

Starting Small

September 10, 2008 by [lifeshifting](#)

Well, not one to typically court controversy, I have to admit that my last blog post created a bit of a stir. It seems that some folks were less than thrilled to hear that boredom, worry, anxiety—and fear!—cannot always be blamed on biology. I have to admit that I may have erred on the side of sounding draconian (or just Republican?) in suggesting that my client needed to take responsibility for dealing with his life/work circumstances...that perhaps he was not “hardwired” to be miserable.

The point that I was trying to make still holds: fear is a natural response to the changing circumstance of life. Fear, which shows up in the guise of boredom, anxiety, stress, a whole panoply of symptoms, is not typically CAUSED by biology or brain chemistry—genetic or otherwise. Fear is simply our natural, bio-chemical response to the deeper truth that life is constantly shifting. Like the weather, circumstances in our work, relationships, finances, and physicality are always in flux, and as much as we might like things to stabilize and settle down (which they appear to do occasionally, thank god!), sooner or later the winds of change will always come blowing across the landscape of our lives.

What I do acknowledge about my last post, is that I was perhaps a bit too cavalier about just how difficult it can be to get in the flow of life’s constant shifts, given that so many of the environmental and external factors are obviously beyond our control—like the general malaise in the country we live in (in this case, the sad state of the U.S. economically and politically...); the shackles we get bound up in financially—like mortgages, credit cards, and car loans; and the mercurial state of the job market. AND, that’s before we head off into relationship territory, where the winds of change can bring their own hurricane season (it is any wonder that we personify hurricanes with names?). Being in an intimate relationship can certainly bring on its own perfect storms.

I don’t want to minimize the struggle and challenge of moving through major change in life. What I do want to emphasize is that we need to be careful that we don’t reinforce the walls of our own self-created prisons—of worry, stress, and anxiety—by being too quick to blame our woes on biology. We all get stuck at times; in fact, on the flip side of any major pinnacle or peak experience there is always a plateau, a leveling off...and that can feel like a real downer.

The key to breaking through the malaise is often quite simple: break the pattern. Of course, whenever we start to think about breaking a pattern that has become stuck in our lives, the first question is always: how do I do that? the good news is that the answer is simple: start small.

Think about it: ever discover a tiny tear in a pair of jeans or a shirt and then find a day or two later that the little tear has become a rip? Small shifts in a pattern, repeated over time, become **BIG CHANGE**. Yes, big change is always daunting, sometimes overwhelming...and usually a show-stopper when viewed by itself as the endgame. So

start small. Need to lose 30 pounds? Start by focusing on what it would take to lose just one. Then celebrate. Need to reinvent your relationship? Start back at the beginning: take your lover on a date. Need to renovate your career? Start by allowing yourself to daydream about what you love to do. Need to get out and network? Start by figuring out how to meet one new person this week. Just one.

So the next time you feel worried, bored, anxious, or just plain fearful, stop for a moment and think about where you may feel stuck. Remember this paradox: when you feel stuck it means that change is in the works. Ask yourself: what aspect of my life might have outworn its usefulness? What needs to be re-invented, reinvigorated, re-born? Then...take a small, tiny, even infinitesimal step in a new direction.

Soon you'll be off that treadmill of anxiety, worry, and fear...and on your way.

Best of luck,

Dr J