

5 Ways to Reinvent Yourself and Create a Better Life

“Abuse, street gangs, motorcycle gangs and being shot... No, it is not the character progression and plot synopsis of the next Bruce Willis or Jet Li action blockbuster, but rather a summary of the struggles and experiences through which Susan Armstrong actually lived! Most people outside of a movie set would not survive any one of these wrecking balls, let alone all five. But Susan Armstrong not only survived them, she went on to reinvent herself, establish her own company, author a book and use her personal experiences as the blueprint for helping others to be successful and achieve their greatest potential.”

Christopher Cussat, Recovery Solutions Magazine, July 2006

It's taken 16 years to reinvent myself, but it's been worth it. My life is more wonderful today than I could ever imagine: it's just taken a long time to get here.

Although I was a bright child, expected to accomplish great things, I learned two misguided lessons at a very early age. I learned that the greatest sin of all was to upset another human being. In addition, in order for people to like me, I had to be “perfect.” Those two lessons kept me in a constant state of worry about pleasing others. They drained my self esteem and left me with unhealthy coping skills that would rule my life for the next 30 years.

Finally, determined to reinvent myself I set out on a journey to learn the rules of joining the human race. It wasn't easy, and it's taken a very long time. Here's what I've learned so far:

We allow messages from the past to control our thinking about the future. We all carry messages, reflections of ourselves, delivered by others: the perfectionist parent, the parent who always compared you to your older/younger sibling, the friend who said you were not pretty enough, or thin enough, or the first boyfriend who made you believe you weren't good enough. Every negative message impacts on our self-image as surely as distortions accumulating in a mirror. They climb inside your sub-conscious, take over, and direct your decisions and choices without your ever realizing it.

Of course these negative messages were not intended to purposely ruin your life. Chances are they were misguided attempts to make you behave or conform to some ideal standard. Perhaps those voicing the hurtful words were lamely trying to inspire by providing themselves as examples. Whatever the source, whatever the reason, the problem is that, at the time, we took those damaging comments as truth and believed them. If we still believe them, we have to stop.

If this is making you wonder about your own subconscious messages, then good! You should try to identify the messages you carry around because guaranteed, they are incorrectly internalized. Whatever we believe we create. This is the first step in reinventing yourself. I believed I was worthless, so every time something went wrong in my life I took it as proof that I was worthless. I was perpetuating a self-fulfilling prophecy. And we all do this! Whatever your negative messages are, instead of looking for proof that they're true, look for proof that they're false. Before you go to bed at night, take a few minutes and reflect back on your day. Instead of obsessing about all of the things you think you did wrong, or didn't do well enough, *focus on the things you did right!*

Acknowledge the errors, fix them, learn from them, but focus on all of the positive aspects of the day and your ability to move forward. You can't get rid of nagging negative messages overnight but you can start to replace them with positive ones over time.

We teach people how to treat us. Unfortunately, we don't always realize we're doing it. We teach spouses, friends, colleagues, our boss, and even our children how to treat us. I have a friend who provides a perfect example. When she wants something done around the house she asks once, and then asks again and again...and after three times, does the chore herself. What has her partner learned? That if he doesn't do it, she will. This leaves her feeling upset and angry because he appears to not listen or care. What is your behaviour teaching others about how to treat you?

We measure our insides against everyone else's outsides. All of these negative messages we carry around guide our thoughts, actions, and choices. When we encounter someone who appears happy and successful and who tells us how wonderful life is, we feel somehow "less than" – which only serves to support our negative beliefs about ourselves. The truth is, we don't really know what's going on with the other person on the inside; we're only looking at the outside and measuring our inside thoughts and feelings against the other person's outside appearance. It's like comparing an orchid and a brick wall. The two are very different.

We do other people's thinking for them. "Oh, I can't apply for that promotion/open my own business...I'm not smart/experienced/educated enough..." Does that sound familiar? How many times do you let your thoughts and beliefs about your own knowledge, skills, and abilities stand in the way of your success? How many times do you allow the negative messages to provide more weight in decision making than the positive ones. The only true failure is the failure to try. Doors remain shut when you don't try the handle.

We stand in the way of our own success. Fear is a powerful emotion. Years of negative thoughts and beliefs create behaviour patterns that are sometimes hard to break. The bottom line is this...there is only one block that stands in the way of your having the life you want and that's you! We stand in our own way, we believe the messages from the past, and we allow people to treat us in unacceptable ways. We measure how we feel against how other people look, and project our beliefs about ourselves that are driven by low self-esteem onto other people's thinking. All of this creates an emotional arena in which we can't possibly succeed.

Do you stand in your own way? Start to develop a clear picture of who you are and what you are capable of. Envision yourself freed from negativity and defeatist beliefs. Only then can you truly start moving out of your own way and achieve the life you desire!