



Pathmaker

Charting New Paths for Midlife Careers and Lifestyles

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Finding the Gift in Adversity

The past several months have been filled with huge upheavals in the world. The stock market and resulting economic impacts on savings accounts and jobs, talks of recession and depression, the rash of terrorism in the East with headlines about what may be in store for the future.

Yet other headlines herald political change at the national level that offers new hope. This season also brings stories of generosity by individuals helping others who are struggling. The way each of us reacts to challenging events is colored by our past experience with adversity, which might block us from receiving the gift that adversity can bring.

How Do We Chose to Handle Uncertainty?

Take a moment to reflect on what concerns you most at this time. Is it the stability of your job, the condition of your retirement nest egg, your ability to pay the mortgage or health care expenses, concerns for how your children are coping with their life circumstances, your fears for the elderly or vulnerable in your family or community, or an overwhelming sense of sadness at the condition of our Mother Earth and all of her creatures?

How do you react to that concern? Notice how it physically "feels" in your body. Is your belly relaxed or tense? Is your chest around your heart tight or open? Is your throat relaxed or is it feeling constrained? What about your shoulders and your eyes? Are these feelings based in fear or want? Or do they reflect inner peace and centeredness?

I recently learned that we have a mere 7-11 second window between the moment when a stress-filled situation occurs and when the limbic system of your brain takes over with a negative emotional state that is geared to protect you with the instinctual fight or flight survival mechanism. What skills will put you in the driver's seat to decide how you will act during adverse times?

Here's the good news! From my reading and research I find just three main keys to negotiating adversity. Now, the bad news...it doesn't just happen...it takes practice. Since you're reading this article you have a head start as you've already decided that you are willing to put effort into being a conscious human being, using your curiosity and desire to learn.

3 Keys to Effectively Handling Adversity

1) Carry out a daily practice for centering your emotional/spiritual self

We can create a sense of calm and inner peace through many different practices such as meditation, prayer, reflection, tai chi, or reading uplifting books. If this is new territory for you, make sure to choose an activity that you find appealing.

Make a commitment to practice for at least 30 days straight so that it can become an easy habit. Begin with a short amount of time, working up to a minimum of 15 minutes a day. Keeping track on your calendar is a great way to give yourself an ATA Girl/Boy for maintaining your effort. Soon you'll start experiencing the benefits of a more positive outlook. You'll build more self-awareness and begin to notice when you are calm and at peace as well as what circumstances around you create a sense of discomfort.

If you need a little extra incentive for getting into a practice read these findings:

"Positive emotions not only feel better subjectively, but tend to increase synchronization of the body's systems, thereby enhancing energy and enabling us to function with greater efficiency and effectiveness." 1

Research has discovered that being unhappy has the same effect on your health as a smoking habit! 2

Every time you experience success your brain releases endorphins that make you "feel good"!

2) Cultivate a "right" outlook about your situation

Once you've learned how to bring yourself to a calm and centered "place" you're prepared to notice when your feelings are triggered by situations that occur in your life. You may also find yourself making a conscious choice to assess the situations in your life from a "present" perspective rather than from fears from the past or what "might happen" in the future. When a challenging situation occurs, you're better equipped to change your patterns and break free from "automatic, knee-jerk reaction". Now when you notice a perceived threat or a problem you can stop, observe, and assess what is really happening. What is real and factual about the situation? If there is truly adversity present, such as your retirement nest egg has shrunk 40%, now what? Move beyond your head where old beliefs can kick in and start taking some physical action. Start by brainstorming what you might do by writing your options for action on paper or talk it through with a family member, trusted friend or financial advisor. Your options might include cutting or postponing non-essential expenses, getting more information about what actions you might take about your failing investments, identify some inexpensive treats that will give you comfort and a sense of abundance during this time of belt-tightening.

Accept the Reality of What Is and Reset your Expectations so that you can make the most of the time and resources you have available.

3) Act From Deeper Purpose and Meaning

Now you're ready to consider your options and decide what actions will support you making the best of what life has presented. Before you act, check in with yourself to see how your options fit with what is truly important to you. In other words, choose the options that are aligned with who you are and what brings you joy, creativity and whatever other qualities make it worth getting out of bed every morning. The manner in which we do something has a huge impact on how easy and meaningful the task is. If collaboration and community are important to you, find ways to carry out your steps with friends, family or colleagues. If creativity is important to you, turn the task into a creative process and make a two or three dimensional work of art that tracks your progress for the steps you have chosen. If you value teaching your children problem-solving life skills find ways to involve them in age-appropriate ways so they can build their experience based on the practical realities that are sure to appear during their long life times.

"If the meaning (of what you do) does not contribute to human happiness, neither will the end." 3

The Gift in Adversity

The gift in adversity is the opportunity for us to grow and thrive. Practice going within to find your inner peace and spiritual strength, which are your greatest tools. Cultivate a clear, realistic picture of the life circumstances you face. Choose to act in ways that bring a joyful, "jump out of bed" readiness to enjoy your life.

If this has brought up some issues in your life or left you wondering how you might manage a difficult situation that you're currently facing, contact Mary for a brief chat at mary@pathmakercoaching.com or visit www.pathmakercoaching.com for additional resources.

Footnotes:

1. Institute of Heartmath, Science of the Heart: Exploring the Role of the Heart in Human Performance, <http://www.heartmath.org/research/research-science-of-the-heart-3>

2. Dan Buettner, The Blue Zones: Unlocking the Secrets of Longevity, presentation at Positive Aging Conference, November 12, 2008

3. Eckhart Tolle, [A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose](#), 2006

About Pathmaker Coaching and Roadmap to Meaningful Midlife®

Positive Change Coach and Philanthropy Mentor, Mary Radu, guides midlife individuals and couples to discover how to share their unique gifts and resources and get into action. If you're a professional or entrepreneur who craves to have a bigger impact in the world, and make your life AND this planet a better place to live, *you need to activate your intentions*. Let Mary Radu of Pathmaker Coaching help you design and execute your unique path, aligning your life with your passions and values. If it's time for you to get moving, you'll find resources at www.pathmakercoaching.com/resources/index.html, or contact Mary mary@pathmakercoaching.com to discuss how you can get supported to make a bigger impact. (707) 824-8836

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