

Taking Control of Your Life in 2012

By Lynette M. Loomis

Step over those pre-conceived notions about yourself and dig into life with both hands

We often look for quick fixes, potions and pills to make us happy or content. In truth, our level of contentment with our life is a conscious choice, a purposeful decision, our responsibility. How we deal with a disappointment in a relationship, an economic downturn or a dream not realized is a matter of choice. We can feel like a victim and let it dictate our sense of self and our future or we can decide to be in control of our reaction and choose our own path forward.

So for 2012, let's make a resolution to practice some new ways of thinking about and reacting to the events in our life and regain control. We will practice them until they become habits. And when we falter and return to familiar, albeit ineffective, patterns, we won't despair. We'll say "Next time I will..."

Re-Phrase Our Inner Messages

We will eliminate the phrases "If only..." and "I just wish that..." from our vocabulary. "If only" is a trap that weighs us down and makes us feel ineffective and powerless. It is the sense that a child has that someone else has to make it all better. "I just wish that..." creates a helpless frame of mind that really says "I want it to be my way without me having to do anything." So this year, we will take charge. We will do everything we can to be creative and resourceful to fix a situation directly. We will rephrase our self-talk to be positive. "If I do this, then I can..." Failing that, we will change our view of the situation.

Shifting How We Choose to View Our World

This brings us to one of the most important keys to our satisfaction with life — how we view our world. Each of us is the product of everything we have experienced in our life. We likely hold onto some beliefs that hold us back from being the best person we can be. We unconsciously harbor negative self-talk "I could never do this..." or "I will never be good enough for..." and "If I fail I will die." Our negative self-talk stops us in our tracks and convinces us not to even try. If we don't try, we cannot possibly succeed. In 2012, we will identify our negative inner messages that stem from childhood, carried us through gawky adolescence, or moved us through a failed relationships or financial turnaround. We will replace those messages with realistic, positive phrases that will inspire us to move ahead with confidence and optimism.

Accepting and Adapting to Change with Optimism and Grace

Generally, we are creatures of habit and find comfort in routine. But change is inevitable. Sometimes the world around us shifts and thrusts us into an unwelcome place such as the loss of a family member or close friend, elimi-



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nation of a job, or a change in health status. We go through predictable, and painful, stages of grieving and most of us come out the other side eventually, saddened but whole. We can't plan for the loss of a relationship we cherish. We can do everything we can to remain healthy. And we can plan for a change in our employment status by keeping abreast of trends in our field, anticipating what could happen, figuring out how we will react to possible changes, maintaining our networking, and living below our means and setting money aside "just in case."

Another type of change involves us changing the way we think or behave. We often fear that if we change we won't be successful or we might fail. (If Thomas Edison let that hold him back we would be probably reading this by candlelight.) We might be concerned that if we change, our friends and family won't accept our changed behavior and we will be lonely. Or perhaps we fear the loss of control when we step outside of our familiar patterns. Yes, we might need to add some new friends who share our new views or aspirations. And some of our greatest life lessons and insights come from our failures. When I pass, I don't want one of my last thoughts to be "I had all of these opportunities in front of me and I wasted every one of them." In our own way, let us be able to say "I went for it."

Healing Ourselves by Forgiving Others

And in 2012, we will tackle one of the hardest things to do — forgive. Forgiving someone for hurting you is not to suggest you approve of or condone what they did. (In this article we are not taking about crimes against you but those inevitable hurts and disappointments that accompany family or

work life or friendship.) Forgiving does not mean forgetting.

We mistakenly believe that if we harbor anger we can make another person feel guilty. We might snub them or be curt in our conversations. (Mind you, a goodly portion what we let hurt our feelings is unmemorable to the other person.) But holding onto a hurt is emotionally exhausting for us — it hurts us more than it hurts our offender! Holding onto a hurt forever can prevent us from moving ahead, being open to new experiences, or trusting again. It negatively impacts our physical and emotional health. It can isolate us from the world. (Bitter people are not particularly engaging conversationalists.) It lets us feel like a victim, all the time.

Mahatma Gandhi has been quoted as saying "The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." Forgiveness is not about the offender. It's about us. It's about letting go of something that eats away at us. Forgiving allows us to take back control and regain our personal power. It doesn't mean we have to invite a person back into our life or trust them the way we once did. It does mean allowing ourselves to move on.

How do we forgive? Compassion. Consider what circumstances, life experience, insecurities or carelessness that may have led a person to offend or betray you. Forgiveness requires that we look at the situation more broadly and with greater imagination and empathy. It is not easy, but it is possible.

In 2012, let's think of a grudge we may have been holding on to, or some anger or resentment we have been harboring, and just let it go. Yes, simply let it go. Let us each free up a negative thought and replace it with greater inner peace. The surge of energy we will experience will be remarkable.