

Getting Unstuck

Feeling stuck is like living on autopilot. You go through the motions but don't feel like you're getting anywhere. It's like you're eating a food that you've always loved but it just doesn't taste good anymore. You might be feeling bored, burned out, frustrated, or hopeless. On the positive side, as long as you are living on autopilot, your life is predictable. You don't have to stop to think about how to do things. You can just keep doing what you've always done.

The problem with living on autopilot is that when you get used to the patterns and routines you've created, you have trouble seeing that there are other attractive possibilities and options. People on autopilot stay in conflict-ridden relationships (romantic or otherwise), get trapped in unsatisfying jobs or careers and/or hold onto resentment(s) and disappointments with a death grip. They may focus on how they've been wronged by another person, or the world or God or on what they lost or never got a chance to have or experience in the first place.

When you're stuck, change often seems too painful, too overwhelming, too impossible, too uncertain, or too frightening. Spinning around in the same old uncomfortable patterns and belief systems may seem less painful than moving forward. But if that balance shifts so that the pain of staying the same outweighs the pain of making changes, there is a roadmap.

The first step to getting unstuck is to parcel out the places in your life where you actually are stuck. When you feel stuck, everything may feel like drudgery, but it's possible that it's really only one area of your life that is coloring your experience in other areas. For example, if you are in a miserable relationship, the anger and/or fear you feel may bleed over into your band practice, softball game, yoga class, job and everything else you do. It's also possible that working in a job that bores you to tears or for a boss who is emotionally abusive may leave you so shut down that you are unable appreciate your relationships (romantic or otherwise) or the things that used to bring you pleasure. Grieving the loss of a lover, parent or dear friend may leave the rest of life seeming empty and gray.

The second step to getting unstuck is to determine what part of the stuckness is beyond your control and find a way to accept it. Try as you might to change someone else's behavior, the economy, or the weather, all of these external factors are beyond your control and trying to change them or resisting them will just make you miserable. For example, the more you try to make your boyfriend stop playing video games or smoking pot and spend "quality time" with you, the more he is going to dig in his heels. And even if he does change his ways for a week or so, he will resent you and find more reason to slide back into his gaming or smoking. Cursing at the snow won't make it melt or turn your yard into a tropical paradise. It will just make you miserable. But if you accept that this is how things are, you can find other people to spend time with or take a trip to Key West.

The third step is to identify your patterns, habits, and perceptions that keep you stuck. What do you keep doing over and over even though it doesn't seem to work? For example, do you suck it up when your boss yells at you and then drown the pain and resentment in alcohol? Do you focus on how life has let you down or on your limitations?

Do your beliefs get in the way? For example, do you believe that getting divorced or breaking up with your lover would make you a failure? Do you believe that it's too late to make a major career change? Do you believe that you don't have enough talent to follow your dreams?

What role is fear playing in your stuckness? Are you afraid of failing? Being judged? Not being good enough? Not being perfect? Being laughed at?

The fourth step to getting unstuck is to get support. Change can be difficult so it's important to have an ally or cheerleader. It's important to find someone who believes in you and who will listen to your tales of woe and encourage you to keep going when things seem hard.

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