding your time and attention right now. When I decided to become a Life Coach, I needed 9 months to complete some projects with my publishing company before I could focus on my new career. Your timeline may be even longer, perhaps waiting until your little ones are in school or you retire. Plan strategically, and use the intervening time to do research and prepare.

~ **Take steps with intention.**

I often hear people say, "I hope I can do this." If you're tentative about the steps you take, the results you'll get will also be tentative. The attitude that leads to success is one of unswerving commitment, no matter what the obstacles. Think of your goal as a lighthouse beacon. If you get thrown off course, use your vision to get you back on track.

~ **Just start and let the path unfold.**

You may not know how to get to your dream goal, but don't let that stop you. Take whatever step you know, even if it's just learning more about what to do. Talk to people; take a class; read a book. As you get deeper into the process, each subsequent step will reveal itself.

~ **Be realistic about how long it will take, and don't give up.**

Even an inspiring dream can be challenging. Don't quit your day job, but don't quit your dream either. Develop discipline, and get used to delayed gratification. Hard work and persistence can pay off with big rewards, but you have to stick it out. You don't want to quit 5 minutes before the miracle happens.

~ **Don't let a lack of funds stop you.**

Money is the #1 excuse for not pursuing dreams. Notice I said "excuse." If you really want it, you'll find a way. Take small steps, and do what you can afford to do. Save money, or find funding in the form of a business partner, grants or loans. Over time, small steps add up to big payoffs. I coached a poor artist, who couldn't afford to buy supplies, to get back to painting using whatever she had around the house. Her long-term dream was to open an artists' colony, which seemed way in the future. A few months later, she reconnected with an old friend who wanted to partner with her to open an artists' colony in her home town.

If you have a dream, start now – yes, even in this economy. Take small steps consistently and build your dream over time. It may seem like the distant future right now, but hey, do you have something better to do with that time than pursuing your life's passion?

Action Challenge

What dream have you been postponing because it doesn't seem possible? List 5 action steps you can take in the next 2 - 3 months to explore that dream and start moving toward it.

Wise Words

"Dreams are astoundingly important. They keep nagging you because you're supposed to fulfill them. When you sense you're special, you're not neurotic or grandiose. Something inside you is calling to you and you have to listen. When you love to do something, that means you have a gift for it ... And when you're gifted at something, you have to do it." ~ Barbara Sher, *Live the Life You Love*

"Motivation is when your dreams put on work clothes." ~ Marguerite Smith

"Courage is not the absence of fear; it's caring for something with a passion greater than your fear of pursuing it... If we are to succeed, our goals must call to us more loudly than our fear." ~ Paul & Sarah Edwards, *The Practical Dreamer's Handbook*

"If you're this successful doing work you don't love, what could you do with work you do love?" ~ Tama J. Kieves

Bookshelf



The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Creative Battles ... Steven Pressfield



Do the Work ... Steven Pressfield



Anything You Want: 40 Lessons for a New Kind of Entrepreneur ... Derek Sivers



Poke the Box ... Seth Godin



The Creative Habit: Learn It and Use It for Life ... Twyla Tharp



The Art of Non-conformity: Set Your Own Rules, Live the Life You Want, and Change the World ... Chris Guillebeau



Uncertainty: Turning Fear and Doubt into Fuel for Brilliance ... Jonathan Fields



Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur ... Pamela Slim



Ignore Everybody: And 39 Other Keys to Creativity ... Hugh MacLeod



The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich ... Timothy Ferris

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Issue 106

Is It Me, or Is It Being Human?

Most of us, as we go through life, strive to be the best person we can be. But hard as we try, there seem to be certain patterns that keep coming up for us that feel beyond our control. It can be frustrating and demoralizing, and perhaps impact our sense of self-esteem.

Several years ago, I did some work with a life coach that involved looking back at key moments in my life and discerning patterns from the events. One pattern that came out was that of being abandoned by close friends, sometimes without any warning. As someone who highly values my friends, as well as close connections and trust, those incidences had been very painful for me. I wondered what it was about me that caused people to leave me.

As I worked with the exercise, it dawned on me that there was a bigger picture here: People change – sometimes without warning – and not everybody valued loyalty and commitment the way I did. It was a huge relief to realize that while it hurt to lose dear friends, it didn't mean that there was something inherently wrong with me. There may have been something about me that prompted them to leave, or maybe it was about what was going on with them. But ultimately, it was part of the human experience: Situations change and people move on.

We all have experiences or patterns that reoccur in our lives that make us feel like we have a kind of "fatal flaw" and perhaps there's nothing we can do about it. People will love us and leave us. As hard as we try to be our best selves, some people just won't like us. We can take great care of ourselves, but ultimately, we will encounter illness and death, for ourselves or others in our lives.

My pattern was about losing dear friends. Yours may be about having health crises or losing jobs or feeling lonely or being mistreated or encountering hurtful people. There's certainly value in taking a hard look at your pattern and seeing where you can take ownership and make appropriate changes. But it's also helpful to understand how much of it is part of the human condition. Think of the Serenity Prayer:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

~ Reinhold Niebuhr

In my experience, the patterns that we are “blessed” with are there to compel us to grow. This can be a painful journey, but if we can discern what’s ours and what’s part of the human condition, we can do what we can to change and come to peace with the rest.

Action Challenge

Sit down and make a list of key points in your life – good and bad. You might go through a timeline, year by year. Take your time; don’t rush this. Once the list feels complete, look for patterns. You might highlight each pattern with a different color. See what you notice about each pattern. How much of it reflects the human experience? What parts of it can you own and change?

Wise Words

“When we look away from our own unique peccadilloes towards a more impersonal inquiry into the nature of the human experience, we discover a very interesting thing – most of the things we thought were wrong with us are simply a part of the human condition.” ~ Michael Neill

“One third, more or less, of all the sorrow that the person I think I am must endure is unavoidable. It is the sorrow inherent in the human condition, the price we must pay for being sentient and self-conscious organisms, aspirants to liberation, but subject to the laws of nature and under orders to keep on marching, through irreversible time, through a world wholly indifferent to our well-being, toward decrepitude and the certainty of death. The remaining two thirds of all sorrow is homemade and, so far as the universe is concerned, unnecessary.” ~ Aldous Huxley, *Island*

“The human condition is such that pain and effort are not just symptoms which can be removed without changing life itself; they are the modes in which life itself, together with the necessity to which it is bound, makes itself felt. For mortals, the ‘easy life of the gods’ would be a lifeless life.” ~ Hannah Arendt

Bookshelf



Feel Happy Now ... Michael Neill



The Human Condition ... Hannah Arendt



The Life of the Mind ... Hannah Arendt



Otherwise Known as the Human Condition: Selected Essays and Reviews ... Geoff Dyer



The Human Condition ... John Kekes



The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation ...
Thomas Keating



Radical Acceptance: Embracing Your Life With the Heart of a Buddha ...
Tara Brach, PhD

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Issue 107

Moving Beyond the Past

Let's face it ... we all resist change. We get comfortable with the status quo, and change – good or bad – throws us out of our comfort zone. But we can't create bright new futures without moving beyond the past.

Ironically, either a positive or a negative past can keep us just as stuck. Losing a positive situation is unsettling, but even a negative past can become entrenched in our identity – we don't know who we are without it. As long as we're weighted down by the baggage of what was, we don't have the energy to create new opportunities that can bring us joy and excitement that surpasses anything we've had before.

The specter of the past can haunt us in many ways:

- ~ Your previously soaring career is taking a nose dive, as you and your contemporaries find yourselves being devalued and replaced by younger talent.
- ~ You were a "looker" – you stopped traffic. Now that you're middle-aged, no one hardly gives you a second glance.
- ~ You had a difficult childhood. You grew up in a dysfunctional family and were painfully shy, so you didn't have many friends. Now, you have great social skills and plenty of friends, but you don't trust that they really like you.
- ~ It was always easy to get work. You leaped from one job to another with ease. Now, you've been laid off and can't even get an interview. You're beginning to doubt your competence.
- ~ You've suffered an illness or an accident. You don't have the strength, energy or ability to do the things you used to do. You feel "washed up."
- ~ You've always been happy being a follower. Now, you're bursting with creative ideas, but you're afraid to step out and do your own thing.
- ~ You were a professional or avid athlete/dancer/mountain climber. Now, you creak just getting out of bed in the morning. You feel sad and frustrated that you can't do the things you used to.
- ~ You loved being half of a couple (or part of a group). Now, you're on your own, and it's scary to create a new life without that sense of partnership and support.

So, how do you let go and move into the next phase of life, whether it seems to be better or worse than the one that you left behind?

~ **Grieve**

Any change involves a loss. It's important to grieve the loss in order to let it go. Even if the change is a positive one, you may feel sad, for example, that the younger you missed out on having the success or good health or loving relationships that you have now. Or you may be leaving behind people or situations that you enjoyed, even if it's for something better. You need to grieve that, so you can move beyond it.

~ **Forgive**

You may feel angry at the situation, the person(s) who caused it or the person(s) you lost. Even if there was malicious intent involved, holding grudges drags you down and eats up precious energy that you need to create your own life. If you blame yourself, you need to forgive that as well.

Forgiveness doesn't mean condoning hurtful behavior. It means releasing yourself from the situation, so you can move on. There's a saying that staying angry at someone, thinking that you're punishing them, is like taking poison and waiting for the other person to die. Forgive as a loving act for yourself, and you'll drop the burden of the past that's keeping you stuck.

~ **Create a ritual**

For some people, having some sort of ritual to demarcate "stepping over the line" into the future is helpful in letting go of the past. For example, you might write a good-bye letter to the person or situation, and then burn or bury it, or throw it in the ocean (with or without the bottle!).

It's also important to create a new self-image to go with your new life. You might get a makeover, redecorate your home or create a vision board with pictures that represent the new, future you. Write a vision statement that illustrates the life you would love to have, one that excites you. Some people even take on a new name that represents them more authentically and brings a fresh, new energy.

In this fast-changing world, we need to reinvent ourselves from time to time to keep up. We don't want to keep dragging old, stale energy with us. The past, despite its impact on us, has become a story, and we can write a new chapter to reflect the future life we want to have, instead of telling the same old tale over and over again.

There's a saying that when one door closes, another opens. Life happens in stages, and there's always potential for new growth and contribution, whether you chose the change or it was thrust upon you. Move into your next stage with a lighter load, and your new creations will happen more quickly and you'll enjoy them that much more.

Action Challenge

What do you need to do to release the past – grieve, forgive and/or create a ritual? Search the Internet or your personal library to find resources to help you do that, or use some of the suggestions in the Bookshelf section below. Then, set aside time in your calendar to work on it.

Wise Words

"Look not mournfully into the past. It comes not back again. Wisely improve the present. It is thine. Go forth to meet the shadowy future, without fear." ~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Without freedom from the past, there is no freedom at all, because the mind is never new, fresh, innocent." ~ Krishnamurti

"The farther behind I leave the past, the closer I am to forging my own character." ~ Isabelle Eberhardt

"When you understand that what you're telling is just a story. It isn't happening anymore. When you realize the story you're telling is just words, when you can just crumble it up and throw your past in the trashcan, then we'll figure out who you're going to be." ~ Chuck Palahniuk

Bookshelf



Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes ... William Bridges, PhD



Emotionally Free: Letting Go of the Past to Live in the Moment ...
David Viscott, MD



The Secret of Letting Go ... Guy Finley



The Little Book of Letting Go: 30 Days to Cleanse your Mind, Lift your Spirit, and Replenish your Soul ... Hugh Prather



Healing the Hurts of Your Past: A Guide to Overcoming the Pain of Shame ... F. Remy Diederich



Healing After Loss: daily meditations for working through grief ...
Martha Whitmore Hickman



Resilient Adults: Overcoming a Cruel Past ... Gina O'Connell Higgins



A New Normal: Learning to Live with Grief and Loss ... Darlene F. Cross, MS, LMFT



Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart ... Robin Casarjian



Forgiveness: How to Make Peace With Your Past and Get on With Your Life ... Dr. Sidney B. Simon and Suzanne Simon

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Issue 108

What Is a Life Coach ... Really?

So, you're facing a challenging situation in your life, and boy, would some help and support be welcome. Your friends tell you that you should get a Life Coach, but you're not sure how much a coach could help. The sitcom you watched last night featured a character who was a Life Coach. She was flaky and silly and prided herself on telling her clients what to do. In another show, a character in a stressful situation had to call her Life Coach "guru" before she made a move. The last thing you need right now is a self-important, domineering busybody running your life.

Flaky guru types make great sitcom characters, but they're not accurate portrayals of what a Life Coach really is. As a 16-year veteran Life Coach and trainer of coaches, I can tell you that the last thing a good, reputable coach does is take over their clients' lives. Unfortunately, anyone can call themselves a Life Coach, without any training or understanding of how to help people without taking away their power.

If you're considering working with a Life Coach, I'd like to offer you a few guidelines to help you choose someone who's competent and reputable.

A Life Coach does/is not ...

- ~ A guru, advisor, fairy godmother/father or authority on your life
- ~ Have an agenda for you or tell you what to do
- ~ Do the work for you
- ~ Inflate their ego through your successes
- ~ Push you to resolve your issues in the way that worked for them
- ~ Use their clients for their own benefit, such as forcing you to buy their products
- ~ Create a dependency
- ~ Do therapy with you to resolve childhood issues or traumas

A Life Coach does/is ...

- ~ A partner who helps you explore situations and find your own resolutions
- ~ Help you clarify each situation and come up with powerful steps that you will take yourself
- ~ Support you on your agenda
- ~ Celebrate your successes

- ~ Help you clarify your own best strategies
- ~ Follow a Code of Ethics regarding professional behavior
- ~ Teach you how to think for yourself
- ~ Help you to see yourself and your issues in a new light and move forward in your life

How to Choose a Coach

Coaching is certainly a “buyer beware” situation. As with any profession, even a well-credentialed professional may not be the right person for you. If you’re choosing a coach, find several coaches through recommendations and Internet searches. The International Coaching Federation has a database of credentialed coaches.

Contact the ones that appeal to you and set up introductory sessions to make sure that the person feels good to you and that you like their style of coaching. You should feel comfortable with them. You should feel unconditionally supported and trust that you can share personal information without being judged, and knowing that anything you share will be confidential.

Check the person’s credibility. Nowadays, most professional coaches have earned a certification from their training school and/or a certifying body such as the International Coaching Federation or the Center for Credentialing and Education. What’s most important, though, is that the coach has hands-on training with a qualified instructor and practice with real clients, and hasn’t just read a couple of books. They should be trained in coach-specific skills and understand the difference between coaching, consulting and counseling.

Coaches also have areas of strength, and while a good coach can support you on any issue, we all have our “sweet spots,” based on our experience and training. (For example, two of my “sweet spots” are Career Coaching and Creativity Coaching.) Find someone who you feel gets you and your issues.

Finally, when choosing a coach, don’t start with pricing. There are many variables in choosing a coach, including compatibility, experience, coaching specialties, etc. The length and frequency of your sessions will vary. Keep in mind that a good coach can accomplish a tremendous amount in 30 minutes, so think value, rather than time. Do your research, and then see who also fits your needs and your budget.

Life coaching has caught on like wildfire in the last decade, and for a good reason: It’s a great way to get support, cut through confusion and move ahead more quickly in your life when therapy is not what you need. There’s

a coach out there for every need and budget. Do your homework, find someone who feels right and fits your criteria, and then engage 100% in this powerful relationship. Like many others who have sought out a Life Coach, you'll see miracles in your life!

Action Challenge

If you're struggling with a personal or career issue, who could you reach out to for support? This week, make at least one phone call to someone in your life or a professional who could help you.

Wise Words

"Time and money spent in helping men to do more for themselves is far better than mere giving." ~ Henry Ford

"If you have some respect for people as they are, you can be more effective in helping them to become better than they are." ~ John W. Gardner

"The greatest thing about man is his ability to transcend himself, his ancestry and his environment and to become what he dreams of being." ~ Tully C. Knoles

"It's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful." ~ Adrienne Rich

"A life coach does for the rest of your life what a personal trainer does for your health and fitness." ~ Elaine MacDonald

Bookshelf



Co-Active Coaching ... Henry Kimsey-House, et al



Sourcebook of Coaching History ... Vikki G. Brock, PhD



Creating Your Best Life: The Ultimate Life List Guide ... Caroline Adams Miller, MAPP and Dr. Michael B. Frisch



Coach Yourself to Success: 101 Tips to Accomplish Your Personal and Professional Goals ... Talane Miedaner



Character Makeover: 40 Days with a Life Coach to Create the Best You ... Katherine Brazelton and Shelley Leith



Be Your Own Life Coach: How to Take Control of Your Life and Achieve Your Wildest Dreams ... Fiona Harrold



Now What?: 90 Days to a New Life Direction ... Laura Berman Fortgang



Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life ... Bill Burnett & Dave Evans



Becoming a Professional Life Coach: The Art and Science of a Whole-Person Approach ... Patrick Williams and Diane S. Menendez

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Issue 109

What's Your Superpower?

Would you like to fly? To be invisible? To hear through walls? To climb up the sides of skyscrapers? To have superhuman strength?

What fun it would be to have a superpower! With the profusion of superheroes in our midst, it's compelling to think about what your own superpower might be. While you might not leap tall buildings in a single bound, there are many human-sized superpowers. You just have to shift your thinking a bit.

I recently read the novel, *A Tale for the Time Being*, by Ruth Ozecki. The teen protagonist, Nao, is having a hard time at school and at home. She goes to the mountains to spend the summer with her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, who sees her struggle. To help Nao, Jiko offers her a superpower. Not what you would expect: It's meditation. By learning to center herself, Nao becomes more capable of dealing with the challenges in her life.

As humans, we may not have the speed or the strength or the sharp teeth and claws of the animal kingdom, but we have other powers. You may not feel particularly special, but we each have a unique combination of gifts that can serve us as we navigate the sometimes rough waters of life.

In the 1980s, Howard Gardner brought forth a theory of multiple intelligences. While we might not all ace an IQ test, we may be outstanding with words or numbers or interpersonal skills or a deeper understanding of how things work. Or we may have personal characteristics such as persistence, insatiable curiosity, creativity or empathy. Or maybe our superpower is our faith or our deep personal connections.

Think of someone like Gandhi, a slight man whose superpower was his vision for his country and his unwavering belief in the transformative power of nonviolent resistance. Or the compassion and dedication of Mother Theresa. Or Oprah Winfrey's passion for education and a powerful desire to help people.

Every one of us has a superpower. You may have to look through a different lens to find it, but it's there. Your distinct set of strengths will not only empower you, but can connect you to your sense of purpose and your unique vision of what you want to contribute to the world. And it will certainly help to be able to call on your superpowers during challenging times.

Action Challenge

List 5 superpowers that you have. Think of strengths, talents, qualities, resources, connections, etc. If you're not sure, ask people who care about you.

Wise Words

Here are some examples of superpowers:

"Within each of us is a hidden store of energy. Energy we can release to compete in the marathon of life. Within each of us is a hidden store of courage. Courage to give us the strength to face any challenge. Within each of us is a hidden store of determination. Determination to keep us in the race when all seems lost." ~ Roger Dawson, *The 13 Secrets of Power Performance*

"The freedom to fail is vital if you're going to succeed. Most successful men fail time and time again, and it is a measure of the strength that failure merely propels them into some new attempt at success." ~ Michael Korda

"For myself, I am an optimist – it does not seem to be much use being anything else." ~ Winston Churchill

"To me, the definition of focus is knowing exactly where you want to be today, next week, next month, next year, then never deviating from your plan. Once you can see, touch and feel your objective, all you have to do is pull back and put all your strength behind it, and you'll hit your target every time." ~ Bruce Jenner

"Humility leads to strength and not to weakness. It is the highest form of self-respect to admit mistakes and to make amends for them." ~ John (Jay) McCloy

"The most valuable time-management technique that I've learned is patience. Patience is a muscle that I strengthen every day... You can't hurry a learning curve." ~ Alison Crawford

"Hope begins in the dark, the stubborn hope that if you just show up and try to do the right thing, the dawn will come. You wait and watch and work: you don't give up." ~ Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*

"Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal: my strength lies solely in my tenacity." ~ Louis Pasteur

"Motivation will almost always beat mere talent." ~ Norman R. Augustine

Bookshelf



A Tale for the Time Being . . . Ruth Ozecki



Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice . . .
Howard Gardner



Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences . . . Howard
Gardner



The Bullying Antidote: Superpower Your Kids for Life . . . Dr. Louise
Hart and Kristen Caven



Your Superpowers: Dream It, Achieve It . . . Steve Gardner



Strengths Finder 2.0 . . . from Gallup and Tom Rath



Now, Discover Your Strengths . . . from Gallup and Don Clifton



*Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire
your Community . . .* from Gallup with Albert L. Winseman, Don
Clifton and Curt Liesveld



*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the
Way We Live, Love, Parent and Lead . . .* Brené Brown, PhD, MSW

Issue 110

Epilogue: *Living a Fearless Life*

When I started coaching in 1998, writing a monthly e-newsletter was one of the best ways to reach potential clients. Marketing has since become more widespread and sophisticated, with blogs, social media, podcasts and webinars. But giving myself a monthly deadline to write an article helped me hone my writing skills and think more deeply about what would communicate to potential coaching clients and contribute something to society.

Now, almost 27 years later, it's been an adventure rereading the articles I wrote earlier in my life. I'm pleased to see that the topics are still relevant today. I particularly love the last issue, about finding your superpower. We have a tendency to compare ourselves to others, often unfavorably. But everyone has their strengths, and I like to imagine that everyone has a superpower, whether it be intellect, people skills, an art or craft, a great sense of humor or the ability to bring a smile to someone's face.

In looking back at my life, the superpower I like to claim has been my willingness to face my fears. Fearlessness doesn't mean being without fear. It means facing your fears head-on and not letting them stop you. There have been days when I just wanted to hide under the covers and not face my day. But I did. And over time, the scary monsters became less scary, because I had faced them before and I knew I could do it again.

If you find yourself facing fears that are stopping you from going after things you want, here are some strategies:

- ~ Pull back and evaluate your fear. Is there truly something there to be afraid of or is your imagination running wild?
- ~ If there is something scary, what can you do to mitigate the risk? Scale it down to the first step you can take without letting your fear stop you, and build from there.
- ~ Who can you share your fears with? Sometimes getting them out of your head and talking them out shrinks them down to a manageable size.
- ~ Imagine the fear as a big, overwhelming object. I always think of the monolith from *2001: A Space Odyssey*. See yourself looking up at it. Now, imagine that the object gets smaller and you get bigger. You might then imagine crushing it underfoot.



- ~ If it's a big scary thing, what's a small scary thing that you can face to build your courage toward the big one?
- ~ Who can you enlist to do the scary thing with you?

Facing fears helps build your strength, courage and even your self-esteem. When you face a fear and prevail, you feel proud of yourself and it clears the way to face future fearful things, knowing that you've done it before.

So, don't let your fears stop you, especially the ones that live in your imagination. You don't want to look back and regret the things you didn't do because they scared you. Live a courageous, fearless life and you'll enjoy a sense of satisfaction for all the things you accomplished.

Action Challenge

Think of something you'd love to do, but it scares the heck out of you. What's one baby step that you can take now to start moving toward that dream?

Wise Words

"Everything you want is on the other side of fear." ~ Jack Canfield

"Fearlessness is like a muscle. I know from my own life that the more I exercise it the more natural it becomes to not let my fears run me." ~ Arianna Huffington

"Feel the fear and do it anyway." ~ Susan Jeffers

"Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life." ~ John Lennon

Bookshelf



Fearless Creating: A Step-by-Step Guide to Starting and Completing Your Work of Art ... Eric Maisel, PhD



Fearlessness ... Anthony de Mello



Inner Child's Journey: A 30-Day Quest to Uncover Fearlessness, Courage, and Resilience ... Timothy Alan



Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead ... Brené Brown, PhD, MSW



The Secrets of Women Who Never Give Up ... Dr. Katja Lindemann, MD



Courage: The Joy of Living Dangerously ... Osho



Fear: Understanding and Accepting the Insecurities of Life ... Osho



She Believed She Could, So She Did ... Kathy Weller



Unstoppable: 45 Powerful Stories of Perseverance and Triumph from People Just Like You ... Cynthia Kersey

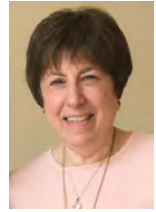


Unstoppable Women ... Cynthia Kersey

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About Sharon

Sharon Good has been a Life, Career, Retirement and Creativity Coach since 1998. With a rich variety of personal and professional experiences informing her work, she has coached artists to achieve their creative and professional goals and helped individuals from all walks of life create fulfilling lives, unique career paths and enriching retirements.



She has trained life and career coaches for the Life Purpose Institute, the Creativity Coaching Association and NYU's School of Professional Studies, as well as offering personal and professional enrichment workshops for the 92nd Street Y and numerous other venues in the New York City area and through teleclasses and webinars.

Sharon is the author of several books published by Excalibur Publishing, Sourcebooks and, currently, Good Life Press. These include *Creative Marketing Tools for Coaches: Use Your Natural Gifts to Attract Your Ideal Clients*, *The Tortoise Workbook: Strategies for Getting Ahead at Your Own Pace*, *Managing With A Heart: 222 Ways to Make Your Employees Feel Appreciated*, *The Tortoise Guide: Starting and Building a Private Practice ... at Your Own Pace* and *Powerful Choices, Powerful Life*.

A graduate of Hofstra University, she is certified in Life and Career Coaching by the Life Purpose Institute, Retirement Coaching by Retirement Options, and holds a certificate in Adult Career Planning and Development from New York University. She has held certifications from the International Coaching Federation and the Center for Credentialing and Education.

Along with writing, Sharon enjoys traveling, reading, singing, dancing, learning through webinars, classes and museums, as well as exploring various arts and crafts.

Sharon's website: www.goodlifepress.com

The background of the page is a soft, textured watercolor wash. It features large, irregular patches of light blue and warm orange, which blend into each other and the off-white paper. The overall effect is artistic and serene.

Living the Creative Life

*For Creative People and Those
Who Want to Live Their Lives Creatively*