

Five Ways To Reinvent Yourself and Create a Better Life

by Susan Armstrong

It's taken 16 years to reinvent myself, but it's been worth it. My life is more wonderful today than I could ever imagine: it's just taken a long time to get here.

Although I was a bright child, expected to accomplish great things, I learned two misguided lessons at a very early age. I learned that the greatest sin of all was to upset another human being. In addition, in order for people to like me, I had to be "perfect." Those two lessons kept me in a constant state of worry about pleasing others. They drained my self-esteem and left me with unhealthy coping skills that would rule my life for the next 30 years.

Finally, determined to reinvent myself, I set out on a journey to learn the rules of joining the human race. It wasn't easy, and it's taken a very long time. Here's what I've learned so far.

We allow messages from the past to control our thinking about the future. We all carry messages, reflections of ourselves, delivered by others: the perfectionist parent, the parent who always compared you to your older/younger sibling, the friend who said you were not pretty enough or thin enough, or the first boyfriend who made you believe you weren't good enough. Every negative message impacts on our self-image as surely as distortions accumulating in a mirror. They climb inside your subconscious, take over, and direct your decisions and choices without your ever realizing it.

Try to identify the messages you carry around because guaranteed, they are incorrectly internalized. Whatever we believe we create. This is the first step in reinventing yourself.

We teach people how to treat us. Unfortunately, we don't always realize we're doing it. We teach spouses, friends, colleagues, our boss, and even our children how to treat us. For example: when my friend wants something done around her house she asks once, and then asks again and again... and after three times, does the chore herself. What has her partner learned? That if he doesn't do it, she will. This leaves her feeling upset and angry because he appears to not care. What is your behaviour teaching others about how to treat you?

We measure our insides against everyone else's outsides. All of these negative messages we carry around guide our thoughts, actions, and choices. When we encounter someone who appears happy and successful, we feel somehow "less than," which only serves to support our negative beliefs about ourselves. This is like comparing an orchid and a brick wall. Your insides and their outsides are very different.

We do other people's thinking for them. "Oh, I can't apply for that promotion/open my own business. I'm not smart/experienced/edu-



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cated enough." Does that sound familiar? How many times do you allow the negative messages to provide more weight in decision-making than the positive ones. The only true failure is the failure to try. Doors remain shut when you don't try the handle.

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We stand in our own way, we believe the messages from the past, and we allow people to treat us in unacceptable ways. We measure how we feel against how other people look, and project our beliefs about ourselves that are driven by low self-esteem onto other people's thinking. All of this creates an emotional arena in which we can't possibly succeed.

Do you stand in your own way? Start to develop a clear picture of who you are and what you are capable of. Envision yourself freed from negativity and defeatist beliefs. Only then can you truly start moving out of your own way and achieve the life you desire.

Susan Armstrong is an award-winning author, speaker, and personal growth teacher. She be presenting at the 16th Annual Women of Wisdom Conference, Feb. 15-18, in Seattle. More information can be found at www.womenofwisdom.org, or www.stopstandinginyourownway.com.

Marianne Williamson: Is Midlife a Crisis or a Gift?

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Look at Louise Hay. She's 81 and just came out with a new inspirational movie. Look at the European cultures who honor the third age, as they call midlife. It's just a different kind of fabulous, a different kind of gorgeous."

Williamson reminds us that "boomers grew up very late. We had a very long post adolescence. Maybe time stretched out for us because we know that we still haven't done what we came here to do and we want to feel that we left this world better than we found it. We shouldn't be the last generation who just got to party-down.

There's a new buzz in the air. Now people are going into second careers. People are finding the career they start in their 60s is what they are really supposed to be doing. The older generation is realizing how much they have to give and that's the key to vital aging: being out there to give what you have to give."

How about love? Have you ever asked yourself "Am I too old for a relationship?" Williamson says if you're single and you want a partner, you'll only attract one when you've mastered the lessons of singleness. She says "Don't ask how can you get a man. Ask how you can be the coolest woman in the world. When that happens, you'll enjoy the experience so much it won't even matter whether men notice you or not, which means of course that they will."

Williamson posits that if we ask "Why can't I meet the right man (or woman)," the question implies that there is someone out there and if you knew where they were you could pop over on the next plane to find them. She says, "Metaphysically, there is nothing outside of us and everything we experience is a reflection of what is going on in our

heads. And once we are ready, we needn't go anywhere because our partner will simply appear."

Now put that in the perspective of midlife. In midlife, Williamson reminds us that "Just as certain foods need to marinate, our romantic skills sometimes need years to come together in all their richness. In our youth, we often had love but didn't know what to do with it. Then — after what can be a very long time in the romantic wilderness — we find love again or love finds us. And this time we do know what to do."

What a resource we have with boomers who are moving into the age of mid-life and beyond. Says Williamson "From people who have hated their jobs for decades and now burst free at last to live their true calling to those who have loved their careers but still reach for something more meaningful in midlife or beyond, something is happening, making it clear to everyone that closing shop is not the pulse of this moment. What this generation can do from our rocking chairs can literally rock the world!"

*The release date for Marianne Williamson's new book *The Age of Miracles, Embracing the New Midlife*, is January 2008. For more info go to www.hayhouse.com.*

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