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MOTIVATED

THE MAGAZINE THAT MOVES YOU!

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Decisions come in all shapes and sizes.

Every day we face decisions about what to eat, whether to exercise, how to use our time, etc. Over the years, these decisions become habits, and we don't think much about them. If we've made good decisions from the start, we don't usually have to worry about them.

When we haven't made good choices, however, these decisions can blossom into bad habits that take a long-term toll on our lives and relationships.

Consistently making decisions—both big and small ones—can be a daunting task. When faced with making decisions—and especially when they are life-altering changes and choices—I like to sit down and list the pros and cons. I also ask those closest to me for their input and opinions, and research and read articles on the topic I need to make a decision on.

That way, after all has been said and done, I feel confident that I am heading in the right direction, and that the outcome of my decision will be the best one possible.

In this issue of *Motivated* I included a number of stories and articles that helped me during times of decision-making. I hope they will support and guide you in making wise choices, too, and that with God's guidance, whatever changes or choices you face, they will turn out just the way you hope.

Christina Lane
For Motivated

Facing Change and Trimming Trees

By Joyce Suttin, adapted

The tree trimmers finally showed up. I'd been nervously waiting for them, both looking forward to them pruning my trees, and also terrified of what the outcome might be. I'd known for a long time that the trees needed to be trimmed, but a part of me loved the wild "jungle" growth, and I'd waited way too long before calling them.

They arrived this morning, and I had to keep myself from constantly running outside and telling them how to do their job. I've seen other trimmers before. I've seen the ugly devastation of hacked-off trees where they had taken a chainsaw and cut the large branches, leaving not much more than an angular trunk that takes years to regain its beauty.

But each time I looked out this morning, I was pleasantly surprised. I watched them take off the small branches that had grown along the far edges of the tree. Then they used the chainsaw to cut off a couple of the larger branches, but only those that were no longer healthy. They worked all morning on one tree, like careful surgeons extricating the cancer that was sapping strength from it.

It's a little like the work of the heart. It's terrifying to admit fault, to realize

that deep changes sometimes need to take place. It takes courage to use a saw on the branches of our personal problems and to begin cutting. It takes faith to cut away those things we have to let go of that are hindering our growth, health, and happiness. It's a painful process, hearing the buzz of the proverbial chainsaw, and my heart aches.

It's during these times of vulnerability, of opening up and facing our weaknesses that we need to be careful not to just begin hacking off everything about us, zealously chopping away and destroying even those things that are healthy and beautiful.

That's when we need the gentle hands of the surgeon, who is careful not to destroy the healthy parts of the body as he operates. We need the patient hands of the tree trimmers like those I hired today, taking time to cut only the branches that are overgrown or dead and dangerous, and leaving the large, beautiful branches that will provide shade in the summertime. This patient, careful pruning enables the tree to come back to life in spring, stronger in its individuality, and lovelier and more vibrant than ever. ■



My Life. My Choice. My Future.

By Natalie Brook, adapted

You've probably heard some of these familiar sayings:

The world is your oyster.

There are no limits.

The word impossible is not in my vocabulary.

Never give up.

If you can dream it, you can do it.

The best way to know the future is to invent it.

Success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration.

Those might be pretty good points, but I end up thinking, *Yeah, right.*

I believe I have much to offer the world, and I should be able to take advantage of the many opportunities around me to serve, give back, find fulfillment, and chart a path that will make my loved ones proud of me.

So why is it that sometimes my “reality” doesn't work out that way? Sometimes I feel small, forgotten, lost, or as if I'm drifting almost aimlessly. I know I've been blessed and have knowledge,

understanding, faith, and valuable talents. But sometimes I just can't put it all together to somehow make those gifts work for me.

The longer I feel this way, the worse it becomes, until eventually I start to wonder if I'll ever find that path to a better life, a deeper relationship, a healthier lifestyle. When I feel stuck or unsure or dissatisfied with where I am today, it can be confusing or frustrating to try to "fix it" or even to know where to start.

Then I came to a conclusion that was helpful for me: This is my life, and it is what I make it. My realization was that no one can live my life for me; I have to take responsibility for my decisions.

I made a list of some of the obstacles that weigh me down and keep me stuck:

Inertia. It's easier to keep doing what I'm doing than to change. It takes faith, energy, sacrifice, and movement to change the trajectory of my life. Without focused determination to change, I know I'll naturally stay on my current path.

Fear. Fear of failure, fear of embarrassment, fear of success, fear of loss, fear of too much hard work. All that fear can be paralyzing. I think fear makes us convince ourselves that what we have right now is not that bad; it's not worth the risk of change.

Procrastination. Putting things off until tomorrow is a recipe for stagnation.

The expectations of others. How I think people see me holds me back from making changes and venturing into unknown territory.

Lack of clarity. That's when you sense that you need to change your life,

you feel restless or uneasy, but you're not sure what direction to go or what to do—so you wait. I've done that. But the key is to do something while you're waiting. As we move ahead with what we do know, we'll find clarity for the things we don't know.

It takes courage to take responsibility for your life.

It takes courage to change and to make different choices.

It takes courage to take risks.

It takes courage to live life in sync with our highest aspirations, rather than succumb to mediocrity.

It takes courage to go deeper and grow into the people we want to be, rather than hide behind excuses or blame others.

It takes courage to live the truth and be the truest expression of who we are.

It takes courage to stay the course and weather the storms that will come once we've made a change.

After we muster up the courage to acknowledge what needs to change, the next step is to take action. Today is all we have, and the action we take today is creating our life, our legacy.

So this is the challenge:

- 1. Take responsibility.**
- 2. Recognize the obstacles.**
- 3. Have courage.**
- 4. Take action.**

When we take a good look at our life choices, face whatever has been stopping us, and ask God for the courage to take action, we can rest assured that things will work out in the end. ■

The End of Her Part

By Elsa Sichrovsky, adapted

Vanessa waved at me as the doors shut, and I watched the train whisk away a friendship of six years. Vanessa and I had met in junior high school, and our common interest in writing stories and shared taste in novels had started an unbreakable bond that had lasted through all the highs and lows of our teenage years. Now she'd won a scholarship and was going abroad to pursue her degree, leaving me to try to figure out how to go on despite feeling like her departure had pulled the bottom out from under my life. Of course, I'd always known that one day we'd both leave home and go our separate ways, but now that it was actually happening, I was crestfallen.

During the first few weeks after her departure, Vanessa's absence awakened me to how much I had depended on her. Instead of spending time with many different friends, I'd stayed in the safe zone with Vanessa and a few of our common friends. It was easier to adopt the views of someone as likable and intelligent as Vanessa than to come up with my own views on everything. For example, I always followed Vanessa's opinions about which books to read or what movies to watch.

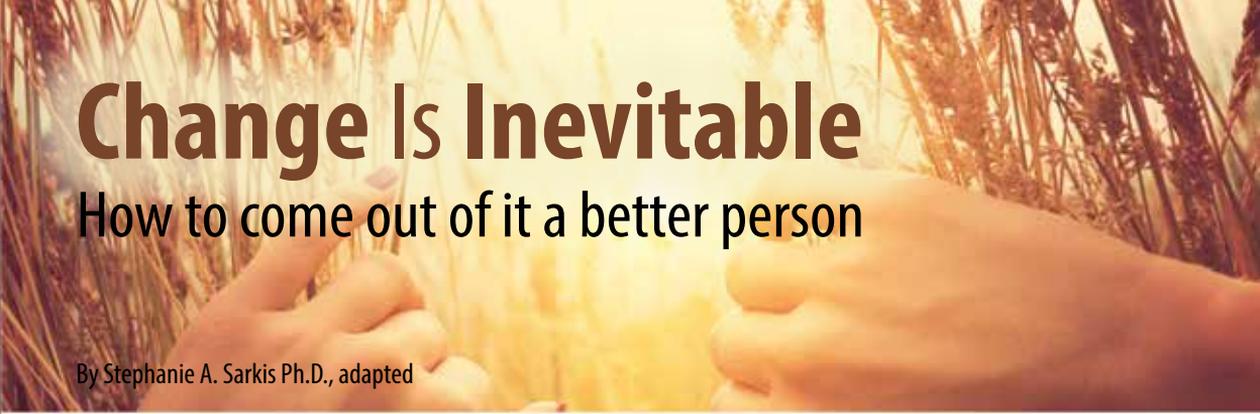
While being staunchly loyal wasn't a

bad thing, I realized that I'd been reluctant to take the personal risk of making up my own mind and charting my own path. Though I admired Vanessa's courage to leave her familiar surroundings and pursue her dream, I was also terrified at the thought of going through the emotional turbulence that comes with reaching adulthood without the assurance of my best friend's validation and emotional support.

Vanessa and I kept in contact for the first year or so, but naturally grew apart as time went by. Back then, having my hopes to preserve our friendship crumble away was heartbreaking. Yet looking back, it's clear Vanessa's moving out of my life gave an impetus to my personal growth.

I was forced to meet new friends, to make mistakes, and then pull myself up to stand again on my own two feet. Not being able to ask for her advice about everything made me search my heart more and contemplate issues for myself.

Though at the time I felt lonely and abandoned, I understand now what Faraaz Kazi wrote about friendship: "Some people are going to leave, but that's not the end of your story. That's the end of *their* part in your story." ■



Change Is Inevitable

How to come out of it a better person

By Stephanie A. Sarkis Ph.D., adapted

The one constant thing in life is change. That doesn't mean we get used to it or fully embrace it. Here are some tips for coping with big changes in your life, and coming out a better person for it.

Acknowledge things are changing. Sometimes we get so caught up in fighting change that we put off actually dealing with it. Denial is a powerful force, and it protects us in many ways. However, stepping outside of it and saying to yourself, “Things are changing, and it is okay” can be less stressful than putting it off.

Realize stress can even come from good change. Sometimes when people go through a good life change, such as graduating, they still feel a great deal of stress—and even dread. Keep in mind that positive change can create stress just like not-so-positive change. Stress is just your body's way of reacting to change. It's okay to feel stressed even when something good has happened—in fact, it's normal.

Keep up your regular schedule as much as possible. The more change that is happening, the more important it is to stick to your regular schedule—as much as possible. Having some things that stay the same, gives us an anchor. An anchor is a reminder that some things are still

the same, and it gives your brain a little bit of a rest.

Try to eat as healthy as possible. When change happens, a lot of us tend to reach for carbs—bread, muffins, cake, etc. This may be because eating carbs boosts serotonin—a brain chemical that may be somewhat depleted when you are undergoing change (stress). It's okay to soothe yourself with comfort foods—in moderation. One way to track what you are eating is to write it down.

Exercise. Keeping up regular exercise may be a part of the “keep up your regular schedule” tip. If exercise is not currently part of your daily routine, try adding it. Even just walking around the block can help you feel better.

Seek support. No one gets through life alone. It is okay to ask for help—it is a sign that you know yourself well enough to realize you need some assistance.

Write down the positives that have come from this change. Maybe due to this change in your life you have met new people. Maybe you started practicing healthier habits. Maybe you became more assertive. Maybe the change helped you prioritize what is most important in your life. Change presents us with the opportunity to grow—and it's important to acknowledge how things have become better as a result. ■

Helping kids cope with change

By Fiona Baker, adapted



PARENTING
FROM THE HEART



Kids like routine. They thrive on knowing what happens when. But life doesn't stay the same—people move houses, kids change schools, friends shift away or stop being friends, parents sometimes separate, and almost every year they'll probably have to face a new teacher.

Parents can play a vital role in helping their kids learn how to cope with change, arming them with valuable life skills along the way.

Coping strategies for change

According to a growing body of research, kids learn how to cope with change and the ups and downs of life by developing resilience.

For years it was considered one of the inherent traits we were all born with, but psychologists today now know that it's one of the most important qualities parents can teach their kids (along with compassion).

And how do they learn it? Apparently by watching us. Studies have shown that children as young as two years old copy the coping, stress-management, and thinking styles of the adults around

them. And they can sense if parents are anxious or worried, and will tend to mimic that.

Other studies have found that there is strong evidence that good early relationships with caregivers can help make children more resilient. And the earlier this resilience-building is started the better.

Reinforcing this “it starts at home” message, Andrew Fuller, consultant psychologist for *The Resilience Foundation* and author of *Tricky Kids*, says resilient parents raise resilient kids.

“When your child needs you to help them make sense of the changes that might be happening, that is not the time to confront your own inner demons,” he says.

“It’s a handy skill for parents to learn to hold their own anxieties in check.”

Fuller describes resilience as “the happy knack of being able to bungee jump through the pitfalls of life.”

Simple tips on helping kids cope with change

- ✓ Give them a sense of belonging, and of being loved by their family.
- ✓ Encourage a diverse group of friends—both for them and the family as a whole.
- ✓ Enjoy family rituals—like Sunday night dinner, or a weekend drive.
- ✓ Get kids used to change from an early age by presenting small changes in the daily routine, introducing and trying new foods, and changing a habit or family rituals by starting new ones.

Top 5 practical coping skills

Jill Savage, author of several parenting books, and the executive director of

Hearts at Home, a US organization designed to help moms, has this advice for parents who want to help their children manage change:

1. **Be prepared to answer their myriad of questions**—and create an environment in which they feel safe about asking you anything about the changes they’re facing. Asking questions helps them process change, and the answers they receive from the people they trust most—that is mom and dad—will help them transition.
2. **Give them warning**—like adults, no child will cope well with change being sprung on them. If you can, start talking through the changes early, so they can get their head around it, as well as formulate all those aforementioned questions.
3. **Stick to routines as much as possible**—try not to change everything at once. If you have routines in place like bedtime rituals, the books you read, and even the TV shows you all watch, try to keep those in place where possible.
4. **Let them grieve**—when any of us move, change schools, or make any kind of change in life, we leave something behind. Let your little ones talk about what they miss, and don’t try to point out all of the wonderful things about the new house, school, bedroom, or whatever. Let them appropriately mourn what they have lost.
5. **Be prepared to weather the change**—many kids don’t adapt immediately, and there may be tears and tantrums, followed by major parental guilt. Expect that it can take time for children to adjust. ■

Looking Goofy

By Marie Story, adapted



A good friend of mine decided to take up tennis. She bought all the gear, scheduled her first lesson, and headed off to the tennis courts.

When she got there, though, she was

immediately aware that there were other people around. There were kids in the playground, people walking their dogs, and a group of others watching a baseball game nearby. Although none of them

were watching her, having people around made her extremely self-conscious.

Her lesson started, but she could hardly hit the ball for nervousness. She kept looking around to see if anyone was watching. She felt silly and clumsy—and stupid for even trying to play.

Finally, the instructor sat her down. “You know,” he said, “no one ever succeeds at anything unless they’re willing to risk looking silly at first.”

He explained that until she could quit thinking about herself and how she looked on the court—basically, until she was willing to look silly—she’d never make any progress with learning to play.

As my friend told me this story, it got me thinking about how often I’ve done the same thing—and not just in sports.

I lived in Mexico for nearly eight years, but never achieved more than beginner-level Spanish. Meanwhile, my sister was able to speak fluently after just a few short years. What made the difference? Superior intelligence? A higher I.Q.? Greater aptitude for languages? More hours spent studying? Perhaps those were contributing factors. But the biggest reason was a whole lot simpler. She was willing to try.

When I hung back because I wasn’t sure how to say something, she stepped up and tried. When there was an opportunity to hang out with people who only spoke Spanish, I’d try to squirm out of it. My sister jumped at the chance to practice.

She made a lot of mistakes and looked silly sometimes. In fact, at the beginning, I was still able to tease her about things she said wrong, but she didn’t let that stop her. She’d figure out what she’d said wrong, find out how to say it correctly,

and try again.

I wonder how many things I’ve missed out on simply because I was afraid to fail, to look goofy. More importantly, what big opportunities that I missed for the same reason?

Maybe it doesn’t seem like a big deal once a person achieves their goals, but no one starts off as a hero. They all had to risk looking silly in order to accomplish something great.

Bestselling author John Grisham’s first novel, *A Time to Kill*, was initially a flop. The book was rejected by 16 agents and a dozen publishing companies. Finally a small company printed 5,000 copies, and Grisham purchased 1,000 of those to sell personally. He did his own little book tour, promoting his book in his hometown library, then in various libraries across the state. And it took a good few months before he sold off all those books. I imagine he felt nervous and maybe even silly trying to sell his own book to strangers. I wonder if he ever got hit with thinking I should just call it quits. During this time, however, Grisham didn’t give up on writing and worked on a second novel, *The Firm*, which became an instant success. His determination paid off.

It takes strength to risk looking foolish. It takes strength to fail and keep trying. It takes strength to try something that seems crazy or unrealistic.

Is there something you’ve been avoiding because you’re scared of failing? Are you running away from some challenge in your life because you don’t want to look dumb if you mess up? If you are, stop! Turn around. Face that challenge, dare to look goofy, and win! ■

Choices

NOTABLE
QUOTES



Choices are the hinges of destiny.

—**Edwin Markham**

Sometimes it's the smallest decisions that can change your life forever.—**Keri Russell**

We are the creative force of our life, and through our own decisions rather than our conditions, if we carefully learn to do certain things, we can accomplish those goals.—**Stephen Covey**

Your life changes the moment you make a new, congruent, and committed decision.—**Tony Robbins**

Life presents you with so many decisions. A lot of times, they're right in front of your face and they're really difficult, but we must make them.—**Brittany Murphy**

It doesn't matter which side of the fence you get off on sometimes. What matters most is getting off. You cannot make progress without making decisions.

—**Jim Rohn**

Life is a matter of choices, and every choice you make makes you.

—**John C. Maxwell**

The more decisions that you are forced to make alone, the more you are aware of your freedom to choose.—**Thornton Wilder**

Life is about choices. Some we regret, some we're proud of. Some will haunt us forever. The message: we are what we choose to be.—**Graham Brown**

Decisions are the frequent fabric of our daily design.—**Don Yaeger**

