



Make your future fabulous!

We all have times when life events can derail us. Monica Castenetto, life coach and author, gives Anna Moore her tips to rediscover a sense of purpose

No matter how careful we are to keep everything on track, and to count our blessings, life is always going to throw us a few curveballs. Things go wrong, plans go awry or we reach the end of an era and suddenly can't see our way forward. Empty nest. Illness. Relationships foundering. Redundancy. When changes leave us feeling flattened and directionless, how can we build ourselves back up to a future that looks fabulous?

Acknowledge the emotional shockwaves

Any change sparks an emotional response. Yes, you knew your last child was heading off to uni. After all, you've stuffed your car with duvet, kettle, bedside light and much more, and ferried them there. Of course, it's all good but what you didn't expect is the effect their departure is having on you. Or perhaps you're reeling from events that are not so good – a relationship ending, a redundancy or a diagnosis of serious illness in a loved one or ourselves. Because by nature we're brilliant at supporting other people, it's easy to stuff your feelings away, go on autopilot, and focus on "doing" not "feeling". But feelings will fester or catch up later, so allowing yourself to feel those emotions is the first step. Don't be judgemental. It's not wimpy but wise to acknowledge sadness if a period of your life has ended. Grief is a natural response to loss of any kind, whether it's the end of those years when the kids were younger, a relationship or a job. Just listen to your feelings first and don't argue with them!

Now share those feelings

The best way to come to terms with painful feelings is to talk about them, and fortunately most of us are good at this. Maybe you want a friend who's already gone through something similar (and come out the other side!) or just a long-term mate you trust. Some people prefer the anonymity of sharing via an online

Join forces

Find others who are having a bit of a reassessment of their lives. They may be people you already know or friends of friends. But this could be a time for meeting new people, through volunteering or a joining a book club. Plan some meet-ups to do easy, fun things (cinema and supper, visit to a gallery or a walk and talk). You'll naturally share dilemmas but you'll also be enjoying new experiences. Not usually the social "fixer" in your group? Put arranging a low-key bit of socialising on your list of things to do. Changing the way you behave is a very good start to a future that feels a little more fabulous...

forum. Not ready for that yet? Try writing it all down instead. Getting physical helps swirling thoughts too. Walk or run it off – best in a beautiful natural space.

Accept the change

If change has been forced on you, like a relationship or a job ending, as opposed to a natural sequence of events like kids leaving home, it's a natural reaction to try and reverse the situation or put your head in the sand. Try not to. Once you've made sure you've done all you can to clarify or reverse the situation, then the sooner you can accept what has happened, the better. It will stop your mind churning over "what might have happened if" and "why you didn't do XYZ". Make a conscious decision to let the past be the past. When those "If only" and "why me?" thoughts surface, remember that you've promised yourself



not to engage with them. Only when you've accepted that the situation "is what it is" can you start moving forward.

Find the real you!

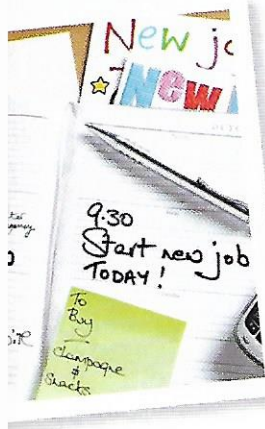
That sense of who you truly are, what you love doing and what makes you who you are can get submerged in years adopting other myriad roles. Think about what you enjoyed in your teens and childhood. Were you creative? Sporty? Studious? Think about the experiences you want to try in the future. Travelling? Rediscovering a talent? Trying something new?

Don't overthink

You don't want too much unstructured time on your hands, so get started quickly. "Doing" builds confidence so set yourself some challenges. Try things out, with no pressure for any particular result. At the same time, think of a simple activity you can rely on to soothe and distract you, whether that's knitting, baking, painting or gardening, and make time for it regularly.

Find the opportunity

Now you can start to look forward. Every change – wanted or not – brings opportunity. Any crossroad brings life to a rare halt, giving you a chance to take stock and think about what you want independently of employers, partners or children. Perhaps you've built a life around your children – allowing work, friends, everything else to take a backseat – and now your children are 200 miles away having the time of their lives, you feel utterly empty. What does this change allow you to do which you couldn't otherwise? Emptiness is a space into which something new can come.



Life coach Monica Castenetto is the author of *What's Your Excuse For Not Living a Life You Love?* (WYE Publishing). Visit her website livealifeyoulove.co.uk