

Rebooting your Life: Starting Over and Saving Changes

Have you recently been through a divorce or other life-changing event? Life's detours can seem debilitating, but we each have a chance to start over and choose a better path. This article relates how change is not always graceful, but it can lead to amazing rewards.

I swore I'd never join Facebook or MySpace or any of those social networking sites, but a couple of weeks ago I ate my words and logged on. Call me crazy.

I must say, I'm breathless after a solid week of cyberspace reunions with former (notice I didn't say "old") classmates and friends from around the country. It was pretty entertaining how we tried to catch up on twenty plus years through one-liners on a blog. I'm not known for brevity, so it was a serious exercise in summarization for me.

I finally distilled my life down to something like this: Married; traveled a lot for work; divorced; stopped traveling; moved closer to family; recently remarried.

I was not the only one who felt the need to explain the fact that I was no longer with the guy I was with back when we were all still hanging out together. A few of my high school buddies are lucky enough to still be attached to spouse #1, but many of us have been through a few life experiences between point A and point B that led us in a different direction. We display one or two war scars alongside our laugh lines. That's okay. That's life.

We tend to proudly display those scars now and talk about what we've learned over the years (notice I didn't say how we've "matured"). It's not so hard to talk about past mistakes after the wound has healed over. But what if it's still bleeding?

I remember the year of my divorce quite vividly and there was nothing proud or confident about it. It reminded me a lot of the Silly Silo. Remember that amusement park ride? It always made me queasy. The world went spinning on at what seemed like an absurdly fast pace, and then the floor was yanked out from underneath me. I was not used to being an entity in myself. I was used to being part of a team. I was used to feeling anchored. It scared me to realize I was alone.

A running monologue of questions surfaced after my divorce. What do I do now? Who am I? What should I eat for dinner? (Uh-oh, I don't cook.) Who delivers? What's my favorite color? What is my favorite kind of music? How late do I want to stay up? If I were to buy a sofa—without consulting anyone else—what would it look like?

For me, divorce was like rebooting my computer. I closed everything down for a few seconds, counted to one hundred, and then opened it all back up again and took a fresh look. I went through a sort of grieving process, and it was followed by a rediscovery process, and then I saved a copy everything I learned so I would avoid repeating mistakes of the past.

Here are some things I learned when I rebooted:

Crying is cleansing. I'll admit it. I cried a LOT. I cry easily anyway, and this major life experience was no exception. Crying usually embarrasses me, and I try to hold back the tears only to end up with choking sobs that make everyone around me wonder if they should comfort me or call 911.

A very wise friend of mine finally said, "What are you doing?" as she stared at me with about as much interest as one watches a bag of popcorn in the microwave. She heaved an exasperated sigh. "LET IT OUT. You're going to get an ulcer."

I took her advice. I let it all out. The tears didn't last very long—just long enough to wash away the grime of guilt and remorse so I could start over. They cleaned the wound so I could begin to heal.

Can I Google myself? The grieving ended and I was left with, well, me. The only problem was I wasn't entirely sure who "me" was. In a moment of panic I Googled myself to find out if anyone else knew. What came up was a series of reviews from musicals I had performed in across the country. Well, THAT was no help. None of those people were really me. Those women were hiding under layers of make up, false eyelashes, and brightly colored costumes.

Who was I? I had to spend a little time with myself to get to the bottom of the mystery. So I scheduled a few dates with me. On these dates I asked myself questions in a detached sort of way, as if I was a reporter getting the facts. Then I really searched my intuition before supplying an automatic answer. I was shocked by my replies.

I discovered that I like quiet time. I turned off the TV that had been a constant companion after I moved into my own place. I played the piano instead, and then . . . I just sat there and looked around. I even shut my eyes. It was nice. Was this meditation? It lasted a total of 7.5 seconds the first time, but it was nice.

Every day became a new discovery. What should I do today? Hey, I've never walked through the art galleries on Main Street. Let's give that a whirl! It was a selfish time, but it was wonderful. I got to indulge every childish whim. I went to The Cheesecake Factory three days in a row after work just to pick up my favorite dessert. I went running at 10:30 at night—because I felt like it. I found that I liked being in shape. Who knew? It was good, and it cancelled out the cheesecake.

Go outside to discover what's on the inside. The next stage of my healing was probably the most important. I learned from the examples of a few close friends that I needed to get outside of my own problems in order to heal inside. I needed to do something for someone else. They talked me into joining a few different volunteer groups, and the world blossomed around me.

I think our main purpose in life is to reach out to each other. I say that because the change in my life was profound when I actively pursued volunteerism. It felt right. I needed to stop being selfish and start lending a hand. When I went outside of myself, I became much more comfortable with my insides.

Jump back in the pool. The final stage of healing was the big plunge. I knew it was time to throw myself back into the pool and start dating again. I still held onto a crazy, innocent hope that I would find true love. That water looked cold, though. As I stared at the deep, blue waters, I remembered that love is a precious gift, and I deserved to give myself a chance to go looking for it again.

I jumped back in head first. No—it probably looked more like a belly flop. I was awkward, and I felt silly, but I was in there participating. That was the important thing. I'd like to say that my first fishing expedition yielded abundant results, but that wouldn't be the truth. I was in the pool long enough to get pretty pruny. But I did find love again, and my life is infinitely better today because I get to share it with Eric.

We all get do-overs. I discovered in the rebooting process after my divorce that I am allowed to go back to the starting line and give it another shot. Thank goodness for do-overs. We can start over anytime we want, whether it's rebooting after divorce, recovering from surgery, starting a new business, moving to a new town, or whatever new path we decide to take.

Every new day is an adventure. I've learned to admit when I need to change and take action. It doesn't mean I lost the game. I am allowed to follow that little voice in my head that says, "It's got to be better than this."

I highly recommend rebooting! (Just remember to save your changes.)

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