

## The Hallway

*One door opens, another shuts behind  
One sun sets and another sun she rises*  
Richard Thompson

Ever feel like you're living your life like a scratched up album on an old school turntable, getting stuck in the same painful groove over and over? Maybe you stay in a frustrating relationship, work situation, or financial pattern even though it doesn't work for you. Maybe you get out of one painful relationship, work situation, or financial disaster only to find yourself in a similar situation. Most people are aware of the notion that as one door closes, another opens. People who don't trust that another door will open often refuse to leave the door that is closing. People who take this saying at face value often get stuck in the flip side of the pattern. They dash from door to door, racing to keep one from hitting them on the ass on the way out and slipping through another before it has a chance to slam in front of them. They leave at the first sign of discomfort, assuming that if they could only find the right partner, the right job, or the right deal, their lives would be fine.

What most people don't know is that the saying has tag line: "One door closes, another opens, *but the hallway is a bitch.*" Insanity can be defined as doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results. If you want to escape from insanity, you've got to spend some time in the hallway, exploring the roots of your patterns. It's not enough to focus on the hand of cards you've been dealt. You can't change this. What you can change are the beliefs and stories you've been telling yourself for years. If one of the stories you picked up along the way tells you, "No matter how hard you try, you're bound to fail," if you happen to get laid off, you're likely fall prey to hopelessness and/or victimhood. You'll filter this current experience of being laid off through old doubts, insecurities, and negative experiences around working and finding work. If one of the stories you picked up tells you that you are not worth loving, you won't believe your partner when he or she says, "I love you." Instead, you'll spend your time trying to poke holes through those words, pushing them away to test their love or simply waiting for them to dump you. Your stories keep you from evaluating each experience on its own terms and block you from living and responding to the present moment.

If you want to get off the turntable, you've got to explore the stories you tell yourself. For example, is it really true that you've failed at *everything*? If managed get your left shoe on your left foot when you got dressed today, you haven't failed at everything. You probably even managed to drink water without drowning. And if you looked at your life through the eyes of a supportive friend (or in absence of those, of a supportive therapist), you'd probably be able find at least a hundred more things that you've done successfully. The same is true of love. Even Adolf Hitler was loved. Are you *really* less lovable than Adolf Hitler? More likely, you're focusing on a few painful experiences and generalizing them to everything else. But what if you isolated the painful experiences from the rest of your experiences? Just because you didn't make it onto American Idol or your first book never got published doesn't mean that you've failed everything you tried. Similarly, just because your ex dumped you for another man or woman doesn't mean you are unlovable.

We learn most of the stories we tell ourselves either directly or indirectly from our parents. You might have had a parent for whom nothing you did seemed to be good enough or who kept pushing you to try harder or do better. You might have had a parent who dismissed the A you got on your report card in math and focused instead on the fact that you made a C in History or that you left your pajamas on the floor. Maybe one of your parents actually told you that they hated you, or maybe you just got the message that your mother or father could never really love you. If this is the case, take a step back. Remember that even though they seemed like gods when you were small, your parents themselves were simply damaged human beings trying to function in a world they couldn't control. They weren't able to meet your very human needs for approval, acceptance, appreciation, or unconditional love, at least not 24/7. Would any child be able to live up to their unrealistic standards? Would they be able to love any child unconditionally? The point is, the negative messages they gave you are beyond "iffy" in the "truth" department. While we're on the subject of your parents, now is as

good a time as any to take back your power. That was then. This is now. Unless you are under 18, you are no longer a child; they no longer have authority over you. You can discard the negative messages and dysfunctional rules they gave you. Feel free to hold on to the positive ones.

As hurtful as our negative stories may be, we rely on them to keep ourselves from feeling the fear of uncertainty. So as you wander around in the hallway, ask yourself, “What’s the worst thing that can happen…” Are you afraid that if you stopped beating yourself up for being a failure that you’d quit trying? Are you afraid that if you accepted your partner’s vows of love that he or she would catch a glimpse of the real you and realize that you weren’t lovable after all? Are you afraid of feeling the agony associated with painful memories? Many people avoid the difficult feelings associated with the painful experiences they’ve had in the past. Instead they repress, deny and avoid them. Unfortunately, painful feelings don’t just go away. The only way to free yourself from painful memories is to process them and release them into the past. That means you have to acknowledge the feelings associated with painful memories, feel the pain you’ve been avoiding, and let the emotions go. Most people find this easier to do with the help of a therapist or in the safety of a supportive group.

Finally, some people sabotage their efforts to change because deep down inside, they believe the story that they can’t change. If you find yourself lost in this particular story, imagine yourself 10 years in the future, after you have successfully changed this pattern. Give yourself time to feel into the future successful you. What does it feel like to be 10 years older and wiser? What sort of clothes are you wearing? What kind of shoes are you wearing? Now, let the you that is 10 years older and wiser tell your struggling self what you did to overcome this problem. Be specific. Tell your struggling self three things you did to change.

By spending time in the hallway you can challenge or rewrite the negative stories that keep you sliding back into the same painful groove. When you get off the turntable your stories have kept you spinning on you can make the most of the opportunities you find behind the door that opens to your future.

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