

Looking For a New Challenge

By BNET Editorial

published on BNET.com 11/09/2007

It could be argued that society is moving backwards; that as adults, we're becoming more child-like—demanding instant and varied pleasures to make us happy instead of developing the maturity to delay gratification. But really, what's wrong with that? We have the technological innovations and resources to support our immediate desires and, if we do not align ourselves to the predominant culture, we will trail behind those who embrace it and find ourselves feeling left behind and lost.

The problem is that instant gratification leads to instant dissatisfaction. The more we experience, observe, and consume, the more we want to experience, observe, and consume. It's a vicious cycle that panders to the lowest rung on our hierarchy of needs and, after a while, we yearn for something more meaningful—something that represents our uniqueness and value as human beings.

So, in this rich mix of possibilities and opportunities, how do we begin to find new challenges that will say more about us, hold our attention, and satisfy our long term needs?

What You Need to Know

I am desperate to find a new challenge but haven't a clue how to go about it. What can you recommend?

It is difficult to make these sorts of choices by yourself. You might find it helpful to find a trusted friend or coach who can act as a sounding board and reflect some of your thoughts and feelings back to you. This will help you objectify what is currently subjective and then you may be able to piece figure out what to do next.

I have started doing something I've always wanted to do but am feeling strangely depressed about having made the change. What's going on?

By definition, change brings a period of adjustment that can be quite depressing. What has probably happened is that you have let go of something that previously defined you and have not had time to establish yourself in your new field. You could think of the transition like a trapeze artist who has let go at the end of one swing and is suspended in thin air as she turns to catch the trapeze at the beginning of the next one. There is a period where nothing is holding her but the momentum of her

maneuver. This can be quite disorientating, but if you remind yourself why you made the choice in the first place and focus on your end goal, you will find that your momentum will carry you through.

I have so many ideas I don't know where to begin. How can I sort these out?

Try listing your many ideas and see if you can find the golden thread that joins them all together—or the several golden threads. If you were categorizing these ideas, what would be the major headings that you would put them under? Do these headings bear any relationship to each other? By doing this, you will slowly draw some common themes from your ideas, which will point toward the type of challenge that would reward you.

I feel caught up in a situation that is impossible to change, yet I'm bored and frustrated. What can I do to find a new challenge without sabotaging what I've already got?

You may be able to find something outside your usual activities that you can run in parallel. It need not be anything particularly big or life changing. Sometimes a small adjustment in our lives can make all the difference. So start small. Find something that you can easily accommodate in your schedule and put some energy into that for a while. Experiment with different things. When you find something you are passionate about, you will certainly find a way to fit it into your life.

What to Do

Finding a new challenge is not something that you can do in haste; it needs careful consideration and clarity of thought. Here are some areas to consider in your quest for a new challenge.

Know Your Values

It is important that you know yourself well enough to choose a new challenge that will be aligned to your motivations, values, and beliefs. Think about the assumptions and attitudes that drive your life. Look at the patterns and see if you can determine what holds all your experiences together. If you can identify what drives you, you will be able to make a good choice about what will work for you and what will not, while avoiding the fantasy that so often characterizes an escape from boredom.

Map out your “Good” and “Bad” Experiences

Look back over your career or life path and see if you can identify what made an experience great for you and what made it unhappy. In this way, you will be able to determine the ingredients that your new challenge will need to have to ensure its success. Be clear about whether you are running away from something, in which case your decision may be tainted with desperation, or whether you are pursuing a dream, in which case your decision will be positive and optimistic.

Identify What Is Happening *Now*

You may have reached a life-stage transition. Perhaps your desire to find a new challenge has been triggered by an event or series of events that have put your situation in a new light. Look around yourself and see if you can pick out what has driven you toward finding a new challenge. At least if you know where you are starting from you have some certainty.

Be Clear about Your Goal

If you are clear about your end goal, you are more likely to make a sound decision about what your new challenge should be. Do you want to:

- *learn something new?* Perhaps you would like to build your knowledge base and develop your intellectual expertise in a different arena. This might be in the form of an academic program, a research project, or a philosophical exploration.
- *develop a new skill?* If you'd like to learn to do something practical that you have not done before, you may want to sign up for a night class, a training program, or apprentice yourself to someone in your chosen field.
- *create a legacy?* Do you want to create something that you can leave behind such as a book on your life or family history, a piece of art, a charity, or a political victory?
- *experience a new culture?* Perhaps you would like to travel and experience different cultures. By seeing the world through the eyes of others, you can develop new perspectives, try out different belief systems, and experiment with your own boundaries. You might want to do this through volunteering. This is a way of seeing the world, experiencing new cultures, and doing something constructive and values-led.
- *have an adventure?* Are you yearning to climb a mountain, try an adrenalin sport, trek across Nepal, travel unaccompanied through Asia, walk the Great Wall of China? There are many adventure vacation organizers who would be happy to help.
- *meet new people?* You may want to increase your professional or social circles to see what opportunities can be born of new acquaintances and contexts.

Once you know what your intentions are in respect of your new challenge, you will be in a better position to identify some specific goals and create a plan going forward.

Investigate Your Options

Once you know your starting point and what your aspirations look like, albeit vaguely at the start, you can try different options on for size. You will probably not be short of people to advise you, so mine them for ideas. In fact, often those that know us well have greater clarity about our motivations and capabilities than we do.

Find Out Who Can Help You

In order to find a new challenge, you could look to the people in your network and ask who is doing something that inspires or attracts you. This may not be exactly what you want to do, but it might give you some clues about the sorts of things you could do. Alternatively, you could think about who in the public arena you admire and whether your admiration suggests anything to you about what you want to do or be known for.

Focus on What You Need to Do

If you can identify what the decision breaker is, you will be able to focus on the important issues first. Then everything else will fall into place as a matter of consequence? Ask yourself what you need to make your decision a success and how you will get this. You may need to ask for some support or resources from someone in your network, or you may just need time away from your full-time employment with a route back after you have satisfied your craving for something new.

Create a Contingency Plan

It can be quite daunting to launch yourself into a new challenge, especially if it represents a complete change from what you are used to, so think about the ways you can retrieve the decision if it fails to work out. This is not meant to be negative, but sometimes having an exit strategy is sufficiently comforting to encourage you to stay with the new challenge long enough to get over any resistance you may initially feel.

However you plot your route to a new challenge, keep an optimistic eye on your future horizon and use positive energy to drive you toward something inspiring and rewarding.

What to Avoid

You Make a Hasty Decision

Sometimes our frustrations can trigger a rapid decision to pick up a new challenge and make a radical change in our lives. This can result in our not spending enough time exploring the possibilities that are likely to succeed, and we may find ourselves languishing in the after effects of a hasty and imprudent decision. Try to leave yourself a way back to your starting point before investing everything in a new challenge.

You Fail to Accept that You Made a Mistake

One precipitous decision can easily lead to a series of others as we try to correct our first mistake in choosing a new challenge. This can end up with us bouncing around like a pinball as we expend energy and effort trying to find a satisfying new challenge on the basis of chance. If this is happening to you, withdraw from the game and take stock of what has happened, analyze what it was that went wrong, reorient yourself, and start again. It is better to stop and accept that things have not worked out as you wished than to perpetuate the situation.

You Base Your Decision on Emotion

Basing your decision on the wrong premise is an easy mistake. If you are making a decision on the basis of an emotional response to a situation, you may make an incorrect analysis and try to fix something that is not really the problem. Emotion screens logic, and although you need to feel emotionally attuned to your decision, it also needs to sit on a sound basis. Get someone to question your assumptions and play the devil's advocate to make sure you have thought through everything properly.

You Fail to Do Your Research

Taking up a new challenge and finding that it is not at all what you expected suggests that you may not have done your research thoroughly enough. If you can, try to get a taste of what you think you would like to do before making any irrevocable decisions. Doing the research is not just a paper

exercise but an experiential one too. There is nothing like putting your feet in the shoes of your new challenge to feel what it would be like to do in earnest.

Where to Learn More

Books:

Bolles, Richard N., *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career Changers*. Ten Speed Press, 2007.

Knight, John D., *Change Your Conversations...change Your Life*. Life Is for Living, Inc., 2005.

Johnstone, Judith, *Planning a Career Change: How to Rethink Your Way to a Better Working Life*. How To Books, 2006.

Isbister, Nick, and Martin Robinson, *Who Do You Think You Are? Understanding Your Motives and Maximizing Your Abilities*. Zondervan, 1999.

Jansen, Julie, *I Don't Know What I Want, But I Know It's Not This: A Step-By-step Guide to Finding Gratifying Work*. Piatkus, 2004.

Wills, Judith, *Mid Life New Life*. Quadrille, 2005.

Web Sites:

United Planet:

Cross-Cultural Solutions: www.crossculturalsolutions.org

Alliance for Conflict Transformation: www.conflicttransformation.org

Bottom Line Secrets: http://bottomlinesecrets.com/blpnet/article.html?article_id=27567