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The Evolving Self ...when growth is the only option.

The Evolving Self is an e-newsletter that reflects the belief that growth is a choice that can bring an ever deepening and expanding awareness of who we are and what we are here for. The reader can expect affirmations, quotes, book reviews, insightful commentary and tips that support the growth of the individual.

What I Did For Love

By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Fifteen years ago in early January, I was spending my days and nights looking for my dog, Hathaway who had gotten out on New Year's Eve. When I got the call that she was missing, I was on a trip I really didn't want to go on with a person I didn't really want to be with. I had left my dogs in the care of people I didn't really trust and as a result, one of them left Hathaway outside, the other left the gate open and she took the opportunity to explore the world. Tragically, she was hit by a car and killed.

As I picked up Hathaway's broken body, covered by a blanket, I moaned and cried like I have never cried before or since, saying, "I'm sorry, I'm so sorry." While many people entreated me, "Don't do that to yourself." I knew in my heart that I was responsible for her death and it was my poor love choices that had caused it to happen.

I believe that most people can relate at some level (some deeper than others) to the desire to love and be loved. Finding healthy love in my life was something that eluded me, not for lack of me trying. I always referred to my "broken picker" as the reason behind that, but the hard truth is, I accepted less, way less than I wanted or needed simply because I didn't believe I could get what I wanted. So I compromised and deferred and distorted love to fit what appeared to be available. For that, I paid a very high price, certainly in the loss of Hathaway but also in the currency of my self-esteem.

Much of the act of accepting less than we want and need in our relationships relates back to our core beliefs about ourselves. Yes, of course they were developed in childhood and I've spoken at length about that before, but for now, let me say that your core beliefs will only allow you to accept what you believe you deserve in your relationships.

If you stretch too far away from those core beliefs, you will sabotage and/or behave in ways that lead to the demise of the relationship. When you are with someone you believe you deserve, even if its not what you want, you will typically just take it because you don't believe you deserve any better.

You Have to Love Yourself First

It is hard to admit much less accept that we have these kinds of beliefs, which some people are unaware they even have. In fact, some people state that they feel the opposite but it's pretty obvious when a person is over-compensating with an inflated ego to cover up the their low self-esteem.

When I was faced with the loss of my beloved Hathaway, I desperately wanted to honor her in a grand gesture and completely change my pattern, but unfortunately it didn't happen so easily for me. For many years to come, I continued to sacrifice my self-image and esteem just to be with someone, sacrificing everything I ever wanted. It seems like I had to fall very low before I finally got it: You have to love yourself first.

If you're like me, you have heard others say, "You have to love yourself first," when sharing your latest heartache. I knew it was true. I always knew it was true, but I didn't, for the life of me, know how to do it.

Today, I can say that it is when I learned how to love myself that I finally found the courage to stand for myself, to accept no less than love in my life. Settling is no longer an option and I'm completely ok being alone for the rest of my life if I don't have exactly that.

Affirmation: I love and embrace *all* of me.

Quote: *"Won't forget, can't regret, what I did for love, what I did for love." -A Chorus Line*

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She Who Was Next

By Jaqui Duvall, MA

As I entered the doctor's office, I had my membership card ready to scan at the reader on the receptionist's desk. There was a patient standing slightly to the right talking with the receptionist and I paused briefly and said, "Excuse me," while reaching my hand forward to scan my card. The patient reached in front of me and scanned her card, saying, "I'm next." I waited while she did this, scanned my card and then went to the back where the treatment tables were lined up. I chose the farthest one in deference to the "person who was next" even though she was still at the reception desk talking.

Very shortly afterwards, the doctor called my name and I indicated I was there, at which point, "She who was next" came into the room. There was a constant stream of words coming out of her mouth. "I was next. That woman nearly bulled me over to scan her card. I was next. I'm in a hurry, I have someplace to be, and I was next..." On and on it went. The doctor stated that he simply went by what showed up on his computer, but showed obvious signs of irritation. As the doctor responded to "She who was next," the volume of his voice got higher and higher as she continued her constant stream of words, "I was next, etc. etc." Eventually, he loudly lost his temper and asked her to leave. This exit did not happen immediately or gracefully. The doctor had to take a time out to calm himself down and when he returned he said, "I didn't like the way she was treating you." "She who was next" never did take her turn, at least not that day.

There was another patient sitting in a chair directly in front of the treatment tables. After "She who was next" left, she stated that she was waiting behind me to scan her card at the door, had witnessed the whole scene and said she would have done exactly the same thing I did in attempting to scan my card when "She who was next" was talking to the receptionist.

In contrast to the doctor, I felt completely detached from the ire and constant stream of words coming from "She who was next." However, there were some interesting insights I had after the experience.

Reduce Your Stress

First, while I have never verbalized my internal thoughts the way "She who was next" did, I have had similar thoughts going through my head in similar circumstances, therefore, it could have just as easily been me. There, but for the grace of God, go I.

"She who was next" almost seemed to be possessed. No matter what the doctor said, she continued her constant stream of words. It appeared that she was completely unaware of herself, how she was behaving and the impact it was having on the people around her. She believed she was in the right and that she had been victimized.

It was clear that, "She who was next," was completely caught up in a dilemma of her own making based on demands she placed on herself and very possibly poor planning and time management. She put herself in that situation and was so stressed that she lost her humanity in the process. Again, there, but for the grace of God, go I. It is a dilemma that happens when I try to squeeze too much stuff into my time. While I have gotten better at this planning ahead thing, there are times when we can't predict the unpredictable.

This whole situation provided a really good example of what happens to us when we get stressed. The instinctive systems in the body take over and the thoughts that are fueling the behavior seem to be real and very convincing.

How we deal with things not going our way can either contribute to or alleviate our stress. We are the only ones who can decide that. And it often requires practicing an intervention on the nervous system by taking deep abdominal breaths, and managing our thinking.

Having a regular practice of deep abdominal breathing is an excellent way of helping the body maintain a regular stress reduction program. In addition, it helps us to re-engage our ability to practice rational thought. Practicing self-soothing by coaching ourselves to calm down is a way of modifying the erroneous thoughts that get triggered in situations like this.

Affirmation: I am responsible for how I treat people.

Quote: *"The greatest weapon against stress is the ability to choose one thought over another."* -William James

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Change Happens

By Jaqui Duvall, MA

For the past nearly two years I have found a "normal" schedule working for Valley Medical as a trainer teaching Workplace Violence Prevention and also working for Kaiser where I teach Behavioral Health Education (BHE) and assist in running the BHE department. Over time, I have created a routine that involves getting up very early in the morning, working out, driving (surface streets only) to VMC, leaving there mid-day, driving to Kaiser and then heading home around 4:15pm. I'm not a big fan of getting up early in the morning, but I'm an even lesser fan of working late and driving through traffic to get home. While it's had its challenges, this schedule has generally worked for me.

The first major change came when we were asked to reduce the size of our classes at Kaiser. So, we called dozens of people to ask them to reschedule to later classes. Very quickly on the heels of this change however, we were asked to cancel entirely our classes for three weeks through the beginning of April. Upon completion of that task, I was essentially told that my services wouldn't be needed until classes were back up and running. At Valley Medical Center, which is the County hospital, we also cancelled classes, especially since my classes there involve physical interaction for learning defense tactics.

For about a half a day, I thought I would be sheltering-in-place along with everyone else. I was contemplating all the projects I would have time to work on and maybe even apply for unemployment to tide me over. Then I saw an email from management at VMC stating that all workers are essential and are needed to work.

When I signed on to teach Workplace Violence Prevention for the County, part of the agreement was that I would act as a Disaster Worker should the need arise. Well, the need has arisen, so rather than sheltering-in-place, I am continuing to work at the county hospital. I'm not a nurse and am not in a position to provide care for the sick; however, I am able to help those who are helping.

My new "new normal" is drastically different than any schedule I have worked for many years. I signed up to work from 12p-8pm (the alternative I was offered was 5am start or 1am finish, neither of which I would be able to sustain.)

I now support the team of people screening patients, visitors and staff who come in to the hospital. At this point, I have no idea how long I will be working as a disaster worker and therefore how long I will be working this schedule. However, because I am practiced in looking for the silver linings here it is:

- Because of the shelter-in-place order, there are far fewer people on the road when I'm driving in to work. While I can still manage to find other drivers who drive by a different set of rules than I do, for the most part, this has significantly reduced my stress level.
- I am no longer getting up at 4:30am in the morning to get into work early enough to avoid traffic. In fact, because I don't need to be at work until 12p, I can sleep in as late as I like and still have time to work out and do some stuff around the house before I need to leave for work. This means I am more rested than I have been for a very long time.
- While parking is tight, I have been able to find a spot every day I have arrived at work. And when I get off, there is no traffic to speak of. So, all in all, I am less stressed, less tense, less harried and more rested. All of this is good for me.
- Because of the drastic changes in my schedule I am experiencing a very different way of living that enables me to imagine how my life could be different, how I might live and work differently. For some time now, I have been contemplating retirement without a concrete sense of how I might get from where I am to where I want to be. This turn of events has given me a great deal of insight into how I might manage my life and my time to enable me to create a completely different kind of life.

So, while I practice safe PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and self-care (this includes using essential oils) to the best of my ability, I feel options are opening up for me.

Affirmation: I am safe and healthy.

Quote: *"It's only after you've stepped outside your comfort zone that you begin to change, grow,*

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Powerlessness By Jaqui Duvall, MA

In my interactions with people lately, we have been checking in about experiences with "sheltering-in-place." It's fascinating to me the variety of experiences people have been having. Some people are enjoying a break in their usual hectic schedules, some people are using the opportunity to do projects around the house, and some people are downright miserable, feeling trapped and caged. Even amongst those who have found a positive spin on the current circumstances, there is a common theme that has emerged. *Powerlessness*. Powerlessness is one of the Human Dilemmas.

Human Dilemmas are those things, which are universal to the human experience. We experience them as part of simply being human. Powerlessness involves being faced with circumstances you did not choose, that you prefer weren't happening and you have little to no control over.

The first step of the 12-steps of Alcoholics Anonymous states, "Admitted that we were powerless over alcohol and that our lives had become unmanageable." This step is all about powerlessness.

Step 1 is very applicable to our current circumstances given the uncertainty that we are living with right now. The Covid-19 pandemic and the shelter-in-place order are turning many people's lives upside down. While there are many things in our "normal" lives over which we have no power, we are now experiencing a new version of powerlessness.

I notice for myself that the whole concept of powerlessness is unpleasant. Not something I enjoy or deal with well. Everything from unfortunate weather changes to traffic to taxes and drastic changes in schedule, to people behaving badly. Many people are challenged by powerlessness and some even lash out at others, or simply try to control everything and everyone they come into contact with.

A sign that we are challenged by uncertainty is the tendency to be compulsive. Eating more, drinking/drugging more, tuning out more (watching TV, playing computer games, Facebook.)

There is an emotional aspect to powerlessness that is worth mentioning and that is Depression. If you consider that Depression is like a system freeze (just like your computer gets locked up,) it falls into the standard instinctual human coping responses, Fight, Flight or Freeze. Studies on depression refer to a common human experience when people are faced with a situation they cannot change as “Learned Helplessness,” or giving up.

Given all this, what to do? So what, now what?

Acceptance. Accepting that we are powerless, accepting how we feel about being powerless and accepting all of our attempts to deal with being powerless. In other words, accepting it.

I find for myself that when I accept my powerlessness, I'm able to eventually move to gratitude, which changes my circumstances profoundly in a very short time. And maybe it doesn't always change my circumstances so much as it changes me and how I look at them. This is something that might be helpful for those who are stuck at home. I believe there is a way to do this without letting your life fall apart. That's not what this is about. It is about an attitude, a way of looking at life, finding and making peace with life on life's terms instead of expecting life to conform to my needs and desires.

Affirmation: I choose to live in the flow of life on life's terms.

Quote: *""The pain of powerlessness is excruciating. It is the most painful experience in earth school, and everyone shares it." - Gary Zukav*

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In Hiding By Jaqui Duvall, MA

There have been some funny memes on Facebook recently depicting the effects of people living in close quarters, aka shelter-in-place. One such meme provides a chart indicating levels of danger vs. safety depending on how you speak to a woman during quarantine. For example: Dangerous="What's for dinner?" Safer="Can I help you with dinner?" Safest="Where would you like delivery from tonight?" Ultra Safe= "Here, have some wine."

All kidding aside, the truth is: It is challenging for people to live in close quarters. And the longer it lasts, the harder it gets. We tend to wear on each other's nerves when there is no separation between us.

Anne Frank was 13 years old when she lived in hiding with seven other people for more than two years in a 450 square foot space. This was during WWII in the Netherlands where it is estimated 28,000 Jews were in hiding from the Nazi's. In addition to not being able to go outside, there was the need to be completely silent as there was an open business operating in the building during the day. Anne and her entire family were eventually arrested and sent to concentration camps. While our current circumstances can't be compared to the horrors of the holocaust there are some interesting similarities to our shelter-in-place of today.

Possibly the greatest challenge for Anne and her family was the fear of being discovered. Today, many people are experiencing paralyzing fear and anxiety of getting the virus. Even as restrictions are being lifted, some people are terrified to leave their homes. Many others are depressed and immobilized from moving forward in their lives because of the many changes that have occurred for them personally as a result of shelter-in-place.

While being quiet is not a requirement for shelter-in-place, monotony and boredom is prevalent as it was among the people who lived in hiding. I've always felt that not having enough to do is way worse than having too much to do. And maybe we have simply forgotten how to entertain ourselves. Lately, I've been playing card and board games and doing jigsaw puzzles. Things I haven't done in a very long time. I feel like I am re-learning the art of play.

Finding a way of releasing stress when confined to a space is challenging for many people but is very necessary to prevent us from taking our stress out on those closest to us. While the gyms aren't yet open, walking is always available to do outside. It's also possible to create a workout routine in your own home. Many people are using YouTube to access videos for yoga and Tai Chi.

Journaling One of the less talked about effects of shelter-in-place is the effect it has on the psyche. While many people are sheltering with their families, many other people are alone. Spending a great deal of time alone can be challenging for people who consistently focus their attention on activities such as work and interacting with others. When we are alone for sustained periods of time, we are often confronted with parts of ourselves we may have previously avoided or even denied were there.

Anne Frank's way of coping was to keep a journal. She is, in fact, famous for the diary she kept during her time in hiding. It was possibly what helped her retain her sanity during her 2-plus years of hiding. She used her diary as a place to retreat to in her own mind. She wrote stories and letters to imaginary friends. Her father, the only one of the eight people who hid together who survived the concentration camps, published the material from Anne's diaries after the war. He said that when he read her diary, he realized that he really didn't know his own daughter or the depth of her thoughts and feelings. Many believe it provides a true and rare understanding of what it was like for Anne and her family.

While I have never experienced having to hide during wartime or any other time, I have kept a diary/journal myself for over 40 years. Among many things, it has been a place to record my secret thoughts and release feelings it doesn't seem safe to share anywhere else. I have often referred to my journal as my *best friend* for that reason. Nowhere else have I shared myself where I have experienced the total freedom to express anything and everything, without judgment.

It has also been a way of accessing parts of myself that aren't available in normal everyday interactions with other people. I have access to an inner child who shares her dreams and heartaches. I have access to an inner brat who confesses to sometimes sabotaging the good things in my life and I have access to my highest and wisest self who simply loves all the other parts.

Affirmation: I choose to be gentle with myself.

Quote: *"The finest thing is that I can write down what I think and feel; otherwise I would suffocate completely."* - Anne Frank

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The Stolen Voice By Jaqui Duvall, MA

In the Disney animated film, "The Little Mermaid," the mermaid princess, Ariel has been watching the activities of humans on land from afar and longs to "...be a part of their world." She goes so far as to make a deal with Ursula the Octopus who says she can give Ariel legs for 3 days to walk on land. To keep the legs and remain human, Ariel must get the Prince to fall in love with her but there is a catch, Ursula will take Ariel's voice. Despite the objections of Ariel's sea companions she makes the deal, joins humans on land with her legs but without the ability to speak.

Leaving fairytales and sensational Disney movies aside, I believe there is something very important going on in this story that reveals something many of us, especially women, can relate to.

I have been teaching Assertiveness now for over 30 years. While there have been many men in my classes throughout the years, the vast majority of my students have been women. While there are some very assertive and even aggressive women in the world, it is far more common for women to be passive. I would go so far as to say that for many women, their voices have basically been *stolen* from them.

Gender roles develop largely as a result of the culture we grow up in. Even living in the age of "feminism," many of us were still raised with *traditional* gender roles. Girl Training code says, "Don't be too strong, too outspoken, too sexual, too aggressive." It results in girls modifying themselves to be pleasing to get a man, not only in behavior, but also focusing on looking good. In the Little Mermaid, Ariel asks Ursula how she will get the Prince to fall in love with her if she can't use her voice and Ursula tells her to use her "body" language. Meaning, she'll have to make use of her "looks." There is a lot of pressure placed on women to look good, be attractive and to age well.

Our mothers may have also modeled the standard of sacrificing our needs for those of our husbands and children. We often learn to stifle our voices, to not stand up for ourselves and to martyr ourselves so others can get what they want and need.

Finally, in many family dynamics, children don't find a listening ear when they are challenged by injustices whether coming from their siblings or even their own parents. Many children are expected to serve, to make their parents look good and *not be a problem*.

The long-term effect of all these factors is passivity. These girls grow into women who don't know how they feel much less have the ability to ask for what they need and/or want, or to express themselves in a meaningful way. These women are much less likely to set healthy boundaries.

Loving Yourself Even when you have raised your awareness of the experiences and life elements that have contributed to passivity, it is not that easy to overcome. We become entrenched in negative beliefs we have of our own worth and habitual ways of behaving.

The Little Mermaid was rescued by her sea creature friends who retrieved her stolen voice. Ultimately, her father grants her permanent legs so she can reunite with her prince and find her happily ever after. The rest of us must rely on other means to find our voices.

In *Dreams Girls*, Deena faces the truth that she fell prey to manipulation and her voice was given to her. She realizes that she "must find her own (voice.)" It's not easy to change especially when you realize that you contributed to your own dilemma.

When we have good self-esteem, being assertive flows naturally. When we value ourselves, we stand up for ourselves, so it is very helpful to consider working on self-esteem as a good place to start.

How do you teach someone to love themselves? Identifying the negative core beliefs we developed in life gives us an opportunity to redefine the beliefs we choose to have about ourselves and our place in the world. And practicing assertive communication helps us to find the voice that was stolen from us.

Affirmation: I speak my truth with confidence.

Quote: *"If you don't have a seat at the table, you're probably on the menu."* -Elizabeth Warren

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Hidden Landmines By Jaqui Duvall, MA

I have been married and divorced twice in my life. After my second failed marriage I chose to remain unmarried while continuing to try to find "the one." I became what is referred to as a *serial monogamist*. Which means, I date only one person, but that one person has changed many times through the years. I have spent an extraordinary amount of time in my life trying to understand the key to finding the right person and how to make that relationship last.

I have often concluded at the end of a relationship that while I was willing to examine myself and my baggage to understand my failure in the relationship, I was never with someone who was also willing to do the same. This willingness to self-examine and modify I believed was the key to finding and sustaining a successful relationship.

Harville Hendrix has the same viewpoint as I and has written multiple books on the subject; *Keeping the Love You Find*, *Getting the Love You Want*, *Making Marriage Simple*, *Receiving Love*, *The Happy Couples Secret*.

The challenge as I see it, having analyzed the subject to death, of course, is that always and forever, we are viewing people and the world through the filter of our unconscious emotional programming. No matter what you have learned about yourself and the world, you can't use simple intellect to effect change. You are always making choices from your unconscious emotional programming, what Hendrix refers to as "the *hidden landmines* we bring to our partnerships."

In his book, *Keeping the Love You Find*, Hendrix breaks down the developmental phases each child goes through in their growth, discussing what they needed to experience in each phase and what happens when they don't experience what they needed.

When reviewing this material, it quickly becomes apparent that most people did not get all of their needs met at some point in their development. According to Hendrix, they will continue to pursue that need in the subsequent phases of development and if still not met, will pursue it through their lives in their relationships.

Interestingly, the challenge becomes: When we reach adulthood, we can no longer look to our parents to fill our developmental needs, even if they are suddenly inclined to give. Perhaps this is part of the human dilemma (the challenges we all face because we are human.) We tend to then go out into the world of adults looking for another adult to fill our unmet need(s). Given the high percentage of adults whose original developmental needs weren't met that means there are millions of adults seeking fulfillment from other adults doing the same thing. Kinda sounds like a recipe for disaster. Or, being set up for failure. Because it is really hard to meet the needs of another person when your own were left unfulfilled. Now we have a bunch of incomplete adults out in the world trying to complete themselves through others. And we wonder why there are so many divorces, over 1 million every year in the US alone. The current percentage of single people is 45.2%.

Self-Examination Back to my original point: "This willingness to self-examine and modify I believed was the key to finding and sustaining a successful relationship" again, is a human dilemma. Here is the challenge: The coping strategies employed by many people who have unmet needs left over from childhood are often the same behaviors that block a person from self-examination.

Self-examination is hard for people who built walls of self-protection around themselves, which often include cutting themselves off from their emotions, needs and feelings. Overcoming this requires some potentially painful work.

In my experience, I realized that I didn't want to wait around for another person who was willing to do the work. Doing the work for ourselves and the enhancement of our own lives is what can lead to the possibility of finding another person who is also willing to do the work.

The work involves uncovering our unconscious emotional programming and negative core beliefs. It involves learning to give to ourselves the things we needed from your parents. And it involves taking risks to change the behaviors that have been keeping us stuck.

Affirmation: I choose to accept and love myself as I am.

Quote: *"Those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it."* -Carlos Santayana

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Changing the Rules By Jaqui Duvall, MA

When we interact with people, whether it is our family, friends or work relationships, we unconsciously establish agreements about how we will treat each other and the roles we will play for each other. We also establish our levels of power. The level of power you perceive yourself to have is a direct result of your beliefs about your own worthiness and deserving.

Because of my early life experiences, I perceived myself as having little power relative to others. As a result, I established a pattern of "serving" others in my relationships. For example, I had a friend in high school who I "served" by telling her what she wanted to hear. Whenever a boy rejected her, I blamed him or the other girl he ran off with. I pumped up her self-esteem, told her she was right and didn't set boundaries even when I didn't feel like doing what she wanted to do.

Eventually I started to feel resentful. As part of my lifelong efforts to heal and grow, I started to *change the rules*. My high school friend didn't react well to this. Why would she? She had a good thing going. She became more demanding, clingier, more reactive, all in an effort to get me to revert back to my original behavior.

When we change the rules in a relationship, people tend to feel threatened. They can't count on getting from you what they are used to getting. They feel abandoned when you start setting boundaries and they suddenly feel *powerless* because you have literally taken back your power. Another example of this comes from the movie, "Something Borrowed."

Darcy, played by Kate Hudson is a loud, brash, self-centered person. Her best friend, Rachel, played by Ginnifer Goodwin is a total doormat. She defers to Darcy, serves Darcy, even going so far as giving up the man she is interested in. Later, Darcy calls, demanding Rachel's attention and presence with her wedding plans. Rachel, who has had enough, simply say's "No" and hangs up. Darcy is in total shock because it was the first time Rachel had ever set a boundary.

Setting Boundaries

I share a home with 3 other women. A new roommate who moved in only a couple months ago was moving out because of family health issues. Initially, she said she was moving immediately and I believed her, however every time I heard from her, the move-out date changed along with the promise to pay her final month's rent. Along with each contact, there were lengthy and dramatic explanations, hysteria and even threats when I didn't go along with her plans. Within a week, she had partially moved out leaving a room full of furniture and rent unpaid.

I needed to set a boundary and I knew I needed to be forceful in my response. I researched the legalities so that I could be accurate and clear with her about the law. I drafted a letter stating that she was in violation of our agreement, that she was behaving unlawfully and spelled out her options.

After all her broken promises and over-reactions, she reacted as if *I* was going too far. This is not a person who has been in my life for very long, and yet was behaving as if all the power was hers, to pay rent whenever she felt like it, leave her things behind with free storage. The letter helped to right a ship that had rocked too far in her direction.

You may have heard this saying: We teach people how to treat us. Learning to set effective boundaries is as much about learning to love and value ourselves as it is about what we actually say. Seems like it always comes down to that.

Affirmation: I act in my own best interest by setting healthy boundaries.

Quote: "When people show you who they are, believe them, the first time." -Maya Angelou

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Red Flags By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Have you ever made a decision that eventually blew up in your face and then looked back and realized you would have made a different decision had you paid attention to the *red flags*? Whether you refer to it as Red Flags, intuition or that still, small voice, the truth is each of us has an internal communication system that receives information from our senses and more. That something more is often undefined, but many believe it comes from our connection to our higher self, the universe or the collective unconscious. Whatever you call it or believe about it, that communication source provides input to our lives and has a really good track record.

I can look back on my life and say without a doubt; every time I have ignored red flags it has backfired. I have spent some time trying to understand this...because wouldn't you want to access a source of information that has your best interest at heart and is always right? If that is what comes from listening to intuition, why don't we do it all the time?

There are a few reasons I have identified:

- We think we know better
- We make something else a higher priority, like money or politeness
- We drown out the voice with louder voices

Intuition is like a personal security system that is always on and ever vigilant, surveying not only danger but everything else as well.

Messages we receive from intuition include: Suspicion, hesitation/doubt, nagging thoughts, synchronicity, hunches, gut feelings, sense of danger, physical changes, direction

Intuition is not only about danger; it can be used for discernment as well. Discernment is about a sense of direction for making decisions. This is really powerful stuff. The kind of stuff people consult with a psychic or an astrologer for, that sense of purpose and destiny.

Setting Boundaries The definition of discernment is "To judge well." To me, discernment is about connection, connection with inner self and higher self. It's about managing our inner world and in particular making sense of the information we have to make the best decision possible.

Many times in the past, I would recognize a moment when I was seeing red flags but didn't take the time to drill down and figure out what they meant.

I have been renting rooms out and sharing space with other people for a very long time. I recently had a really bad experience with a person. I am really clear that I am partially responsible for the issue because I had plenty of red flags indicating to me that the person was not a good fit for my home and I ignored them.

After that experience, I am understandably gun-shy about bringing another person in to my home. I considered NOT doing so at all and letting my daughter use the room and take back my office, which my daughter has been occupying since the last boomerang.

It occurred to me that in taking back my office, I would potentially be opening up space in my life for the work I have largely abandoned. While I have continued to write this newsletter and take the occasional client, I have been working full time between two jobs so it has been a little challenging to do much else. However, I have felt called to expand my personal business again. Taking back my office felt like a call. I started realizing though that setting up an office at this particular time, doesn't mean it will be filled with people. Shelter-in-place is still in effect. Coaching is being done through Zoom or other on-line forums. Creating the space doesn't mean that I suddenly have the motivation, the time and the inclination to do the work.

I decided that perhaps making room was more of a metaphor for the idea of making space in my heart and mind to do the work I feel called to do in this lifetime. With that in mind, I look around and consider, how can I make my current set up more conducive to the work? What do I need to do to create a new pattern, a new habit? The whole idea of focusing on understanding intuition and discernment is to identify the actions that it is leading us to. This is the stuff that coaching is all about.

Affirmation: "The voice of spirit speaks within me
because I am listening."

Quote: "When something feels off, it is." -Abraham
Hicks

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Eat a Toad for Breakfast By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Consider how many tasks you have on your "To-do" list whether or not you write them down. Some of those things have likely been there for a very long time. Chances are there are some minor items like: Sew on a button, clean out the birdfeeder or tighten a screw. You may also have some more significant items on that list, such as: Research Graduate schools, make an appointment to see a doctor, lose ? lbs., write a book.

There are a lot of reasons we don't do these things, or at least put them off. Interestingly, we have a fear mechanism in the brain that is engaged whenever we attempt to make changes in our lives. Think New Year's Resolutions starting out with enthusiasm and intention and then reverting back to old behaviors within a few days. That fear mechanism employs self-sabotaging behavior when it gets engaged that makes it really challenging when we want to make changes even when we view them as being for our good, like exercise, following a healthy eating plan, and meditation.

"Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day."

This quote from Mark Twain inspired others to consider the benefits that can come by doing what you least want to do first. After that, everything else seems easy. This is a principle used in coaching which I utilize when faced with something I really want to do or believe I need to do and can't seem to get myself to do.

To this point during Shelter-in-Place, I have been working full-time outside my home. While I know many people have cabin fever and want to be out and about, I have been craving time at home. Over the next two weeks, I'm *staycationing*. This is the perfect time to experiment by *"Eating a Toad for Breakfast."*

The activities that count as "Eating a Toad," are the things you otherwise would put off. Maybe they're not fun. Maybe they're connected to a vision for moving in a different direction in your life. Maybe it's something related to your health like exercise or losing weight. I have several activities that I want to accomplish in the next two weeks. More than anything I want to feel productive. So the experiment is: I don't allow myself to play or do the fun things until I have spent some time doing the Toad tasks.

Kaizen is a Japanese term, which means *improvement*. It was first employed by western consultants and Japanese manufacturing companies after WWII in an effort to rebuild the Japanese economy. The power of Kaizen is that it focuses on small, incremental changes. Eventually, these changes accumulate to produce positive, measurable change.

The concept of Kaizen has been adapted to the Coaching field because when it is used for personal change it also results in supporting the changes we really want to make but can't because of fear. Robert Maurer, Ph.D. who wrote a book about it called "One Small Step, the Kaizen Way," says, "All changes, even positive ones, are scary. Attempts to reach goals through radical or revolutionary means often fail because they heighten fear. But the small steps of Kaizen disarm the brain's fear response, stimulating rational thought and creative play."

When you make a small, incremental change it bypasses the fear mechanism in your brain. When you continue to work these small changes you start to make progress and pretty soon you see results and suddenly you've completed this task, which had eluded you up to this point.

I am, without a doubt a person who is largely driven by getting things done. There is a great sense of accomplishment for me when that happens. Rather than just having a list of things I never get to that weighs on me, nags at me, drains my energy, I like the thrill of checking off a completed task. Coaching is all about doing the things you really want to do while working to overcome the obstacles that prevent that from happening.

Here's how it works: Identify the activity you want or need to accomplish. Figure out what the first step would be. Ask yourself what needs to happen even before that. Start with the smallest step that moves you forward with that task. You don't have to spend hours, but at least a bit of time each day...Then identify what your reward will be. Maybe it's watching TV or going onto Social Media. I recommend staying away from eating rewards for obvious reasons.

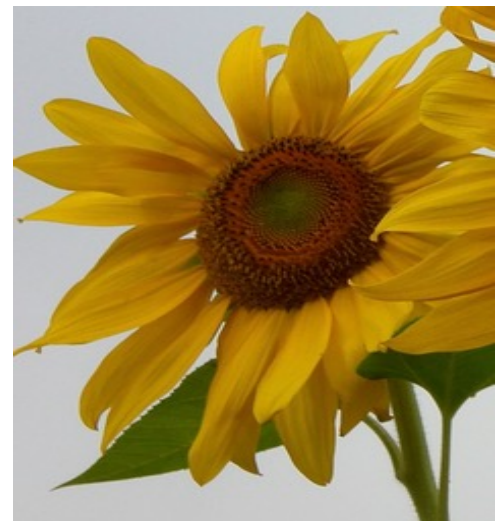
Doing an experiment like this helps to create movement and momentum. Do it long enough and it creates a new habit. When I employ this principle I get to reap the bigger rewards in my life by accomplishing the things that matter to me...because ultimately, my goal is to fulfill my purpose in life.

Affirmation: "I am productive, energized and inspired."

Quote: "Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day." - Mark Twain

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Self-Management By Jaqui Duvall, MA

In April 2020, I wrote an article about [Powerlessness](#). It was early in the Shelter-in-Place experience and I was trying to make sense of what I was experiencing and observing of other's experience. Little did we know, 6+ months later that this would last so long and not only that but could possibly continue on for some time to come...It has become the new norm for the foreseeable future.

This year has been challenging for many if not all...depending on your unique circumstances and how you cope with them. I have had my share of challenges:

- A roommate who skipped out on rent threatening ungrounded legal action amidst a series of verbally abusive phone calls.
- Working as an "essential worker" for healthcare during the entire COVID19 Shelter-in-Place experience
- An aggressive and bullying boss
- The California fires
- Paying higher Taxes
- A very stressful election
- Relationship turmoil
- Health issues
- Aging

While I haven't taken a poll, I'm going to guess that many people have had it way worse than I. The question becomes, how to cope under extreme circumstances? The answer: *Self-Management!*

The opposite of self-management is reactive, disabling distress, panic attacks, intrusive thoughts, being easily enraged or aggressive and allowing our inner world to be dictated by what is happening outside us. We might behave by being emotionally volatile, projecting our stuff onto and blaming others for our troubles. Ultimately, allowing our reaction to circumstances to interfere with our normal functioning in life.

The definition of Self-Management is management of or by oneself; the taking of responsibility for one's own behavior and well being. To me, this means we focus on our own part of the equation of every experience, which is, of course, the only thing we have any control over. And direct our efforts to taking care of ourselves. As I see it, to successfully self-manage requires emotional maturity and tools for self-care.

Strategies When there are so many things going on around me over which I have no control, turning my attention to what is in front of me to do is really helpful. Since I can't change or even effect what is going on *out there*, I ask myself, what can I do right here? When I look around my house, there are plenty of "projects/tasks" to keep me busy. For example: Yesterday I cleared out the gutters on my house. Today, I'm doing laundry.

Emotional maturity is all about *how* I deal with things. While I know I haven't mastered this at this point in my life, it continues to be something I strive for. To achieve emotional maturity, for me means that I have to give myself time and space to process what is happening around me. It doesn't mean that I don't have emotional reactions; it means that I use tools to make sense of it all. The most helpful tools to do that are talking to another person who is well versed in listening skills and journaling. Both of which are all about sorting things out.

Here are some self-care strategies that are also helpful: Calming, positive self-talk, making a plan and taking action

Calming, for most people starts with taking deep abdominal breaths. It is often the first thing on many stress management lists because to make better decisions, we have to engage the rational mind which is basically unavailable when we are in the Stress System of the body. It's easy to do and you really don't need special training to learn how, just start doing it.

Positive Self-Talk involves changing the way I talk to myself. Common to most human beings is the negative and self-critical voice we carry around with us in our heads, which is constantly commenting on everything we do and say. I have worked long and hard to modify this for myself. I have learned that if I don't intentionally change this voice, I am condemning myself to live with the default I developed from childhood. No, thank you. I now choose to be gentle with myself and reframe my thinking to a foundation of gratitude. It takes work.

Making a plan is just what it sounds like. If I don't change the way I'm doing things, then guess what? Nothing changes. So, taking some time to consider what I want to do and be in the world and making a plan that reflects my intention.

Taking action is, of course where the rubber hits the road. Sometimes, I find I have to start very small with incremental changes and work my way up to a reasonable momentum.

Affirmation: I choose to be the person my dog thinks I am.

Quote: *"In the midst of every difficulty, lies opportunity."*
-Albert Einstein

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Positional vs. Personal Power By Jaqui Duvall, MA

Over thirty years ago when I first got involved in teaching Assertiveness, I worked for one of the first entrepreneurial companies in Silicon Valley. It was exciting times when companies were allowing people freedom to do their jobs in a way that worked for them, allowing people to show up for work in their own choice of clothes, having beer busts on Fridays and providing on-site services for employees like a Rec Center. The spirit and heart of the company was based on innovation and creativity. Maybe it was luck or maybe it was Kismet, but I count myself as fortunate to have been part of that company at that particular time and to have experienced the growth and expansion it inspired.

I was there in a moment when leadership and developing people was highly valued. I was on a team whose mission it was to provide tools for employees to communicate better so that they could more clearly convey their ideas. But more than that, there were values that that company held that were instilled in me. I can see the influence that had on me now. My views about Assertiveness and communication were largely formed by those early experiences. As a result, I put a lot of stock in leading with heart rather than relying on positional authority.

So, it makes sense that when I encounter a person in my life today who is not only using positional power, but also abusing it, that it would get my attention.

Positional power is authority granted by an outside entity, an organization whether that be government or private, where the authority is part of a ranking system, e.g. manager vs. employee. The authority granted is based on the rules established by the bestowing organization.

Personal power is something that emerges from within a person based on their characteristics. In particular, their credibility, integrity, and emotional maturity. Personal power is inspired and passionate.

Personal Power leaders know that how they interact with their people is most important. They typically listen carefully and are able to read between the lines. People trust them because they do what they say they're going to do and what they choose to do is the right thing for the people involved. While they have their eye on the mission, they are aware that people make the work happen. Their time and investment is in the people.

When you work for a person who abuses positional power, fear of reprisal is often rampant. People don't feel safe to express how they truly feel for fear of retribution. There have been disastrous results linked back to people not speaking up out of fear.

For example: "A woman checked into the hospital to have a tonsillectomy, and the surgical team erroneously removed a portion of her foot." How did this happen? In part, because no less than seven people wondered why the surgeon was working on the foot, but said and did nothing.

In my work, teaching Workplace Violence Prevention, the subject of co-workers challenged by Supervisors abusing their authority comes up frequently. Yelling at people, using excessive control tactics and micro managing. While they have plenty of reason to speak up, people are afraid because they work 40 hours a week with that person and they know from experience that the Supervisor is likely to retaliate.

When you have an issue with a person who utilizes personal power, it's typically pretty easy to resolve because they are approachable. They listen well and take action based on the best interests of the people involved in the situation.

An example of abuse of positional power: The Supervisor's approach to managing is to expect compliance without question even when she is managing people with vastly more experience than she. She favors people who don't push back on her or think for themselves. When brought to her attention, she doesn't do her homework to understand the complexities of the situation. She is so focused on the mission of the work, that she completely dismisses the person, just doesn't really care. She is so entrenched in her belief that she is right in her approach that she doesn't respond to coaching from her own manager to modify behavior that is in clear violation of the company's policies. Options:

- Utilize the programs offered through the organization to protect you from abuse. In doing so you need to be prepared to deal with conflict and stress while the issue is being addressed. It could go on for a while. You will need to take into account, the seriousness of the offense, where you are in your career and your assessment of the support you may receive.
- Take classes to improve your assertiveness, listening, stress management and calming skills.
- Get support from your Employee Assistance Program, which offers confidential counseling.
- Consider moving to another job within the organization, if possible.

Affirmation: I choose to be the person my dog thinks I am.

Quote: *"In the midst of every difficulty, lies opportunity."* -

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