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Coach's Corner: Face Problems or Run?

By Sharon Pahlka

Published: Monday, June 1, 2009 10:53 AM PDT

Sometimes life seems to be one problem after another. With each problem, we face a choice: run from our problems or face them.

Fearing pain, we avoid facing problems in all kinds of ways: procrastination, denial, deadening ourselves with food or drugs, or burying ourselves in work. The problem with avoiding pain this way is that the substitute becomes even more painful. Procrastination and denial can turn small problems into big ones. We may avoid the problem, but we also avoid the growth the problem demands of us. What may seem today like the end of your life or world can become the most significant, positive point of your life when you look back on it. Facing our problems almost always works better than running.

Recently, I have had a problem sleeping and put off dealing with it. Even though it kept getting worse, I left Greg Jacob's book *Say Good Night to Insomnia, the Six-Week Solution* on my nightstand unread. I told myself that dealing with it was too much time and work. My procrastination finally caused the problem to become so intolerable that I decided to face it. My life improved dramatically, and it wasn't nearly as difficult as I thought. Now I sleep and won't become dependent on sleeping pills. And I learned about myself that I tend to overrate difficulties and procrastinate because of that.

When we face pain, the perseverance and courage of others can inspire us. A mother, after the death of her physically and mentally challenged daughter, writes, "We are mainly who we are today (good and bad) because of the experiences she brought in our lives." A friend, after years of dialysis and three transplants, says, "Adversity introduced me to who I am and what I'm supposed to do." She's not alone. Adversity introduces all of us to ourselves.

Ultimately, life gains meaning through confronting and resolving our problems. Problems call forth courage and wisdom. They cause us to grow spiritually and mentally. Facing one problem helps us learn to face others. As Benjamin Franklin said, "Those things that hurt, instruct." So, get those problems you have been hiding out from under the bed and face them — even if it hurts.

Coaching Question: Have there been times when adversity has served you?

Coaching Tip: Don't allow yourself to be defined by your hardships; instead, face them.

Homework: List three problems you have today and the avoidance pattern you often use. Envision what it would look like to face and go through each problem, or even to endure rather than run from it.

Quotes: "Not being beautiful was a true blessing ... Not being beautiful forced me to develop my inner resources. The pretty girl has a handicap to overcome."

– Golda Meir

“Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records.”

– *William Arthur Ward*

“To live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in suffering.”

– *Viktor Frankl*

Resources: *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Victor Frankl.

Sharon Pahlka is a life coach and speaker. In her coaching, she helps her clients live well and meaningfully, especially those with chronic health challenges. Sharon’s column, “Coach’s Corner,” offers helpful tips from her work.

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