

The "Risky Business" of Life

What's riskier: skydiving or leaving your marriage of 18 years?

For many of us, psychological risks—such as quitting a secure, well-paying job to go back to school or speaking on stage or choosing to adopt a child—may ultimately feel more dangerous than those of physical derring-do.

Yet these are the challenges that we are asked to face time and again if we are to continue to grow as individuals. Each time we take a risk that contributes to our personal growth or enhances our self-esteem or enriches our lives, we make the choice to stretch ourselves, knowing there are no guarantees and chancing possible failure. It can be exhilarating and terrifying at the same time.

Growth-producing risks generally fall into three categories.

Self-Improvement Risks

These are the risks you take when you want to get ahead, learn something new or make a distant dream a reality. Maybe you want to change careers, or take singing lessons. Perhaps you decide to learn to speak Italian... in Italy! On one side of the risk is the person you are and, on the other, the person you want to become.

Commitment Risks

All commitment risks have emotional stakes, whether you pledge yourself to a person or a relationship or to a cause, a career, or a value. According to Joseph Ilardo, author of *Risk-Taking for Personal Growth*, if you avoid making emotional commitments, you all but guarantee that your emotional growth will be stunted.

Self-Disclosure Risks

Communication risks fall into the

category of self-disclosure. Anytime you tell someone how you really feel, you're taking the chance of self-disclosure. When you open up to others and reveal who you really are, how you feel and what you want and need, you make yourself vulnerable. It is impossible to be assertive without doing so.

All risks carry with them the possibility of failure. Often significant sacrifices must be made before any real benefits are realized. Routines may have to change; the familiar may have to be released. You may be rejected or humiliated. In the case of commitment to a value, personal safety may be in danger. Consider those who stand up for what they believe in or put their own health and well-being on the line in the name of a cause. Challenging yourself is often the key to personal growth and development.

Are you a risk-taker? Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does every decision involve endless debates with yourself?
- Do you accept less than you should because you're afraid to speak up?
- Do you have difficulty making emotional commitments to others?
- Do you make up excuses that stop you from taking advantage of opportunities for self-improvement?
- Does fear of disapproval keep you from doing what you'd like to do?

A "yes" answer to these questions indicates a reluctance to take risks, which may mean you tend to play it safe and reject change.

Consider this: to fulfill your potential, to discover your real self and live an authentic life, you must take risks. And while security may appear to be the absence of change, the only genuine security lies in taking risks. *

10 Signs of S-T-R-E-S-S

Despite its bad reputation, stress isn't actually a product of only negative things. It's a response from your body to changes in your life. "Good" things can cause stress as frequently as "bad." The stress created by getting a new job or the arrival of a baby can take its toll just as much as that caused by losing someone you care about or getting laid off from work.

Following are 10 warning signs of stress. Simple stress reduction techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, relaxation or exercise may be able to reduce these symptoms.

- 1. Fatigue or exhaustion** that is interfering with daily activities.
- 2. Sleeplessness or bouts of insomnia** caused by a list of concerns and worries.
- 3. Irritability or moodiness** that may trigger negative responses and reactions.
- 4. Anxiety** about what the future holds.
- 5. Depression** that affects your ability to cope and weakens your spirit.
- 6. Lack of concentration** that makes it difficult to perform familiar tasks.
- 7. Health problems** such as headaches, backaches, chest pains, constipation or diarrhea, or a change in appetite.
- 8. Anger** and difficulty in controlling your temper.
- 9. Social withdrawal** from friends and activities that once brought pleasure.
- 10. Feeling overwhelmed** or out of control.

*If you are experiencing several of these warning signs, or you're unable to maintain balance, you may need help in identifying and dealing with the stressors in your life. **

A Letter From

Margaret Hood Black



As much as we might try to avoid risks, the fact is that life is full of them.

The good news is that taking risks—the kind that stretch us personally—can significantly enhance our self-esteem and enrich our life, even if they are often frightening as we go through them. The cover article reviews the three categories of those kinds of growth-inducing risks.

The quiet voice of our intuition, too little used by many of us, can offer direction in the kinds of risks we undertake and can be helpful in navigating nearly every aspect of our life, as the page 3 article on our brilliant “GPS” describes.

In between these two features is a quiz to find out—truly, no-fooling—if you are too busy. It’s an important fact to be honest with yourself about, because being too busy can affect your health, your relationships and your peace of mind. The Top 10 helps in another way by listing the warning signs of too much stress.

And finally, a look at creativity and its role in a healthy, happy life. Too often, we think of creativity as belonging only to artists, writers, musicians and the like. But it’s there inside all of us, and letting it out is a positive, life-enhancing move.

Please don’t hesitate to call if you’d like more information about any of the articles, or if you have any questions. And, of course, you’re welcome to pass this issue along to others.

Are You Too Busy for Your Own Good?

These days, being “crazy busy” has become a national lament. Time just seems to speed up or evaporate beyond our control. We dash here and there, adding more and more to our plate. It all seems so NECESSARY. But not taking enough down time can wreak havoc on our health, relationships and peace of mind. The reality is: how we fill our time and how we spend it is our choice. Answer the following questions to discover if you’re caught up in the “too-busy” cycle.



True False

1. I’m always doing “urgent” things and trying to catch up.
2. I allow myself to drift into obligations when I don’t know how much time or energy they’ll require.
3. I find myself running from when I get up in the morning until I go to bed at night. I’m always tired and never feel like I accomplished enough.
4. I seldom schedule a day off for myself and when I do, I tend to fill it with activities.
5. I don’t make time for “self-care” activities: physical exercise, nurturing or “pampering” myself, cultural stimulation, spiritual well-being, learning something new, playing or just doing nothing.
6. I seldom have time to do the things I really love.
7. My work and project areas are cluttered with “I’ll look at this later” stacks and “to-do” piles.
8. I often miscalculate how long certain activities will take.
9. I often miss deadlines or work long hours to meet a deadline.
10. I respond to interruptions such as phone calls, faxes, email, beepers and pagers, and allow them to take me off track.
11. I try to keep things in my head rather than making lists. If I do make a daily “to-do” list, it’s impossible to complete in a day.
12. I tend to move from one urgent thing to the next, rather than working toward specific goals and objectives.
13. I find myself constantly wishing I had more time or projecting an imaginary future when I have more time, making comments such as “as soon as...” or “next year...”
14. I spend time running errands and rushing because I didn’t plan well enough.
15. I spend time doing things I could pay someone else to do.
16. I often do things because I “should,” or continue to do things that no longer fit who I am.
17. Other people complain that my schedule doesn’t allow enough time for them.

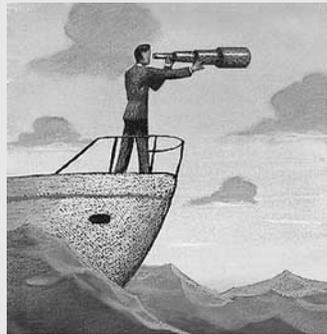
These fast-paced, high-energy days it’s difficult to stay out of the “too-busy” lane. But if you answered “true” to most of these questions and would like some help slowing down your life, please don’t hesitate to call. ✱

Your Brilliant Internal GPS

How to Develop and Use Your Innate Intuitive Skills

Do you sometimes know who's calling before you even answer the phone? Ever felt like you're in danger for no apparent reason? Or feel like something just isn't right about something your kid just told you? That's your intuition speaking to you and it makes good sense to listen.

Just like bats have built-in sonar that guides them in the dark, we humans have an internal guidance system that gives us information beyond the limits of our other five senses. Intuition, our so-called sixth sense, is something we're all born with and, like breathing, it's operational all the time.



Intuition doesn't talk to us the way our other senses do. Its voice is fragmented, symbolic and often sudden. We get an urge to call someone immediately, a certain song comes to us out of the blue, a particular object or image appears again and again.

Call these messages hunches, gut feelings, inklings or just "something in my bones," intuition is that still, small voice inside that looks out for our well-being. And, according to intuition experts, our sixth sense is sending us "hits" all the time. They are answers or options to questions we may not even know we have asked.

"Intuition is an internal guidance system we're all born with," says Nancy Rosanoff, author of *Intuition Workout: A Practical Guide to Discovering and Developing Your Inner Knowing*. "It just needs to be brought out so you can use it to your advantage."

Like strengthening your physical body by exercising, you can develop your intuitive skills to better serve you in many areas of your life.

In relationships, your higher consciousness can steer you toward healthy unions or away from painful ones. And while intuition is no substitute for research, planning and common sense, it can be a useful additional tool in financial decision-making. In health, holistic therapies, including intuitive healing, are becoming an adjunct to mainstream medicine. "Nothing is more exciting than learning to trust what your body is trying to tell you and then acting on this knowledge," says Christiane Northrup, M.D.

Here are a few tips to help strengthen your intuitive skills so you can grow more trusting of your hunches.

Clear your mind

Relax and unclutter your brain.

Know the question

Focus the question, and understand what you're asking. Not, "Will I get a new job?" but, "What will my new job be like?" Look for impressions, feelings and physical reactions, not specific "yes" or "no" answers.

Pay attention to details

Read between the lines. You can prime your perception skills by monitoring how people interact with you.

Map your messages

Take notes on hunches, inklings and gut feelings then track events and situations to get an ear for the sound of your intuitive voice. Also, piecing together random bits of inner information might give you insight into a bigger picture.

Don't judge

Listen to your inner voice and accept what comes without judgment. Don't let your logical mind interfere with your intuitive mind.

Notice symbols and other nonlinear clues

You may have to translate or decode recurring images and pictures that are unique to your intuitive alphabet.

Expect mistakes

Not in the intuitive process, but in your interpretation. Remember with practice, you'll improve.

With practice, you will be able to use your intuition, not as a replacement for, but as an enhancement to your own good judgment. Listen to and learn

from your intuition. It can show you how to be more discerning and compassionate, how to trust yourself to make decisions that are true to you, and, ultimately, instill a deeply felt belief in yourself and your dreams. ✧



Creativity Is a Way of Life, Not Just About Making Art

No matter what you may have been told, every one of us is creative. It's as much a part of us as our voice and breath and fingerprints.

Creativity isn't just about making "art." Cooking, gardening, keeping a journal, handiwork and crafts are all creative acts. Arranging flowers or rearranging furniture, painting a picture or painting a room, singing on stage or singing in the shower—these are all responses to the "call."

That call is the call to create, and it is universal, bidding each of us to bring something new into being. It may be as faint as the stirring of butterfly wings or loud as a brass band on the Fourth of July. Or you may not hear a sound at all, but feel an urging, an inner pull, a sense of excitement and longing that resonates from within.

Creative expression helps us feel connected to the world and builds bridges of understanding. It nourishes us and helps us grow, provides insights and deeper understandings. Creativity is fun, exciting and playful. It relieves

stress and releases tension. It provides a way of communication when normal channels may be blocked or are insufficient—when we must speak in colors and textures and shimmering visions and music.

Creativity is love expressing itself; it heals and renews. Our creations are mirrors in which others may see themselves and the signature of our lives that says, "This is how I saw it."

Creativity is a way of living. It's being spontaneous and playful, exercising the imagination, finding solutions, and embracing possibilities and doing it all with passion.

Yet for all the joy and fulfillment it brings, some resist the call to be creative. In our culture, the ideas that "time is money" and "art is frivolous" hold certain sway and old messages like "stay inside the lines" or "you can do better than that" have remarkable staying power. It takes courage to look beneath

the surface of what we've been told to find our heart's desire.

Creativity requires risk-taking. It asks us to surrender, to lose control, to trust. It's an act that says we believe in ourself.

Honoring the creative Self means finding time, making space, being patient and taking the chance of looking foolish. You cannot care too much what others think or say. You must be willing to start over and stay with it; creativity takes stamina. There are no magical secrets or absolute rules. Creativity can't be taught. You just do it.

Like the body's natural urge for motion and the human need for connection and community, the spirit longs to express itself. So when you hear the call to create, answer, "Yes!" It is your self searching for your Self, a movement toward being whole. *



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