

Of Interest

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Turn Your Stumbling Blocks into Stepping Stones

By Liz Ashe

I first heard singer-songwriter Jana Stanfield when she was just starting her career. Written to give people a “faith-lift,” Jana’s songs speak to “life issues.” But I felt she was singing directly to me as she sang; “*I’m Turning my Stumbling Blocks into Stepping Stones. I’m turning my Possibles into Probables... I’m turning my Somedays into Someday Soon ..I’m turning my Problems into Challenges.*”

At the time I was struggling with the desire to change an 18-year Clinical Microbiology career. Call it fear, lack of self-confidence or inability to risk, but every time I tried to “step out” I tripped over countless “stumbling blocks.” Mentally I had erected too many road blocks that held me back.

It is amazing how our mind can drum up so many “CAN’TS” or manufacture an endless array of excuses that immobilize us and create “Possibility Paralysis.” Surely you can finish this common jingle;

One for the Money...

Two for the Show...

Three to Get Ready... and _____

Did you say Four to Go? That is the rest of the jingle, but in life many of us never get past the three to get ready.

*I want to lose weight but have to wait until after the holidays -
Three to get ready...*

*I want to start my own business but don’t have the money -
Three to get ready....*

I want to change careers, but I might fail -Three to get ready.

I was a master at “Three to get Ready” and Can’ts and If Onlys and had an ever-growing number of reasons I couldn’t go back to college and change careers. It took me two years just to pick up the Graduate Degree catalog at the University and another year to sign up for my first course. One of my stumbling blocks was as silly as I didn’t know what to wear as an adult student on campus. Tired of listening to me, a friend cared enough to say, “Liz, wishing and hoping won’t get you what you want. You will never know unless you try. I’m tired of your self-pity. Step out of your comfort zone or stay where you are and quit whining.” I liken her words to a book, Even Eagles Need a Push, (McNally, David) and I’m thankful she gave me mine. It led me to Four for the Show.

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When Stumbling Blocks Get in Your Way Consider the Following:

Thomas Edison tried 2,000 experiments before getting the first incandescent light bulb to work.

Abraham Lincoln failed in business, had a nervous breakdown and was defeated in 8 elections.

Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone was told it is an “interesting but useless gadget.”

Turned down by MGM, **Marilyn Monroe** was told to learn secretarial work or get married.

John Grisham’s first book was rejected 28 times.

Elvis Presley after one show at the Grand Ole Opry was told, “You ain’t getting nowhere son.”

After his first screen test, **Fred Astaire’s** MGM testing director said “Can’t act, can dance a little.”

Lucille Ball was dismissed from drama school with a note saying she was wasting her time and was too shy to put her best foot forward.”

Famous football coach **Vince Lombardi** had said of him, “He possesses minimal football knowledge and lacks motivation.”

Michael Jordan was cut from his High School basketball team.

Louisa May Alcott, author of Little Women was advised by her family to find work as a servant or seamstress.

Beethoven’s music teacher called him hopeless as a composer.

Walt Disney was fired by a newspaper for lacking ideas. He also went bankrupt several times before he built Disneyland.

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Four for the Show – With help from EAP and career counselors I finally did change careers. Kurt Lewin's Forced Field Analysis helped me a lot. It is a useful technique for looking at all the forces for and against a decision. In effect, it is a specialized method of weighing pros and cons. By carrying out the analysis you can plan to strengthen the forces supporting a decision, and reduce the impact of opposition to it.

Simplified, it works like this: Take a sheet of paper and divide it into two columns. Label one, **Stumbling Blocks** (things holding me back) and the other **Stepping Stones** (things driving me to action). Then fill up each column with as many things that come to mind. This may take several days. For me, the Stumbling Block list was a lot longer and showed me that the only way I could move to action was to reduce the items on the Stumbling Block list and increase or put more weight on the items in the Stepping Stone list. This isn't a quick or easy process.

Once you remove or break down your Stumbling Blocks it is easier to focus on your **Stepping Stones**. The list can be used as a goal setting guide. Big stones can be broken into smaller more doable pieces. I shared this with a woman who wanted to open her own catering business. Once she dealt with her blocks, she started with little goals while she was still employed. Her stones were: read everything I can find on catering, experiment with recipes, talk with chefs and caterers in non-competing localities, take a class for small business, decide on a name for the business, design a logo and sign, start buying kitchen necessities one by one, scout out rental properties, look into licensing and insurance, volunteer my services to local groups, and SAVE. In less than five years, she was ready to take the plunge part-time and then by five years, she was able to give up her job and cater full-time. She told me this, "I would still be wishing for something that seemed unattainable if I hadn't faced my roadblocks and realized my possibilities." She turned her "Stumbling Blocks into Stepping Stones."

You can too. It may not be easy and you may get impatient, have setbacks and feel pain if things don't work out as planned. You may have to face real fears and even resistance by others around you. You may get discouraged. **Please know this: If you want something badly enough, it is worth going after.** No matter what happens, congratulate yourself for having the courage to try!!!!

"Behold the Turtle, he only makes progress when he sticks his head out." (James Bryant Conant)

"You are never given a dream without also being given the power to make it true... You may have to work for it, however."

Richard Bach, author of the book Jonathan Livingston Seagull

Dr. Suess' book, *Oh The Places You'll Go* is a marvelous motivating book. He talks about people just waiting.

*"Waiting for the train to go
or a bus to come, or a plane to go
or the mail to come, or the rain to go
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow
or waiting around for a YES or NO...
Everyone is just waiting"*

Dr. Suess goes on to say, "No that's not for you! Somehow you'll escape" and then describes the ups and downs of life while encouraging us to find the success that lies within us.

The book ends with:

"Will you succeed? Yes you will indeed! (98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)"

Other Books of Interest

Feel the Fear and Do it Anyway (Susan Jeffers)
Pulling Your Own Strings (Dr Wayne Dyer)

EAP CAN HELP WITH YOUR BLOCKS

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