

Names used in this column are changed to honor client confidentiality.

That Stuck Feeling

The feeling of being stuck—that sense of impatience accompanying a stalled or trapped existence—is a necessary discomfort. It spurs us toward change and forces us to grow, sometimes against our will.

Michael Meade, author of *The Water of Life*, says, “Stuckness happens when change needs to happen.” He emphasizes that “we need to feel stuckness before we hear the question: Are we going to the place that our soul intends to get to?” But we can’t even see the need for change, he continues, if “we’re not ready for it or are afraid of it.” But once we feel stuck or trapped—that’s the sign that we’re ready for what comes next.

Amy is one of those people who feels stuck but is afraid of change. At one time, she loved where she worked. She was excited and enthusiastic about being there. But over time that zeal has fallen sharply. She’s hit a wall. Her skills and talents have taken her as far as she can go in her workplace.

In our counseling session, Amy was downcast and forlorn as she talked about her predicament. “I know I need to move on,” she said. “But I’m scared to leave.” The thought of uprooting has paralyzed her.

Perhaps science can ease our misgivings about change. “Chaos theory” teaches us that change arises from disequilibrium, not balance.

Systems fall apart in order to reorganize, writes Margaret Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science*. Instead of signaling trouble, fluctuations and disruptions to the established order can signal healthy change. Wheatley says, “Disorder becomes a critical player—an ally that can provoke a system to self-organize into a new way of being.”

A system is a cluster of interconnected parts that form a unified whole, such as the human body, a culture, a family, a pond or a corporation.

When a new baby arrives, a family system is disrupted, paving the way for reorganization. Corporations are occasionally challenged to adjust to a declining market, setting in motion a restructuring process. A country’s unemployment rate activates the need for creative solutions.

On the personal level, our comfort zone of familiarity is disrupted when we sign up for a class for the first time, change career paths, watch our last child leave home, stop smoking, lose a loved one, alter how we eat, get laid off. The chaos that accompanies these events is the spawning ground for change.

Amy’s discontent—being distraught and dissatisfied with the status quo—is likely the language of her soul crying out for change. For some people that outcry may signal a need for changing one’s perception about a problem, or speaking up instead of remaining silent.

But this isn’t the case with Amy. Change for her entails seeking a job that corresponds with her skills and talents. She must realize that any transition requires letting go of the known and venturing into the unknown. This isn’t easy to do because we human beings nest ourselves in the security of the familiar. The opposite—the unknown—is unsettling so we don’t go there with

much poise and serenity. But the human spirit is defined by a sense of adventure that overcomes such fears, and it's that "can-do" attitude that has been the driving force behind every major advancement throughout our history.

Helen Keller encapsulated that concept in a single line when she said: "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing."

We live in the midst of disorienting times. Change is all around us. We can either hunker down in trepidation, or ride the wave to new possibilities. Invariably, upheaval and change are partnered up in the dance we refer to as the evolving process. When facets of our life no longer fit—career, routines, roles, relationships—we would be wise to let the stuckness take us to the peaceful place within where we can listen to our soul's intent.

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