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**Getting Out of the Rut... Initiating and Managing Change**

**By Edward B. Toupin**

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Have you ever accomplished something, then wondered where to go next? Or, perhaps you've accomplished something and just continued down that same path because it worked. Many people become stuck in this way because of the "security of sameness." You can get stuck from problems as well as triumphs.

I have to say that my life has been a most interesting set of twists and turns, but I've always had the opportunity to maintain a little bit of control. The control I kept, however, was not over my environment or my direction, but on me and how I handled or initiated change.

You realize when you get stuck and that you devise a plan to move forward—it all depends on how you manage and initiate your own change.

---- Planning Out Your Life ----

I hear so many people say that you cannot plan your life, "you just let it happen." So, what happens while you're sitting there waiting for life to happen? But, if you plan your life too rigidly, what experiences will you miss out on?

You really can't plan your life right up to the end, nor can you plan it out five years and expect it to work as you expect. I know that sounds bad, but planning your life and expecting to stick to it will only limit your options and keep you in one place all the time.

Realize that, as you experience change and enjoy life, you grow. Growth spawns new ideas, feelings, and intellect that change your point of view. As your point of view changes, so do your directions and options in life. You must be willing to change your life's plan as you grow so that you can

take on more challenging things and be accepting of other new experiences.

As I write, I think of some of the things I've done in my life. I once worked for a major corporation and wanted to be in management. But, once I got there, what was next? Nothing. I didn't realize that I forgot to think about what happened next and I didn't know that once I got there----"there" was not where I wanted to be anymore.

The point is that you cannot plan your life in an absolute manner or you'll either miss out on new experiences or end up in a place you no longer want to be. You must learn to adapt and change your plan after each step of your path. As you achieve each new goal, you grow, taking you one step further.

---- Geometry of Life ----

Sameness is security for many. You wake up, go to work, go to the store, take care of the kids, change the oil in the car----what else is there? If you notice, the sameness you experience is in the form of a geometric shape----line, square, circle, rectangle, or triangle. Take note of the things you do during your day and determine the shape of the consistent paths you take.

For instance, when I worked in downtown Denver and lived south of town, my path was a straight line. I lived at the end of Broadway, 14 miles from town. I drove down Broadway to my office, which was located in a building on Broadway itself. All of my stores, friends, and family were within one block on either side of Broadway. This became so monotonous that I could drive to work in a daze and still get there safely. Sound familiar?

The easiest way to break out of this shape is to change your path from time-to-time. I'm not specifically referring to your path to and from work. I'm speaking of any path that seems to have etched itself into your existence----you create a "rut" in your virtual road from travelling the same path too often. For instance, instead of going down Broadway, I should've taken the freeway and made a square, then changed it later to some other shape.

At first, even small changes will take a lot of effort, but the one thing you'll begin to notice is that you're indirectly changing other things as well. This is what you want to do!

Once you "break out of your shape" you have to figure out what it is that you want out of life. Don't go material, go more for fulfillment as material things are only a reward for accomplishments. Also, being emotional beings, satisfying a feeling or desire is a fulfilling reward in

itself—it makes us feel whole.

---- Making a Plan ----

To help you stay out of your rut, you must make a plan that takes into account the many things you want to do in life that fulfill you. The overall plan consists of your Mission, your Vision, and your Goals. Each of these items identifies what you want, where you're going, and how to get there.

\* Defining Your Objectives

Realize that, just because you want to do something, there is a reason you want to do that thing (i.e., fulfillment, acceptance, and education.) Since you're probably not sure why you want to do these things, you might want to do a dozen or so things with each providing the same fulfillment—it leads to clutter and confusion.

To resolve this situation, write down all of the different objectives you have in your life. Make them action phrases like "writing a book" or "driving across the country." Make the list as long or as short as you like.

Once you're done, next to each item, write the specific fulfillment to be achieved next to each item. Make each word an adjective or each phrase descriptive of something tangible. For instance, "writing a book" might provide "fame and fortune" while "driving across the country" might provide "freedom." Once you've finished classifying your objectives, you'll find that most of them duplicate the fulfillment achieved and others have no reason at all. This is where a lot of people run into a problem! You have a million things to do, no time to do any of them, and your inner need is to feel the fulfillment.

To resolve this, group the items in separate lists by the fulfillment you describe and eliminate those items that have no reason. From each new list, figure out the tasks that will give you the greatest feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment. From this final list, you have your primary objectives to accomplish—all others are secondary and should not be focused upon until you've finished your primary objectives.

\* Your Mission, Vision, and Goals

Once you've figure out your primary objectives, you must now figure out how to get there. This is not an easy task and it might take a few days to cut through the fog that has settled in your mind.

The Vision is a view of things in the future—it where you see yourself. It

is the tangible item that you chase to feel the fulfillment you seek. Realize that your Vision will change many times over your life, but each redefinition gives you a clearer view of where you want to go based on your growth.

The Mission is a statement that defines what you will do to reach your Vision—the action that you perform to reach your Vision. As your Vision changes, so must your Mission because your direction will change as well.

Goals are important in that they add direction and purpose to life. They define the intermediate steps involved in accomplishing your Mission. These are selected items from your objectives that must be achieved to build the path of your Mission. As each Goal is accomplished, you are that much closer to your Vision.

---- Executing the Plan ----

Once you've defined your Goals, you can begin defining and executing your plan of action. For each Goal, you must define the steps required to reach them. For instance, one of my past Visions was to "work at home as a writer." My Mission was to do "technical writing and work in other writing

arenas to enhance my talent and my exposure." Some of my Goals to reach the initial Vision were:

- Locate three writing contracts.
- Work to generate income for six months of unemployment.
- Locate insurance.
- Quit day job.

For each Goal, I defined a set of smaller steps or actions that helped me accomplish the Goal. For instance, my plan of action for "Locate three writing contracts" was:

- Assemble my writing samples.
- Rebuild Web site to advertise my work.
- Rewrite resume to reflect direction for software documentation.
- Talk to local recruiters about opportunities.
- Visit sites for telecommuting opportunities on a weekly basis.
- ...

Obviously, you must be careful when defining your Goals and plan of action so that you perform the steps in the proper order. If you define your steps in such a way that you end up in a deadlock, then your entire plan is useless. Make sure that you organize your Goals and your plan of action

such that each step builds on the previous.

--- What's next? ---

Don't feel that this process is over after you do it the first time.

Realize that you will grow as you accomplish your Goals toward your Vision.

As you grow, your Vision will change and so must you change your Mission and Goals.

This is an iterative process that forces you to reevaluate your direction as you accomplish each Goal in your path. Not only will this reevaluation and reassessment of your direction help you stay out of the consistent geometric shapes that put you in a rut, but it will keep your life moving forward to greater fulfillment in the things that really make a difference for you.

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## **Time To Get Out Of A Rut?**

**By Joanna Wasmuth**

Is it easier for you to say "no" or "yes" to things? I was on the phone this week with a friend, about to cancel plans to go see a dance performance. I had plenty of good reasons – I'm not feeling well, I'm battling a migraine, I'm behind on work, the dishes are piling up, etc.

As I heard the words "I'm not going to make it" come out of my mouth, I realized I'd gotten into a bit of a self-protective rut where it's easier to stay home and watch a movie than go out and experience something new. I was settling for the mundane, not reaching for the exciting. And it was happening in other areas of my life too. Not in huge ways, but it was impacting the quality of my life nonetheless. I'm sure none of you have this challenge, but I do! ;-)

As I was about to hang up with my friend, I asked myself which I would remember more in two weeks - staying home and watching a movie, or going to a dance performance with several girlfriends? Thankfully, it only took me a second to realize I had to break out of my rut of doing the easier thing, and instead do the more satisfying thing!

~ Where are you journeying in an easy rut in your life? ~ How could you step out of that rut today and move towards a more satisfying, fulfilling life?

**FEATURED RESOURCE** Looking for a new hobby or way to get more enjoyment and excitement into your life? Check out this list for some fresh ideas -->

MOTIVATIONAL QUOTE ---> 'Let go of the past and go for the future. Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you've imagined.' ~ Henry David Thoreau

Joanna Wasmuth is the founder of Harmony Coaching –

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coaches and speaks to business professionals who want to fast track achieving their dreams in life and business. Her specialty is empowering professionals with chronic pain from injury or illness to make a comeback in life by reinventing and living their dreams.



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