

Everything You Need to Know About Life After Divorce

A Compilation of Published Articles

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Divorce Recovery: Acceptance Of What Was and What Is

The clients who come to me for help in letting go and moving on after their divorces discover that acceptance, a mandatory step in divorce recovery, comes in two stages. First we work to be in acceptance of the end of our marriage and then we move on to accept what our life is now, in the present. This second step in the acceptance process seems to be the more difficult hurdle to overcome but it can be overcome successfully.

Acceptance of the undeniable fact that our marriage is over must be fully integrated into our psyche for us to be able to create a new life. We need to look back over our marriage and see exactly where we have confused what actually happened with our own personal interpretation. All too often our interpretations of the events of our marriage are simply not true, not factual. Our deep hurts have a tendency to cloud our thinking and limit our perspective.

Separating the facts from our biased interpretations will allow us to stop blaming our ex as well as ease our resentments. We also learn how to see that any marriage, no matter what may have occurred, is a product of two people, a mutual creation. Even if one of the partners was unfaithful or deceptive, we must begin to see our part in the collapse of our marriage because only when we can stop blaming and take responsibility for our part, do we take back our power and our ability to move forward. If we are honest with ourselves, we know where we could have done things differently.

Now comes the even more challenging step in acceptance: acceptance of our new life. Once the fact that we are divorced sinks in, reality rears its so-called ugly head. We start to really understand what our life is now that we do not have a partner. All too often, we react with fear, anger and resentment.

There are many common issues that arise amongst my clients. The number one item seems to be the day-to-day responsibilities for the children. Why am I the one who has to handle everything and he gets to play with them every other weekend? I have to do it all: school, homework, discipline, doctors, dentists, conferences, carpooling, groceries, cooking, cleaning...you name it! Then Dad shows up once a week and every other weekend and it seems like its all fun and games. This is unfair.

The list goes on and on and on. No more regular outings on Saturday nights. There is no one to share household maintenance. Your finances now are solely under your control and for many of us that seems daunting. No more extended family. The holidays loom before us and we are lost. Mutual friends fall by the wayside. Need I go on?

This is where the real challenges arise and this is where we learn about our hidden reserves of strength and how much we have learned and grown from the entire experience. There is no doubt that it is hard and seemingly unfair. But guess what? That is the true nature of life. Life is not always a bowl of cherries, quite the opposite. Life is chaotic and there is constant change, oftentimes not to our liking. Life is not always fair. Life just is and we simply

cannot control what life throws out way...we can only control how we choose to handle it. This is a fact of life that we must accept in the depths of our very being.

What to do? There are real choices in front of you. You can continue to fight against reality, a reality that you cannot change. You can resist what is for what you think should be and suffer immeasurably. You can remain rooted in your past, a past that no longer exists, and within that past you will continue to be in pain, blame and resentment. Just envision banging your head against a brick wall because that is exactly what you will be doing.

Either you resist what is or you accept this new landscape. You can surrender to the flow of your life's direction instead of swimming against the current. You can let go of all the things that keep you stuck and chained to your past. You can choose acceptance and with that choice, new possibilities will begin to open for you. You can choose to look for what might be right and what might be opportunities in this new world.

Take for instance the overwhelming responsibilities you now have. Perhaps you are one of the women out there who work and have kids. As an aside, I know that in most cases, you had the bulk of the responsibility during your marriage so things are not that much different. But that being said, start to prioritize. The house is no longer going to be sparkling clean. The kids may have to learn to do their own laundry. There won't be home cooked meals every night and guess what? Everyone will still survive and thrive. What is really important? The love and closeness of this new family unit.

The opportunities abound although it might be hard to see them. I know that when I divorced my kids took on more responsibility around the house and they not only rose to the occasion but they are the better for it. I marvel at how they adjusted and simply went on with their lives. Mind you, my ex and I made a pact to get along and do whatever we had to for the kid's benefit.

Our meals together were chances to bond. I learned to not sweat all the small stuff: I let go of my to do list and learned what was really important, which turned out to be one of the greatest gifts of my divorce. Our vacations together were wonderful and I have phenomenal relationships with my kids. I found a new career. I discovered whom my true friends are and have made many new ones. I discovered reservoirs of strength that I did not know existed.

Of course, it isn't a bed of roses but neither is life in general, no matter whether you are married or divorced. I could go on about all the things within this new life that I am still wrestling with but hey, I wrestled with life when I was married! Life changes and you either go with the flow or drown in self-pity. It remains a matter of choice. It may take years, tons of effort and struggle but anything worthwhile in life takes time and effort.

You must drop unrealistic expectations that life should be a certain way and go with the way that life is. You must learn to change your perspective, embrace what is and choose to look at what the possibilities and opportunities are in this new world of yours. Remember that your perspective will not only change the way you think but it will actually change your reality.

The Real Divorce: Cutting the Emotional Ties that Bind

Your divorce decree is only step one in moving into a new life after divorce. The real divorce is the cutting of the emotional, mental and physical ties that still bind you to your ex-husband. This is the real work of divorce recovery: becoming a single woman possessed of confidence, self-esteem, an enthusiasm for life and most important, a complete break from the emotional turmoil that led to your divorce in the first place.

All too often, women experience the same conflicts with their ex that originally led to divorce: constant arguments, reactive behavior leading to emotional upsets, old patterns of reliance, the barrage of destructive barbs aimed at your self-esteem and deep hurts. To truly be divorced you must put forth great effort and inner work that will sever your ties to your ex and you must build a structure that will facilitate that work.

Let me give you examples: You and your ex have children together therefore you must be in contact with one another on a regular basis. Unfortunately, your discussions with him always end in an argument. Nothing happens easily. The deep resentments and hurts suffered in your marriage and actual divorce remain intact. You each know each other's hot buttons and continue to push those buttons resulting in upsets. It's the old marriage still running the game. You continually get sucked into this abyss.

If this is the case for you know that you have not divorced on an emotional level. You are an ex-wife versus a divorced woman. Somewhere inside of you there is still an attachment of some sort to either your marriage or your ex. You need to look inside to determine where you are still tied to him.

Acceptance of your new place in life is mandatory. Acceptance comes from acknowledging that your marriage is over with no hope or wish for it to continue. Acceptance allows you to living in a way that reveals a freedom from the past. It means living in the present and the future. It takes work but before you can do this work, you must put in place new rules that will lay the groundwork for a completely new relationship with your former husband. These rules are there to protect you from any further hurts or upsets.

You must build a new structure that empowers you versus disempowering you. Take the analogy of going on a diet to lose weight. You need to create an environment that will both motivate and move you towards your goal. To do so you remove all of the temptations that lead to over-eating or eating the wrong foods. You clean out all the junk food from the cupboards and replace them with healthy and non-fattening foods. You create a support system with a friend who you can call when you feel yourself slipping into your old eating habits. You take on a partner in your exercise program. In other words, you do everything that you can to surround yourself with ways to achieve your goal.

You must do the same thing when you are working at disentangling yourself from your ex. Create an environment that will help, not hinder your progress towards true

independence. Remove all the temptations to stay connected to your ex. Within this framework you are free to do the inner work of healing.

My ex and I had a fairly amiable divorce and we have managed to move out of each other's lives albeit for the children. Or so I thought. In reading the book, *Leaving Him Behind* by Sandra Kahn, she mentioned something that set off a light for me. My ex has spent a good deal of time around my new home, as his condo has taken much longer to complete as was predicted. In order for the children to see him more often I have been extremely accommodating and have allowed him to be in my home with the kids. He knows the code to my house lock and oftentimes enters on his own. He has the tendency to walk into the house, open the refrigerator door and grabs something to eat, which is exactly what he always did when we were married. Not such a big deal you might say. But Ms. Kahn says otherwise.

Although we have a very friendly relationship for the most part, he is not my husband anymore. I have been far too accommodating to him. I should have created a scenario where it was incumbent upon him to get into his new place in order to have a place for him and the kids.

This is my house and I should have laid down the ground rules that said he is to knock on the front door just like any other houseguest. Houseguests do not help themselves to the food in my refrigerator. This is him living by the old rules as if this were his home, which it is not.

These ground rules are meant to protect you and prevent any kind of situations that could lead to an upset. Obviously the less you have to do with your ex the better. That is not to say that you cannot have a relationship with your ex but it has to be radically different from the one you had while married. There are those women who cannot have their ex in their lives for any reason other than the children. Their emotional ties to their ex are still strong and they need to isolate themselves in order to break those ties.

Set ground rules that determines the nature of this new relationship. These rules might include:

- 1) Communicate with your ex via writing and/or brief phone calls. Keep all communication limited to only what is necessary for the kids or legal matters.
- 2) When an upset is looming or when your ex starts to speak to you in inappropriate ways, stop the conversation and hang up or walk away. Let your ex know this new ground rule: you will speak to another in respectful ways and will not tolerate anything else or the conversation is over.
- 3) Ensure that your home is just that: your home. It is not a place to hang out with the kids. It is not his home. When he is in your house make certain he realizes that he is a houseguest like any other.

- 4) Keep your conversations highly impersonal and to the point. Protect your privacy. Do not discuss your fears, concerns or personal issues because that only maintains the emotional tie between the two of you. Don't talk about anything that opens the door to more connections or emotional entanglements. Keep it business-like.
- 5) Do not involve the children in any communication between the two of you. Don't send messages through the kids. Keep them protected.
- 6) Stay out of each other's lives. You don't need to know where he goes, what he does, what he is thinking or whom he is seeing...and he doesn't need to know those things about you as well.
- 7) Don't look to your ex for advise or support. This might be the hardest tie to break. I remember in the early part of my separation, I continued to treat him as my husband when I called upon him for assistance with the kids. Wrong. Handle it yourself by getting support from friends or family. You aren't married anymore and you will only be left disappointed.
- 8) Consider your child support or your alimony as your money and not a gift from him or an obligation. Your money, no matter how it is acquired, is your money. The courts determined that support and it doesn't give him the right to comment upon or berate you about finances. If you are experiencing any problems with support checks, take it to your lawyer. Never beg or put yourself in an inferior position. Keep your true financial position to yourself.
- 9) Be careful of maintaining relationships with his family. Blood is thicker than water. If you have developed a friendship with your sister-in-law, make certain it is because you two are friends, not family members. Always insist that the subject of your ex is forbidden.
- 10) You are not a wife anymore and do not exhibit any behavior that mimics that role. All too often women continue to do things or relate in ways to their ex that were part of their former marriage. If he needs support or someone to talk to about personal matters, he needs to call a friend and not you. You are not there to assist him as you did when you were his wife. You are not his wife anymore and not his friend either, at least not right now.

Perhaps in the future, when you have cut all of the psychological ties to your ex that held you back from creating a new life for yourself, you might be able to ease these rules. I doubt it. What's done is done and what is past is past. Let go of anything that does not serve you well.

You will be much more successful in healing yourself and moving on if you have adopted rules and created an environment that keep you physically and mentally separate from your ex. The work of healing your emotional wounds and of learning acceptance

and forgiveness for yourself and him demands all your attention. Don't squander your time and effort on him. It's all about you now, you as a single woman with an exciting and wonderful future in front of you.

Moving Beyond Your Divorce: Acceptance

There is no single more powerful stumbling block to moving beyond our divorce into a new life than the inability to accept our new reality. Acceptance is the hardest part of the divorce recovery process. Acceptance requires total honesty, courage and the willingness to let go of the life that we had...a life that no longer exists. Without that acceptance, we cannot move forward and create a new life.

How does one learn acceptance? Although it takes time and a good deal of inner work, it can be done. Here is a step-by-step guide to move you towards acceptance:

1) It's about you, not them.

One of the most powerful lessons in life is the knowledge that we have control over one person and one person only...ourselves. If you are looking outside of yourself to move forward, you won't. We can't change anyone but ourselves. We have power over no one except ourselves. It is when we turn inward and do the work on ourselves that we will be able to effect dramatic and positive changes in our lives.

Being a victim means giving away all control and power. If I blame someone else for my situation, then I am powerless to do anything about it as I have chosen to absolve myself of any responsibility.

We can create changes that will make our lives better but not until we stop trying to change our ex or our current reality and we realize that it's about us, not them.

2) Get support.

If you think you can do this all by yourself you may be in for a big surprise. Research consistently shows that getting support in any challenging endeavor leads to more success. Whether you choose a divorce support group, a therapist, a member of the clergy or a Life Coach, just do it.

If you are one of the those people who think that you have to handle life's challenges on your own because somehow you equate support with weakness, get over it! Getting support is a sign of intelligence as far as I'm concerned as well as an indication that you really are serious about moving onward in life.

3) First, you must get through the initial stages of loss that includes denial, grief, anger, depression and whatever else you might be feeling early in the divorce process.

These emotions are all natural and necessary states that we need to experience. They are the norm versus the exception. Each one of these

feelings needs to be embraced and experienced fully. There must be an ending before a new beginning.

There is a difference between fully experiencing an emotional stage and getting stuck in it. Beware excessive self-pity and real depression. Here is where support becomes important to your well-being and improvement.

4) Distinguish between facts and interpretations.

I cannot stress the importance of this step enough. People get stuck when they cannot face the facts and prefer to believe that their personal interpretations are reality.

You might be familiar with the exercise of the picture that has a hidden image within it. Ten people may come up with ten different interpretations of the picture. Some people will see the hidden image immediately and others will never see it until it is pointed out to them. Either way, the hidden picture exists. It is a fact.

You may feel that you have been mentally abused and yet your partner may feel that you are the one that is abusive. He said, she said. Probably a counselor will see a totally different picture altogether. You know, there's your side, his side and then the truth.

Once you are truthful with yourself and can see the facts versus the drama or story of your divorce, you will be on your way to acceptance.

5) Be brutally honest and take responsibility for your marriage, divorce and life.

Those of us who can be totally honest with ourselves will receive the gift of a deep awareness of who and what we are along with the ability to accept our lives as they are without looking to blame someone else. Being honest allows us to see things that hadn't existed for us before. The truth will indeed set you free. By setting aside our egos, we can look at our life for what it actually is versus a story about our divorce.

Once we have been honest and have embraced all the facts about our divorce, we are free to accept full responsibility for our lives.

Responsibility is power and the freedom to choose what we want next in life. If we cannot take responsibility, we remain victims and victims absolve themselves of both their responsibility and therefore the power to control their own lives.

6) Learn the difference between what is and what you think should be.

If we are living in a netherland of what we think should be, we are completely cut off from reality or 'what is'. If you think that you should not have to be experiencing divorce, then you cannot accept what is...that you are indeed getting divorced. You live in a world of your own.

We all create a list of should be's that keep us stuck in the status quo: I should be happier, I should be getting more support, I shouldn't have to work, and I should still be married. By concentrating on what we should be, we ignore what actually exists for us and remain stuck.

I think we should live in a world where peace is the predominant ethic but we don't live in that world. That's a dream I have. By acknowledging the world as it truly exists, I can make choices as to how I will live my life and also how to address the problems that do exist.

7) Consider the emotional wounds that you brought to the marriage.

Your ex may complain that you were not a warm person. I doubt that it was your marriage that created a cold person, if indeed that is what you are. We bring ourselves into our marriages and the parts of us that show up and create issues are the parts of us that we haven't addressed yet. They are emotional wounds from somewhere in our past and they have a tendency to pop-up in our close relationships or when we are faced with challenging times.

Now is your chance to address those wounds and heal them so that you do not repeat your so-called mistakes again. Use your divorce as a catalyst to go inside and heal yourself.

8) Release toxic emotions.

Get rid of the debilitating toxic emotions that you are carrying around. Picture them as heavy baggage that keeps you stuck in your misery and produces a broken back. Anger, bitterness, hatred, resentment, rage...these are all toxic emotions that will harm you far more than your ex. You are the one who pays the price. You need to work through them and then release them because they will weigh you down for the rest of your life if you allow it.

Once you have done the work of truth versus interpretations and what is versus what should be, you will find it much easier to give up your anger and resentment. They do not serve you and you are learning to give away anything that does not serve you well.

9) Learn forgiveness for yourself and your mate.

You might not be able to practice forgiveness in the early stages of the journey to recovery but if you go through these other steps, you will be able to forgive your ex and more importantly, yourself. Forgiveness takes a big load off your shoulders. It releases energy that can be used for positive things.

Forgiveness does not necessarily mean you condone bad behavior, it simply means you forgive. If we separate the person from the behavior it

becomes easier to forgive. You know that just because you sometimes say mean things it does not mean you are a bad person. Just a lapse in judgment. We are not necessarily our behavior. We know all the subconscious motivations that exist within every individual. If we look at the inner child within a person, forgiveness is a given.

10) Make conscious decisions; utilize free choice.

When you do the inner work of divorce recovery, you tend to attend to many things that have been left unresolved for years. You become more conscious of your actions and your choices. You become aware of the subconscious and how it can run your life. When you learn to observe the constant mind chatter that goes on inside your heads, you learn that the mind chatter is not you, its just chatter.

Making conscious decisions based in free choice means that we are not letting our mind chatter, our past, our emotional wounds or our interpretations of reality run the show. We take control of our lives. Conscious living allows for incredible freedom and the ability to create extraordinary changes.

And your bonus tip:

11) Find the gifts of your divorce.

Everything that occurs in our lives and everything that we are (warts and all) has a hidden gift. If you speak to someone who has survived divorce and has gone on to create a and vibrant life based upon their own passions and values, they will certainly tell you that their divorce was the best thing that happened to them. That may not be true for you but there is a gift waiting for you to find. My ex likes to say that he is responsible for my new career and to a certain extent he has played a part. Oftentimes it takes a good whack on the head to awaken us to life's possibilities and our own happiness.

It's the old adage: Every cloud has a silver lining. It is true. Search for the gifts of your divorce and it becomes yet another step toward a successful recovery from the trauma of divorce.

Successful divorce recovery takes inner work. Much like a flower, the work that has takes place underneath the surface of the ground, invisible to the human eye, is the crucial aspect. Without that subterranean work, there would be no flower. The reward of the flower is dependent upon the inner work of the seed and the root system. It is the same with humans. Do the inner work and you see the outer rewards.

Recovering from Divorce: Honoring the Truth

Do you remember the old adage that states there's your side, there's my side and then there's the truth? If we were totally honest with ourselves, we too could see the truth of any situation. Once we accept that truth, we have the newfound freedom to gain clarity, discover our options and make real choices that are based in reality and not a subjective interpretation of what is. The past no longer runs the show. A world of possibilities opens that we might otherwise have missed. To recover from divorce one must face the truth.

The gist of the adage is that we don't really see reality for what it is. Rather we see things through our interpretive abilities and we interpret things based on our past experiences. Reality gets fine tuned through our own personal filters. We live in a world based on the past, a world that no longer exists.

Here's an example. Recently I was coaching a woman and we were discussing how she had interpreted her Mom's behavior to mean that she wasn't lovable. She had a brother and a sister who grew up in the same home and they did not feel unlovable. How? The truth was that the Mother was a non-emotional, logical and somewhat distant person. Those were the facts. It had nothing to do with my client and yet she had interpreted her Mom's behavior as meaning that something was wrong with her. If she had been lovable, her Mom would have been the nurturing and loving Mother she needed. The client's belief that she is unlovable has colored her entire life's experience. Only it wasn't true.

Facts versus interpretations. Now look at your divorce. What are the real facts and what are your interpretations of those facts? Perhaps your marriage broke down because you felt your husband was never happy with you and you were the target of his constant criticism. Your husband's story is that you were never truly loving and nurturing and he was desperately attempting to fix that situation. The marriage counselor sees something different. She sees that you interpreted his attempts to receive more love as constant criticism. That is indeed how it felt to you. She also sees that he had been somewhat needy and his approach only pushed you farther away.

Our inability to see the truth without our personal interpretations makes it impossible to resolve the conflict. In truth, you may have had an experience from your past where a parent constantly criticized you and you have become extremely sensitive to anything about your behavior. In truth, parents who were not loving towards him may have raised your husband and so he craves attention. Whatever. The truth is that we allow our past to serve as a filter for our present and thereby create reactions that are not based in reality. The operative word is reactions: we are only reacting to life and not being the master of our fate.

It could be that your marriage broke down because the two of you married for the wrong reasons and you simply cannot make it work. But most people will not admit to that truth and will heap all sorts of blame on one another based on their own personal interpretations of who is at fault.

To break free of the pain of divorce we must be willing to see the facts versus our interpretations of the facts. What is versus what we think is. In order to do that we must be willing to set our egos aside as well as our past. Facing the truth instead of what we want to believe is the truth is what we have to do to be able to make the changes we want in life. That is not necessarily an easy task but it is a necessary one if we are to move forward in our lives. You cannot begin a new life until you end the old one.

Here's an exercise you can do to start on the road to recovery. Take a piece of paper with two columns: one listing the facts of your marriage's demise and the other your interpretations of why things went south. For instance, the fact might have been that you and your husband had different ideas on money. Your interpretation of that fact might be that your ex was incredibly cheap. Separate fact from interpretation by being as objective as possible without allowing your personal opinions to cloud the issue.

A good marriage counselor will tell you that a marriage does not fail because of just one partner. Although it may not look like it to you, it is the truth. Even if your ex had an affair, there were reasons for his infidelity other than his lapse in moral judgment. If you are really honest with yourself, you will see the real reasons for why thing happened the way they did.

I had a conversation with a woman whose husband left her and her kids unexpectedly... or so she thought. In reality, he had been taking solo vacations/adventure for the past year. She went along with his absences, assuming full responsibility for their home and children. She had always taken care of everyone and everything, which enabled him to be totally self-absorbed and yet initially she could not understand what had happened, why he left. She gave him all the rope he needed to hang himself or rather, to hang their marriage. When she was honest, she saw that the signs were there all along and that she had a good deal of responsibility for the marriage's failure. She had been an enabler of bad behavior on his part.

Another old adage states that the truth will set you free. Knowing the difference between the truth and our own personal view of reality will indeed set you free. Grounded in reality, in the truth, we can become the person we want to be and live the life we want to live because we are no longer living in a world of our own making, a fantasyland.

It is how we choose to handle life's circumstances that matter in the end. We can choose to be truthful with ourselves or we can choose to continue living a convenient interpretation. Al Gore has described facing a harsh reality as an inconvenient truth. I like that idea. Anything worthwhile takes effort. With effort come rewards. If we choose to accept the inconvenient truth, we are choosing a life filled with abundant rewards. The choice is ours to make.

How to Handle your Emotions During Divorce

Divorce brings out the lunatic within us. Rage, anger, depression, sadness, resentment and blame are just some of negative emotions running the show. Your emotional state is hard to pin down from one moment to the next. This is not the best state of mind to be in when you are being called upon to handle so many things and make so many very important choices and decisions. We need to tame the gremlin, (that negative mind chatter within), learn to be less reactive and be in more control of our emotional state in order to be able to effectively handle our divorce. The good news is there are many tools and skills you can access to help you through this difficult life transition.

Learn to recognize your 'danger zone'. Your danger zone is that place where you are prone to reactive behavior and emotional upsets. Once you begin really tuning into your body's cues, you will recognize this place and can take action to not go there. I am alerted to my danger zone when my stomach tightens, my heart races, my neck tenses and my breathing becomes shallow. There is a fluttering sensation throughout my body. I know I am becoming emotionally reactive and I may soon say or do things that I will regret. I know that if I allow my emotions to take over and go reactive in my response to the situation, I will not be making any conscious decisions as to my actions. Trouble is around the corner!

Let me give you an example. I walk into my daughter's room and it is in utter disarray. I have asked her repeatedly to keep it clean but here I am faced with a virtual pigsty yet again. I sense that I am about to explode. So what do I do? Do I just let loose and create more havoc or do I walk away? I walk away. I go off and spend three minutes doing some deep breathing and calm myself down. Perhaps I choose to take a short walk around the block. I calm down and now have the wherewithal to make a very conscious choice as to how I want to handle the situation. The operative phrase here is 'conscious choice'. Choice can only be conscious and being reactive is unconscious. I decide to go back and have a reasonable conversation that will result in specific ramifications if she cannot abide by some basic house rules.

You are going to be faced with hundreds of choices in the course of a week, from interacting with your kids to making decisions with your attorney. Being emotionally reactive is having no choice. Choice comes from deliberate reasoning and that means you need to be in control of your emotions. Again, step back when you feel a reactive response arising, calm down and then and only then choose.

Learn to be more aware and conscious of your emotional state by becoming in tune with your body's reactions. Make a conscious choice to walk away when you are entering the danger zone and calm down via whatever means you find best. Understand that you can make conscious choices that will serve you versus unconscious reactions that will harm you and whoever happens to be in your line of fire.

Next up: taming that negative mind chatter. Given the amount of pain and wounded-ness you are experiencing, your mind chatter will be at it's all time high. Your mind chatter is based in your wounded ego. Those wounds are fresh from the divorce but there are also plenty of old wounds that are being reactivated because of your divorce. Hence the constant flow of negative thoughts. Remember: you are not your thoughts. Just because you think you are a failure does not make you one. That's your gremlin (the mind chatter) talking. Learn to separate yourself from your gremlin. The real you is the one who actually notices the mind chatter. There is you and there is the mind chatter, okay? Start there, by simply noticing the chitchat. Notice it, acknowledge it for what it is and let it go.

You want to learn to make the important distinction between what is a cold, hard unarguable fact and what are the interpretations or meanings you attach to the fact. Your marriage ended: fact. You are a failure: interpretation that you have created about the fact that your marriage ended. Are you a failure? Is that an unarguable truth? No it is not. It is a personal interpretation you have made that is created out of a filter of pain. We run wild with interpretations and meanings during this difficult time period, attaching meanings to anything that moves! Try not to. Millions of people get divorced and many of them do not see themselves as failures. You feel really bad about being a failure but that feeling is based upon something you made up! Separate the facts from the interpretations and you'll start feeling better.

Don't take everything personally. I know this is a hard one but we feel badly when we take things personally that are actually impersonal. Let me give you an example: Sara's husband has an affair. Sara takes it personally and makes it mean that she is a reject and not good enough. If Sara were to actually take a closer look at the whole picture and be honest with herself, she would acknowledge that there were warning signs all along that things at home were shaky. Her husband was unable to express his needs and instead sought refuge elsewhere. It had nothing to do with Sara personally; it was about him, not her.

If we look closely, we will note that we have a tendency to take many events during the course of a single day as personal affronts. We need to take a step back before we react and look for the impersonal aspect of the event before we begin to label ourselves lacking in some respect. Something as simple as a child not responding to our requests can become a personal insult: they don't respect me, or they don't appreciate me when in reality they are just teenagers who have a tendency to be self-absorbed and irresponsible.

Establish boundaries that keep you from upset. Draw very distinct lines that will not be crossed in order to protect you. You may notice that every discussion with your ex leaves you feeling badly so limit those discussions to only what is absolutely necessary. Like the Doctor said to the patient who complained that when he stretched his leg it hurt, don't stretch your leg! Let the attorneys handle as much as possible. Your home is now your home and keep it that way by making it clear that your ex no longer has access. Don't go to your ex for emotional support, as it isn't his or her job anymore. This is the time to begin to disengage from your ex on a physical and emotional level by putting as

much distance between you two as possible.

If your 'divorce story' is depressing, stop going over it. Your divorce story is the never-ending litany of what went wrong, who did what to whom, the blame, the resentment, the regret...on and on and on. The more involved you are in that story, the worse you feel. If your attention is on everything that is wrong, you will feel very badly. It's like going to see a depressing movie over and over. Ultimately, you can barely manage to drag yourself out of the theater! Try writing your divorce story in all it's gory detail and then read it as many times as it takes for you to get really sick of it! Then begin to let it go.

Take good care of yourself. Stress and anxiety take a huge toll on our physical and emotional body so you need to be extra vigilant about nurturing yourself. Get proper rest and food. Take up some sort of cardio activity to burn off the pressure. Learn to calm yourself through deep breathing exercises. Take up yoga or meditation. Pamper yourself: get a massage or have your hair done. Surround yourself with family and friends who show you deep love and compassion. Show yourself that same love and compassion. All too often, we are the ones who beat ourselves up the most when what we really need is tender loving care.

Understand that going through a divorce puts you in a very limited perspective on life. It is like being in a snowstorm where you cannot see the sun anymore. Just because you cannot see the sun does not mean it doesn't exist. It does. You just have a limited perspective due to the storm. When we are in deep pain, we cannot see that this too shall pass, that life will get better, that there are infinite possibilities that can open up to us and that we just may be stepping into a better life.

It isn't so much what happens to you in life as how you handle what happens. There are always going to be curves in the road and it behooves us to learn how to meet the challenges with which we are presented. Handling your emotions well during your divorce can only benefit you and your family. You will feel better, handle decisions and choices better and come out a better person.

Divorce Recovery: Acceptance Of What Was and What Is

The clients who come to me for help in letting go and moving on after their divorces discover that acceptance, a mandatory step in divorce recovery, comes in two stages. First we work to be in acceptance of the end of our marriage and then we move on to accept what our life is now, in the present. This second step in the acceptance process seems to be the more difficult hurdle to overcome but it can be overcome successfully.

Acceptance of the undeniable fact that our marriage is over must be fully integrated into our psyche for us to be able to create a new life. We need to look back over our marriage and see exactly where we have confused what actually happened with our own personal interpretation. All too often our interpretations of the events of our marriage are simply not true, not factual. Our deep hurts have a tendency to cloud our thinking and limit our perspective.

Separating the facts from our biased interpretations will allow us to stop blaming our ex as well as ease our resentments. We also learn how to see that any marriage, no matter what may have occurred, is a product of two people, a mutual creation. Even if one of the partners was unfaithful or deceptive, we must begin to see our part in the collapse of our marriage because only when we can stop blaming and take responsibility for our part, do we take back our power and our ability to move forward. If we are honest with ourselves, we know where we could have done things differently.

Now comes the even more challenging step in acceptance: acceptance of our new life. Once the fact that we are divorced sinks in, reality rears its so-called ugly head. We start to really understand what our life is now that we do not have a partner. All too often, we react with fear, anger and resentment.

There are many common issues that arise amongst my clients. The number one item seems to be the day-to-day responsibilities for the children. Why am I the one who has to handle everything and he gets to play with them every other weekend? I have to do it all: school, homework, discipline, doctors, dentists, conferences, carpooling, groceries, cooking, cleaning...you name it! Then Dad shows up once a week and every other weekend and it seems like its all fun and games. This is unfair.

The list goes on and on and on. No more regular outings on Saturday nights. There is no one to share household maintenance. Your finances now are solely under your control and for many of us that seems daunting. No more extended family. The holidays loom before us and we are lost. Mutual friends fall by the wayside. Need I go on?

This is where the real challenges arise and this is where we learn about our hidden reserves of strength and how much we have learned and grown from the entire experience. There is no doubt that it is hard and seemingly unfair. But guess what? That is the true nature of life. Life is not always a bowl of cherries, quite the opposite. Life is chaotic and there is constant change, oftentimes not to our liking. Life is not always fair. Life just is and we simply

cannot control what life throws out way...we can only control how we choose to handle it. This is a fact of life that we must accept in the depths of our very being.

What to do? There are real choices in front of you. You can continue to fight against reality, a reality that you cannot change. You can resist what is for what you think should be and suffer immeasurably. You can remain rooted in your past, a past that no longer exists, and within that past you will continue to be in pain, blame and resentment. Just envision banging your head against a brick wall because that is exactly what you will be doing.

Either you resist what is or you accept this new landscape. You can surrender to the flow of your life's direction instead of swimming against the current. You can let go of all the things that keep you stuck and chained to your past. You can choose acceptance and with that choice, new possibilities will begin to open for you. You can choose to look for what might be right and what might be opportunities in this new world.

Take for instance the overwhelming responsibilities you now have. Perhaps you are one of the women out there who work and have kids. As an aside, I know that in most cases, you had the bulk of the responsibility during your marriage so things are not that much different. But that being said, start to prioritize. The house is no longer going to be sparkling clean. The kids may have to learn to do their own laundry. There won't be home cooked meals every night and guess what? Everyone will still survive and thrive. What is really important? The love and closeness of this new family unit.

The opportunities abound although it might be hard to see them. I know that when I divorced my kids took on more responsibility around the house and they not only rose to the occasion but they are the better for it. I marvel at how they adjusted and simply went on with their lives. Mind you, my ex and I made a pact to get along and do whatever we had to for the kid's benefit.

Our meals together were chances to bond. I learned to not sweat all the small stuff: I let go of my to do list and learned what was really important, which turned out to be one of the greatest gifts of my divorce. Our vacations together were wonderful and I have phenomenal relationships with my kids. I found a new career. I discovered who my true friends are and have made many new ones. I discovered reservoirs of strength that I did not know existed.

Of course, it isn't a bed of roses but neither is life in general, no matter whether you are married or divorced. I could go on about all the things within this new life that I am still wrestling with but hey, I wrestled with life when I was married! Life changes and you either go with the flow or drown in self-pity. It remains a matter of choice. It may take years, tons of effort and struggle but anything worthwhile in life takes time and effort.

You must drop unrealistic expectations that life should be a certain way and go with the way that life is. You must learn to change your perspective, embrace what is and choose to look at what the possibilities and opportunities are in this new world of yours. Remember that your perspective will not only change the way you think but it will actually change your reality.

Divorce Recovery: Beware Expectations

In a nutshell, expectations are premeditated resentments and disappointments. They are self-sabotaging beliefs we hold that literally set us up to feel bad and keep us stuck in the pain of our divorce. They are in direct conflict with how the world actually works and are based on the phrase, 'should be'. In order to let go of the pain of our divorce, we must let go of impossible expectations.

What exactly is an impossible expectation? How about: I expect my ex to treat me with respect. I expect that my ex will be totally fair as regards our financial settlement. I expect my ex to feel regret for his bad behavior. I expect my ex to have trouble moving on after our divorce. I expect my ex to support me emotionally. I expect my ex to be a great Father to our kids.

Life rarely goes according to plan. Life has its ups and downs, its joys and sorrows. Life is never all one particular way: always good or always bad. The nature of existence is that life is chaotic, that it is in a continual state of change, that we cannot predict what will come next and there are no guarantees. That's just a start. Life isn't necessarily fair. We cannot control the outer world. The list of what life is goes on and on. The problem that arises is when we create expectations about life that are virtually impossible or unenforceable.

Let's take a close look at a particular situation in order to experience the truth of this fact. Sara is separated and getting divorced. Her husband left saying that he was not happy. After the fact she discovered that he was also having an affair, something he initially denied. Sara is having trouble because her ex continues to lie. Sara's impossible expectation is that her ex stops lying. She also expects for him to come clean about everything he has done. She expects for him to be on time for visiting the children, something by the way he couldn't manage even when they were married. As a result of her ex not living up to her expectations, she is continually angry, frustrated, resentful and disappointed.

The problem of course is that her expectations are impossible or unenforceable. Her husband lies and she has no control over that fact. That is just what he does and to expect him to become Mr. Truth overnight is totally unrealistic...virtually an impossible expectation. She also wants him to come clean and fess up, something that is not part of his character. Again, an unenforceable or impossible expectation. Suddenly, she expects her ex to be on time for the kids, something he has proven over and over again that he does not do. Is it a wonder that Sara is miserable? She is in a constant state of disappointment and resentment.

Sara cannot control her ex. She has a set of impossible or unenforceable expectations she is living under and they are the crux of her misery. She cannot change her ex or transform his character. Sara can control her expectations. She can identify where she is setting herself up by exposing all the impossible expectations she has surrounding her ex and

seeing how they cause her great pain. Once she has identified these expectations, she can move forward by acknowledging that they are indeed impossible and not under her control. She also needs to remind herself of the real laws of the universe.

Namely: Life isn't necessarily fair. Life has its ups and down, its joys and sorrow. Life involves suffering. Life is unpredictable. Life doesn't always go according to plan. Sometimes people do bad things (and sometimes they do good things!) There is much in life over which we have no control. It is not so much what happens to us in life but rather how we choose to handle what life throws our way!

If you are using the phrase 'should be', then you know you are living with unrealistic, impossible or unenforceable expectations. Should be's always point to a fantasy world. We reject what is and expect what we feel should be. My ex shouldn't lie. Except of course he does. My ex should be emotionally supportive. Except of course he isn't. You get the picture. We can continue to resist what is or accept the truth. It ultimately comes down to a choice. As a human being, choice is our most powerful asset.

Choosing to let go of impossible expectations is choosing to let go of blame, resentment, disappointment, anger, frustration, disillusionment and regret. Choosing to accept what is versus what should be is living in the truth and the truth will give you the freedom to re-create your life.

I suggest that you make a list of all of the impossible or unenforceable expectations that you have. Notice when you become upset: see what expectation might be operating. Notice when you are working under should be's. By setting down these expectations in writing, we can begin to identify where we need to change our points of view.

Next make a list of the real laws of the universe so that you can begin to drop unrealistic expectations. What do you know to be true of life? Are there any guarantees? Is everything always a bowl of cherries? In other word, get real!

I guarantee that your self-imposed impossible expectations are a major source of your inability to let go of the pain of your divorce and move forward. This concept does not just apply to divorce recovery. It applies to all of life. Visualize a little child stamping their foot and exclaiming, "But that isn't fair!" Don't be that child.

How To Forgive after Your Divorce?

Forgiveness is a miraculous act that serves as a release valve that propels us forward into a new life after divorce. To forgive is to be truly free, to be unencumbered by the past. The problem or challenge with forgiveness is that it is very difficult and oftentimes near impossible for us to go there, especially if we are leaving an abusive relationship of some sort. How can we forgive really bad behavior? How can we forgive someone who has wronged or betrayed us?

There are two important elements of forgiveness: what it is and what it gives to us. Forgiveness is the ability to let go of blames, resentments, upsets and negative emotions we hold against a particular person. In order to achieve forgiveness, we go through a process that begins by separating the person who we are forgiving from their behavior. We do so because forgiveness does not mean that we condone someone's bad behavior. We don't.

Here's an example: I learn from my client that her Mother was a highly abusive person, who both physically and emotionally abused her as a child. She hates her for that and many of the client's reactive behaviors, deep wounds and present situation revolve around her relationship with her Mother.

Separate the behavior from the person. The Mother's behavior was extremely bad and we do not forgive the behavior. How about the Mother herself? Ask yourself: What kind of a person would abuse her kids?

The Mother's childhood was brutal. Abject poverty, abusive Father, abusive husband, little education, on and on. We need to look at her through a new set of eyes, those of empathy and compassion. See the inner child of the Mother: a skinny, dirty, hungry, poorly dressed little girl with tears in her eyes. That is an image we can forgive. We can conjure up great compassion and love for that wounded child and then begin to see that the wounded child is still very much alive within the Mother. We experience a deep sense of sadness when thinking of how her life was wasted because she was so crippled by her experiences.

This realization does not absolve the behavior of the Mother. The behavior was terrible. We do not forgive the behavior but we do forgive the Mother who, because of her deep emotional woundedness, seemingly had no control over her actions.

What happens next is part two: what forgiveness gives to us. Forgiveness is a gift that we give ourselves because it allows us to break the emotional link that binds us to the person we are forgiving. An emotional link to our ex keeps us mentally, emotionally and spiritually tied to the person that we are seeking to divorce! We may have had a physical divorce but we are still tied to that person by a very taut rope. By remaining in blame, resentment or hatred, we keep ourselves locked to the pain that we are trying to escape. We cannot move forward into a new life under these conditions.

Here's an example: Imagine I continue to be upset by the fact that my ex had an affair. It continues to bring up feelings of betrayal and rejection, and with those feelings comes the extra-added charge of unworthiness and being unlovable. How am I supposed to move into a new life with self-esteem, confidence and a sense of empowerment when I am dragging that weight around?

I need to ask myself these questions:

Have I truly accepted the end of my relationship? Am I living in what is versus what I think should be?

Have I taken full responsibility for my life as it is now?

Do I truly acknowledge that I have 100% responsibility for what was as well as what is? Otherwise, do I see that I remain a powerless victim?

Do I see the gifts or lessons that I received as a result of all that I have experienced?

If you have gone through the process of acceptance, responsibility and acknowledgment of the lessons of your divorce, you then need to forgive. You need to separate the behavior from the person. You need to see the inner child that resides within your ex and bring forth your compassion and love. What if the shoe was on the other foot: would you want to be forgiven? Would you want to be released from your shame?

Here is a very important point that you need to get: Your resentments, blame and negative emotions have one target and one target alone: you. You are the one who suffers, you are one stuck in the past and you are the one who hurts. Not your ex. You. Conversely, you are the one who will benefit from forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a gift. Forgiveness is freedom. It feels light, not heavy and burdensome. It is a release from the past that has been running you. It contains gifts: it might mean that you can no be more tolerant, nicer, self-aware, loving, nurturing and open to new possibilities in life. It is the gift of letting go of the negative mind chatter that plagues you everyday.

Remember, there is no need to verbally forgive this person. You need not write them a letter or have an in-person forgiveness conversation. Forgiveness is something you do for yourself and so if you write a letter, then save it or burn it. Forgiveness is an inner dialogue.

Here is the greatest gift of all: self-forgiveness. By forgiving someone else, you also forgive yourself. You can stop beating yourself up. You can see your own inner child who desperately needs your love and compassion, not your constant judgment and criticism. You can return to state of wholeness. You can have the freedom and power to create your best life possible.

Your Divorce: Mistakes are Life Lessons

Your divorce is not a failure or a mistake. People miss an incredible opportunity to learn, grow and change for the better when they view their divorce through the lens of failure. A so-called failure is actually a lesson in how not to do something and an invaluable tool for doing things right and in your self-interest in the future.

I am presently immersed in my second reading of a marvelous book entitled, 'The Tender Bar' by J.R. Moehringer. I want to quote a few lines wherein the author, in attempting to write a book, discovers something powerful:

“Above all I suffered from a naive view that writing should be easy. I thought words were to come unbidden. The idea that errors were steppingstones to truth never occurred to me, because I absorbed the ethos that errors were nasty little things to be avoided, and misapplied that ethos to the novel I was attempting. When I wrote something wrong I always took it to mean that something was wrong with me, and when something was wrong with me I lost my nerve, my focus, my will.”

Life, like writing, is not easy. Fact. Errors are steppingstones to the truth and the truth is the steppingstone to personal growth, enlightenment, positive forward action and change for the better. Thomas Edison, the inventor of the electric light bulb, amongst many other inventions, said it perfectly: “I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.” Each time he found a way that didn't work he moved closer to what would work and his eventual triumph. So too with a divorce.

Our divorce holds great wisdom. When we are ready, we can uncover this wisdom and it will benefit us immensely. In my work as a Divorce Recovery Coach, I am constantly amazed at the impact of these revelations on my client's lives. Time and time again, what initially looked like failure or a misstep reveals itself to be a powerful tool for both their recovery from the pain of divorce as well as a guide to moving forward in life.

Let me give you an example. Upon examination, Sara came to see that from the very beginning of her relationship with her husband, she had deep misgivings. She knew in her gut that things were not quite right and yet she went ahead and got married. Throughout her marriage, the signs were there and yet she chose not to confront them. When her marriage ended she was devastated. After a time and much reflection, she came to see that she had not trusted her own intuition. Sarah did not trust herself and never had. The greatest gift she received from her divorce was to learn to honor her own inner wisdom and intuition. She learned to trust herself and thereby gained the self-respect and confidence that she desperately wanted and needed.

Do you remember our parents telling us to do as I say and not as I do? Did that work? Probably not. We learn best when we experience things for ourselves. It is

the best way to teach children: learning by doing. Unfortunately, this means that more often than not, we do not absorb a lesson until we have experienced it directly. It takes a crisis, a good smack on the head to awaken us. Then, if we choose to use the crisis as a learning tool, that learning will become imbedded in our psyche.

Your divorce, like most of life's experiences, will be a wasted opportunity to be a better and happier person if you do not use it as such. As the writer William Saroyan said: " Good people are good because they've come to wisdom through failure."

Look at your marriage and divorce and be brutally honest with yourself. Drop your self-righteous positions and your need to be right so that you can discover the truths and gifts of your divorce. Don't miss out on these life lessons. Take these truths and search for the lessons that are waiting for you. I guarantee that what you will learn about yourself are not necessarily indigenous to just your marriage. They are probably related to the emotional baggage you have carried around for a very long time. We now get to address those things that have been obstacles throughout our lives.

I always hated the adage that when life hands you lemons, make lemonade. Too damn corny, right? Yet in this case, it is fitting.

Victimhood: The Curse of Divorce Recovery

Feeling or labeling yourself a victim of your divorce is one of the most disastrous moves you can make. It will prevent you from moving forward into a new life. Victimhood renders you powerless. To create a new life after your divorce takes a person who is fully responsible for their past, present and future. Being responsible means having control over one's life and that is what it takes to both recover from the emotional wounds of a divorce as well as plan for your new life.

If you consider yourself a victim then you believe that you had little to do with what happened to you. You take no responsibility. The responsibility is someone else's and that leaves you with no power. Victims blame someone else. Blame absolves them of their part in the dissolution of their marriage. Blame keeps them stuck in the pain of the past and their divorce.

It is so much easier to place blame on someone else than accept personal responsibility. The fact is that two people inhabit all marriages. Those two people are co-creators of their marriage and their divorce. Even if one of the partners was unfaithful or a liar, there are always signs along the way that we either refused to see or to acknowledge. If we are in denial about all the warning signs along the way, we can only look to ourselves for lack of some responsible action.

Blame leads to resentment. Resentment consumes our mind chatter. We spend far too many hours ruminating about all the things that our ex has done or continues to do to us. We resent their new life and our lack of one. Consider the amount of time wasted being in resentment? Exactly who suffers? The answer of course is clear: you. You are the one who is angry, sad, bitter and unhappy, not your ex. Your blame and resentment, along with your regrets, are like poison in your system. It completely immobilizes you.

How do we overcome these feelings of victimhood? Here are some suggestions:

1. What is the truth of your marriage? If we are completely honest and courageous, we will have begun to recognize that indeed, we played an integral part in our marriage and divorce. All too often, we interpret events and situations in our marriage and believe them to be the truth. For instance, my husband was cheating and lied to me about it. I interpret that to mean that I am no longer desirable, that I failed as a wife. I live in my marriage as if that is a cold, hard fact. It is not. The fact is he cheated. Period. That fact could mean a hundred different things. Stick to the facts.
2. Where am I responsible? What were the warning signs along the way that I refused to acknowledge? Where was I in denial? Where was I an enabler? For example, I know a woman who was completely surprised when her husband left her. She went on to tell me that she always gave him total freedom to do

- whatever he wanted: trips that lasted a month at a time and little or no responsibility in rearing their children are just a couple of items on the list. She handled it all. Translation: she was an enabler and gave him the rope that was needed to strangle the marriage. Acknowledge where you didn't do what you needed to do. Accept responsibility. Responsibility if empowerment.
3. Exactly what are you resisting? Why can't you see the truth and accept responsibility? Why do you suppose you cannot accept the reality of your life as it is now? These are questions that must be addressed. What do you gain by remaining a victim? Are you afraid of facing the truth? Are you living in what you think should be versus what is? Do you enjoy being a victim? Do you like the fact that being a victim absolves you of any responsibility and therefore any positive action?
 4. If you are resisting the reality of your life, consider doing a turnaround and simply go with the flow of your life's direction. Fighting reality is a useless business. The more you resist something the more it will persist. Consider the flow of a river. What does it feel like to swim against the current? That is what you do when you cannot accept what is.
 5. Do you allow your fear of the unknown to run you? Are you afraid of your future? Are you afraid of being alone? What exactly are you afraid of? I recently heard someone say that they spend so much time worrying and little or nothing of what they worry about actually comes true! Do you see the insanity of that? As far as the future, we don't know from day to day what the future holds for us. How about if you believed that your future was going to be just fine instead of being in fear? What if everything happens for a reason?
 6. Consider your perspective on life. Your attitude. What is it? Do you believe that life is hard and unjust? Do you see all that is wrong and nothing that might be right? Let me tell you something, not only does your attitude affect how you handle life; it can actually determine your reality. If you believe that life is too hard then that is exactly what life will be for you. Kind of like a self-fulfilling prophesy.
 7. Do things differently. If your victimhood along with it's blame and resentment is not working for you (and I guarantee it isn't) then for heaven's sake, do things differently. Try on a new perspective. Examine the truth of your life versus your own personal interpretations. Take responsibility. Take actionable steps forward. Stop resisting. Get out and do new things, meet new people and don't isolate yourself. Get back into the swing of things.
 8. Learn from your experience and use that new wisdom for empowerment. Once you see the life lessons of your marriage and divorce (and believe me they are numerous and impactful) you can use that wisdom to be a better person, to help you to become the person that you truly want to be. Everything that happens

to us in life has a hidden lesson for us if we only look for it. Might there actually be a silver lining in this storm cloud?

9. Consider the costs of remaining a victim? Do you want to live your life as a bitter and angry person? Is that how you want to be seen? If you have children, is victimhood what you want them to model? How do you want to be seen? Do you realize that as a victim you have no power to change your life? Remaining a victim is a very bleak picture.
10. Choose a new and better life. Think of all the decisions and choices you make during the course of a day. Are they moving you away from being a victim or keeping you stuck there? Stop and think before you make important and even not so important decisions or choices. Our choices define us and determine the course of our life.

In closing, I want to share a few bits of wisdom from the Dalai Lama:

When you lose, don't lose the lesson.

Follow the three R's: respect for self, respect for others and responsibility for all your actions.

Remember that not getting what you want is sometimes a stroke of luck.

Judge your success by what you had to give up in order to get it.

Divorce: You Can't Always get What You Want...but You Get What You Need

The Rolling Stones were actually very smart. They were dead-on when they sang that you can't always get what you want but you get what you need... that is if you are paying attention to what is being offered. When we wish, pray or hope for something, what we actually might be gifted with is the situation in which to manifest that gift.

Let me give you an example. A woman I coached wanted to learn patience. She was always terribly impatient which led her to be frustrated and angry most of the time. It was a major problem in both her personal life as well as her career and she was miserable. One day we were discussing her three-year old son and in a moment of clarity, she realized that he had been placed in her care to teach her the art of patience. She got it! You simply cannot successfully raise a kid without patience. She was placed in a situation where she had to acquire patience or fail as a parent.

She went on to see that her boss at work who got on her nerves was also an opportunity to cultivate not only patience, but tolerance and diplomacy, traits in short supply in her life. Her manager didn't do things fast enough or well enough in her book, which led her to be annoyed and angry. She wore her annoyance and anger on her shirtsleeves, which resulted in great friction between the two of them.

After her epiphany with her small son, she realized that if she were going to be successful in her career, she would have to learn to be more patient, tolerant and diplomatic. She would have to learn empathy and there was not a better person to teach her than her boss. Once again, she was able to see her situation as an opportunity to develop into the person she wanted to be instead of a dead-end spot.

All too often, we don't recognize the opportunities in life. We see obstacles instead of openings. Divorce is a perfect example of hidden opportunities. At first we cannot see the forest through the trees. We are in pain and our perspective or outlook is very limited. We don't realize that our divorce has many gifts or opportunities for growth. They are hidden from view but the challenges that lay before us are actually chances to become the person we were always meant to be.

Take Alice. Her marriage was not a happy one but she ignored all the signs along the way. She did not want to have to confront what was happening: she was in denial. She had always allowed her husband a great amount of freedom because she found it difficult to stand up for herself. She lacked self-esteem and she brought this to her marriage.

When her marriage fell apart, she was devastated and claimed she could not understand what had happened. After working together, she was able to face the fact that she had been an enabler of her husband's behavior. By not standing up for herself, she gave him a green light to do whatever he wanted. In addition, by refusing to confront the reality of her marriage, she failed to do take the necessary actions that might have changed the situation for the better. Seeing the truth she now chose to take responsibility for herself and her life.

Alice decided to use her divorce as a catalyst for the changes that would give her the life she wanted and deserved. She chose to see that her divorce was the perfect opportunity to develop self-esteem, confidence and strength. She began to see that perhaps, just perhaps, her divorce was exactly what she needed in order to become what she truly wanted. She had suffered as a result of her low self-esteem and now she found herself in the perfect place to cultivate that trait.

What are you seeking? What do you need? Look around. Is your situation right now a springboard towards what you really want? Remember that you might not get exactly what you asked or prayed for but if you look hard enough, you will see that you may have been gifted with the opportunity to create the things that you so desire.

Life After Divorce: Acceptance of Your New Reality

What do you think of people who are detached from reality? People that are seemingly living in a world of their own making? It's unnerving to say the least as well as truly sad. Yet for those of us attempting to recover from a divorce, our inability to fully accept our new reality is not too far removed from living in a fantasy world.

Non-acceptance of what our life is right here and now is the biggest obstacle to letting go and moving on after divorce. Initially I believe this is due to denial, which is part of the grieving phase that follows any major loss in life. Unfortunately, all too many of us stay in this state way beyond the end of this grieving phase. We continue to deny our present reality. We refuse to accept what our lives are now. We yearn for what was or what we think should or could be, all of which are fantasy. The only thing that exists for us is the here and now, the present.

I want to liken this to the process of aging. In the past couple of years, I have moved into my late 50's. As a former member of the counter-culture, I have always seen and experienced myself as much younger than my chronological age. After all, in another life I was a rock and roll DJ! Note please how I refer to that stage as another life. Luckily I don't look my age... that is from the neck up! The signs of my true age are now evident on this body.

I remember about twenty years ago being at my mother-in-laws and seeing a friend of hers who I now recognize as having been my present age. She was dressed in a revealing dress and as I noticed her sagging skin, I thought to myself how unattractive it looked. Guess what? I have that same skin now. I can wish that I had the skin of a thirty year old but that will never be. If I adopt that attitude of non-acceptance, looking in a mirror will fill me with regret and resentment. The other choice, and really the only viable choice, is to fully embrace this new phase of my life and revel in my new reality: a much wiser and experienced woman who is a beautiful fifty- something. If I choose the former, I lose out on all that life has to offer me now and remain stuck in a past that no longer exists! If I choose acceptance, I can take advantage of what my life has to offer me now and not lose out on any new opportunities or possibilities.

You are getting divorced or you are divorced. That is what is, that is your only reality. Whatever went before is gone and can never be retrieved. You really need to get this because until you are willing to be fully conscious of what your life is now and accept it for what it is, you are going to stay stuck in pain and regret. You are going to give up the pleasure of living life to it's fullest. You are going to give up on all of life's sweet moments. You are going to give up happiness, success and fulfillment. You are going to give up on life. Are you willing to pay that price?

What is it that holds us back from acceptance? My gut feeling, as well as my experience coaching other women to acceptance, is the culprit is fear. Fear is an emotional response to threats and danger. Our fears lie in the unknown. What has already happened does not

provoke fear. It is the not knowing that frightens us. Uncertainty. What if I cannot take care of my children and myself? What if I am alone for the rest of my life? What if I am never happy again? What if I end up a bag lady? What if the sky falls?

What can we do about uncertainty? Sorry but there is not much we can do with not knowing what comes next. No one on this earth can predict the future. This is another aspect of reality that calls for our acceptance. Real courage and wisdom is the ability to be okay with not knowing. After all, what is the choice when you cannot possibly know what the future holds? The very nature of life is uncertainty.

How can we best live in an uncertain world? Well, we know that being in fear of not knowing is not the answer so how about the opposite? What if we were able to hold the belief that everything will work for us? What if we were to believe that everything happens for a reason? What if we were to believe that there are new and exciting opportunities and possibilities opening up for us now in this new phase of life? What if life will work out and we will be happy and fulfilled? What if this divorce is just what we needed to get back into life? What if?

Look, you get to choose: fear or a belief in a better future. One viewpoint will keep you stuck and one will serve you well. A simple shift in perspective or attitude can work miracles. Our attitudes not only change the way we think, they change our reality. Don't believe me? Try it on yourself. It is the old power of positive thinking. I am not suggesting taking on a Pollyanna-ish persona but I am suggesting that you take a good hard look at your prevailing attitude on life. If it ain't working, change it!

It is not only our fear of uncertainty that keeps us from acceptance but also our unrealistic expectations of life that get in our way. You may or may not be conscious of your expectations but they are there and they bite you in the behind all the time. If you feel that life isn't fair, you have unrealistic expectations of life. If you feel that your ex should be a certain way, you have unrealistic expectations of life? If you think that life should not include difficult times, that's right...big time, unrealistic and totally unenforceable expectations that set you up for disappointment, resentment and unhappiness. Get real and recognize life for what it really is. It is not all hearts and flowers. It is not always fair. It is what it is! Quit setting yourself up.

Examine and manage your unrealistic and unenforceable expectations. Know what you can and cannot control vis-à-vis these expectations as that is what makes them unenforceable. Learn to make uncertainty without fear a part of living. Learn to believe in your future instead of fearing it. Learn to accept life as it is instead of as you think it should be. Live in reality instead of fantasy. Honor yourself and commit to your life. Use this divorce as a catalyst for a better life. Go for it!

Life After Divorce: The Power of Acceptance

In Divorce Recovery, as well as any other major loss in life, acceptance is the most important and most difficult step we must take towards releasing the past and beginning a new chapter of life. By acceptance I mean the acceptance of your reality, as it exists for you right now: what is and not what we think should or could be. Acceptance means being conscious and accepting of your reality with no illusions or personal interpretations or filters. It also involves giving up blame, resentment and regret. The ability to let go of those negative emotions is true acceptance, which ultimately gives you the freedom to move forward.

Recently, the profundity of acceptance was reinforced by the example of two very amazing women. One is a dear cousin of mine who has been extremely ill over the last two years and the other concerns an Iraqi veteran. Both of these women have made me see that acceptance comes in many forms, some much more challenging than I could have ever imagined. They have proven to me that acceptance can be achieved and with it, remarkable possibilities for life.

My cousin recently sent me an e-mail alerting me to another family member's new business. I wrote back to ask how she was doing as she has been fighting cancer for the some time now. She has been near death innumerable times and has undergone the most aggressive forms of treatment available, including a bone marrow transplant.

As a side note, this is a woman who was divorced when her two girl were very young, one only six months old. She had to go to work and raise her daughters totally on her own plus she had a brush with cancer once before in her life.

For those of you having trouble accepting your reality, I want to share Cookie's update to me:

"Hi Shelley-
How are you doing? How are the kids?"

I am recovering - still. Unfortunately, I have Graft vs. Host disease. The disease basically means that the transplant is not working right now. The host (me) and the donor (graft) immune systems are battling and hopefully my donor's immune system will win. I am also suffering from severe osteoporosis. I have been left with a deformed spine, 7 fractured vertebrae which have led to quite a bit of nausea. Because my torso is now deformed to accommodate my new structure, I have trouble processing and digesting food. Let's see, I have lost a lot of my sense and smell, I have an inoperable hernia. It is inoperable because there is a high risk for infection, so no surgery is allowed. I wear a spine brace and I am in a lot of pain. My physical demeanor is that of an elderly person. (Note: she is only in her early 50's)

BUT on the flip side I am above ground and I do appreciate life. I have a big support system. I have good medical care and my friends and family are the best. I just want to get on with my life and stop being a patient.

My girls have been awesome through my whole ordeal; their compassionate character makes me proud. My best friend and caregiver is without a doubt, an angel sent from heaven. We live together and he is my shadow. He has been caring for me physically and emotionally and I am very grateful. Of course, without my mother's help, I wouldn't be here. So, there are many things to be grateful for, it is just hard to be me right now."

It is simply mind-boggling to me that she can be talking about gratitude given her life situation!! She could easily be stuck in anger, depression or victimhood and we would not begrudge her at all. Instead she has accepted that this is her life now and there is no going back. Her life has taken a terrible turn by any accounting. Of course, she has depression...who wouldn't given the circumstances? Remarkably, I hear someone who has acknowledged her reality yet wants to live the rest of her days with love, compassion and gratitude for what she does have... even if it is only, in her own words, " (being) above the ground."

Next up, Melissa Stockwell. I saw an interview on television with this Iraqi vet who lost a leg in the war when a bomb hit her convoy. She has gone on to compete in the Para Olympics in Beijing in swimming. Despite the challenges of adjusting to life with one leg, she has taken on one physical challenge after another, proving again and again that she can still be a formidable athlete.

And she does not waste time with regrets or dwelling on the past. She was very clear in the interview I witnessed that there was no way she would waste a moment in blame or resentment or a yearning for what was. She let it go. She had a life to live.

"When I signed up, I knew I was taking a chance," she said. "I'm proud of how I lost my leg. I was proud to wear the uniform. I still am. I've done more with one leg than I ever did with two," she said. "I have bigger dreams than I ever would have had with two legs. I don't know if things are meant to happen, but I'm very happy."

I am struck by Melissa's comment concerning how much more she has gone on to accomplish with only one leg. Instead of viewing her situation as an end, she saw it as a beginning. The loss of her leg became an opportunity for Melissa to excel in a new landscape and with each triumph; she went on to do more. Melissa goes on to say:

"I'd love to have my leg back," says Stockwell, who also learned how to fit other amputees with prosthetics. "But the things I have been able to do have been valuable to me. I live a great life; I have no regrets and don't want to go back to what was before.

Life is always changing and for the most part, we don't have control over the external events that we are handed. Life does not ask our permission. That's life. Stuff happens. What we can control is how we choose to see things as well as how we handle what life

throws our way. Given the past is gone forever, we are left with the present. What do we do now?

Choice is the most powerful gift we humans possess. It allows us to consciously decide for ourselves how we will live. We make choices everyday and every choice we make has repercussions. If we can learn to accept what is, we can move forward to make the changes that are needed to flourish in this new environment.

So, you are divorced. Do you choose to remain bitter and resentful and pay the price of that decision? I assure you, the costs will be high and it will be you and not your ex who will have to ante up. Keep in mind, no one twisted your arm and demanded that you waste your time in negative emotions. This was a choice you and you alone made. How is that choice affecting the quality of your life?

Yes, it is easier said than done but nothing worthwhile in this life is accomplished without effort. Your parents told you that and like much of what our parent told us, it turns out to be true! Change is a matter of conscious choice, desire, effort and a commitment to oneself. As I always say to my clients: You have one precious life to live and you get to decide how you will live it.

Once you have fully accepted your new reality, without harboring feelings of blame, resentment and regret, you are granted the freedom to create a life based on your passions and values. It is never too late to do anything. I read recently about a 90 year old man participating in a triathlon! You can choose acceptance, gratitude, opportunity and possibility as your mantra. Trust me, it feels much better than it's opposite!

Divorce: Freedom is the Reward of Letting Go

The ability to move on after your divorce entails the letting go of the past with its emotional baggage and negative emotions. If you can accomplish this feat then the heavy burdens you have been carrying will lift and you will experience the liberation of freedom: the ability to move unimpeded towards whatever goal you establish for yourself.

Think of slavery. Picture a person wrapped in chains. Now think of those chains as having specific labels attached: blame, resentment, resistance, anger, denial, sadness and confusion. Each of these labels is a chain in which we bind ourselves, keeping us stuck in our pain and regrets and unable to move forward towards a new life after divorce.

“Without freedom from the past, there is no freedom at all, because the mind is never new, fresh, innocent.”

Krishnamurti

I would add to Krishnamurti's wise words that without freedom from the past there is no present to experience and no future to look forward to. Without freedom from the past we are doomed to stay stuck in all our 'stuff' and render ourselves immobile, paralyzed. To move through this life transition of divorce demands an ending, a break from the past. In order to have a beginning, there must always be an ending. One door closes and another opens.

In order to let go of the past we must be in acceptance of our new reality, our life, as it exists now that we are divorced. It is part of coming to terms with loss. To refuse to accept a loss keeps us mired in the fear of that loss. To live in fear is to live under a black cloud that once again keeps us stuck in the past. Loss is a part of life, it happens and there is no way around it. We must face loss and come to terms with it.

Ask yourself: what is the price I am paying in holding onto what no longer exists? What is the cost of being chained to my negative emotions and perspective? Is it costing me my health? My peace of mind? My relationship with my children? My happiness? My optimism and enthusiasm for life? I assure you that the price you pay is very, very high and it is you alone, not your ex, that pays that price.

How would you feel if you were free of all that negative stuff? Would you feel the world contains new possibilities and opportunities for you? Would you feel light? Would your body and heart stop aching? Would you be able to be happy again? Would you have renewed energy? How would freedom feel for you?

The choice seems fairly obvious, yes? So how to let go?

-Begin by making a list of the costs of holding on to the past. In writing it will

reveal to you the real costs.

- Make another list of what life would look like with freedom from the pain of your past.

- Do the classic Ben Franklin close. Weight the pros against the cons and make a decision as to how you want to live your life.

- Now make a list of the things that you have to let go of in order to gain your freedom. Things like blame, resentment, bitterness, anger, sadness, denial...you get the idea.

- As you look at each of the items you need to let go of, once again, take a look at the cost involved in holding on. For instance, holding on to blame makes you a victim because you are saying that your life is what it is due to someone else, thereby giving that person control over you. To give up blame and victimhood, you need to take full responsibility for yourself, your life, and your feelings.

- Choose.

We each have the free will to choose for ourselves. Choosing life over enslavement to the past is a choice that will empower you, free you and move you forward. Forget about your ex, they have nothing to do with your future or your choices. This is all about you. Choose life. Choose to take back your life.

“You can't separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom.”

Malcolm X (1925 - 1965), Malcolm X Speaks, 1965

Freedom from the past, from being a victim, from all the emotional baggage of your divorce will indeed give you the gift of peace of mind. When you realize the incredible gifts associated with freedom, this is a no-brainer. Remember that you alone can take back control of your life. This is all about you.

Life After Divorce: Living with Change and Uncertainty

“If we can recognize that change and uncertainty are basic principles, we can greet the future and the transformation we are undergoing with the understanding that we do not know enough to be pessimistic.”

Hazel Henderson (Economist, writer and syndicated columnist)

Fear of our future after divorce keeps us stuck in the pain of the past. This fear prompts our mind chatter to paint a bleak picture of an uncertain future, which in turn creates a disempowering and negative attitude towards life. A negative attitude on life becomes all-pervasive and leaves us powerless and depressed. If we stop and think about it, the future is totally unpredictable and unknowable. We simply cannot know what the future holds. Thus it is our perspective about the future that will lay the foundation for what is coming around the bend.

The universe is in a constant state of flux. Nothing ever remains the same. In this respect we are a mirror of the universe. Look back on your life and see how it has been one change after another laced with constant uncertainty. Just when you think things have settled in they change again. I remember thinking how my life had dramatically altered when I married. Then boom! We moved, we had a child and my ex got a new job. Our heads were swimming. We sat down and realized that this was life: a succession of one change after the other with absolutely no guarantees on our future. We just had to roll with it.

My life has continued to change. I had another child, retired, went back to work, moved again, got divorced and moved yet again. I sent my son off to college and my daughter is now in high school. So I learned to recognize and accept the fact that that nothing remains static: that goes against the laws of physics. As a human being, we need to accept the law of change. Not only the law of change but also the law of uncertainty.

We live with the fact that we do not know what will happen in life from one minute to the next. I may plan on attending a play tonight but there is no guarantee that I actually will. I might get sick, the car might not start, the lead actor might fall down and break a leg...who knows? I may marry with the highest intention of my marriage lasting a lifetime but it might not work out that way. Obviously I did not get married so I could get divorced! My intentions were honorable and loving but sometimes things do not work out the way we planned or expected.

So once again life hands us a choice: do we live in fear of the uncertainty of the future or do we choose to believe that our future might just be better than our past? Do we choose to look for all the things that might go wrong or do we choose to look at the new

possibilities available to us now? Do we choose to be pessimistic or do we choose to be optimistic and hopeful? Do we choose to accept uncertainty as a fact of life and move forward in the not knowing or do we choose to be paralyzed by uncertainty? Do we choose to acknowledge how our attitude on life impacts us or do we choose to bury our heads in the sand?

If we want our future to look a certain way then we need to take charge. Uncertainty is always part of the process of taking charge and moving on. Courage to me is living with uncertainty. Our perspective or attitude on life not only changes the way we think but also changes our reality. I myself do not ascribe to the extreme belief of 'The Secret' wherein one can create their desires if they just think it to be but I do believe that our attitudes do shape our future and the attainment of our goals.

Just think of a person you may have known in your life who never achieved much due to their fears. I know a young man who has not ventured forth from his hometown, who works in a dead-end job, and who doesn't make any attempts to make new friends all because he is afraid. I cannot tell you if he is afraid of what might happen if he tries something new and different. Perhaps he is afraid of failing, of looking foolish, of rejection or any number of other reasons. The reasons aren't as important as the fact that his fears have paralyzed and kept him painted into a little world. He feels secure in that little world even if he is miserable most of the time. He will never know what might have occurred had he made the effort.

I always ask my new clients the following question: What would you regret never having done in your life? Notice that this question does not state what do you regret having done in the past but rather the question asks you to look to your future. Think long and hard about this question. Would you regret never having traveled abroad? Would you regret never having found happiness again? Would you regret never having lived by the sea? Would you regret never having a career in radio?

Life is all about change, uncertainty, making choices and taking charge. Take back control of your life by accepting the facts of life. You can play a very active role in your future by creating an attitude that serves you. You can choose to live in fear of the unknown or embrace the unknown. You can take actionable steps that lead you to your vision of your future or you can live in fear and be paralyzed. You never get a guarantee on life. That's life. But you can choose to believe that there is a new and better life out there if you only have the courage to leave the old one behind. There just might be a new you waiting in your future if you have the courage to leave the old one behind.



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Receive her free, powerful e-book, *The 10 Secrets to Coping with Divorce*, and her monthly *'Take Back Your Life After Divorce' Newsletter* by going to: <http://www.freedivorcesupport.com> or contact Shelley at shelleystile@changecoachshelley.com to schedule a free consultation and sample session of divorce coaching. For more information on Divorce Recovery Coaching go to www.changecoachshelley.com.