

# When life is **NOT** so fabulous

There are times when life events can derail us. Life coach Monica Castenetto gives Anna Moore tips to rediscover a sense of purpose



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**N**o 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. Relationships foundering. Redundancy. Illness. 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. Or maybe they're leaving after a period of coming and going to finally set up a home of their own. 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 own feelings away, switch 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 that part defined who you were. Just listen to your feelings first and don't argue with them!

## 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, it's understandable to try and reverse the situation or bury 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 – which they will regularly! – remember that you've promised yourself not to engage with them. Only when you've accepted that there's nothing else you can do to change what's happened, and that the situation "is what it is" can you start moving forward.

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

## Find the opportunity

Now you can start to look forward. Every change – wanted or not – brings opportunity. Any crossroad brings 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, hobbies to take a back seat – and now your children have left home, you feel utterly empty. Or perhaps you haven't found the right man and you're looking at a future that may not have children in it at all. Once you've allowed yourself to grieve and accepted where you are, give yourself free reign to reimagine and reinvent. What does this change allow you to do, which you couldn't otherwise? Emptiness is a space into which something new can come.



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## 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 of adopting other myriad roles. We can quite simply get out of the habit of thinking about ourselves. Think about what you enjoyed in your teens and childhood. Were you creative? Adventurous? Sporty? Studious? Think about the experiences and things you want to try in the future. Travelling? Rediscovering a talent? Trying something new? A word of warning; when you're low or lost, don't be led by what others think you should do, or swayed by social media. This is when we're most vulnerable to life envy – alone, at

home, on Facebook or Instagram, drifting in a sea of "boast posts" from friends, and friends of friends. Don't torture yourself or wallow in their happier homes, better careers, more wonderful lives. At your most rational, you know what you're seeing is carefully curated, a public face, a long way from real life. Looking here for inspiration or ideas is not wise. Another common mistake is to jump at the first replacement option that comes your way – to grab any next job, get into any next relationship – just to have a replacement to fill the void. It may provide a route out, a fast escape – but will it lead you to exactly where you want to be?

## 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 or even accepting invitations you wouldn't normally. Plan some easy meet-ups (cinema and supper, visit to a gallery). 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 usually behave is a very good start to a future that feels a little more fabulous...

## 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 – make a list of things to do within one week, then within a month and then within three months. 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, something you can do on autopilot that's creative – whether that's knitting, baking, painting or gardening – and make time for it regularly.

*Any change – wanted or not – brings opportunity. It may seem brutal to find the positives during your toughest times, but that's when you need them most*