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You're Not Lost

An Inspired Action Plan for Finding Your Own Way

Maxie McCoy • © 2018

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Women in Business / Women's Careers

Take-Aways

- Feeling lost will help you determine what you want from life.
- Appreciate the discomfort of growing.
- The best-laid plans may not be the best for you.
- Don't worry if you're not an expert. Just have a growth mind-set.
- Your friends see aspects of you that you don't.
- Self-care should be at the top of your to-do list.
- Anyone who succeeds has worked through difficult times.
- Small actions increase your confidence to take bigger ones.
- Make sure your thoughts support you.
- Fear arises when you challenge your comfort zone.

Recommendation

Inspirational writer and interviewer Maxie McCoy asks you to celebrate feeling that you're lost, because that brings the promise of discovering a life true to your dreams. It takes work, but the tips, exercises and worksheets at the end of each chapter help. McCoy sometimes uses raw, informal language to motivate you to examine who you are and what you want. Her accessible manual prompts women to move forward in a new direction. If you've ever come close to achieving a five-year plan only to find your dreams changing, McCoy's advice is for you.

Summary

Feeling lost will help you determine what you want from life.

Feeling lost is uncomfortable, but can help you find your passion. The discomfort forces you to examine your life and goals.

You don't need to know your final destination – but to take a journey, you must have faith in yourself. Feelings of uncertainty may overwhelm you, but they're only feelings. They don't equate to your value as a woman. Ignore or actively reject society's external expectations.

Determining who you are and embracing yourself helps clarify your path. When you are yourself, you attract people and new opportunities. Seek out the child inside you who danced freely without shame. Cultivate the expressive feelings that lifted you up before society repressed them.

“Being exactly who you are is a powerful energy source.”

Instead of internalizing social messages that, as a woman, you fall short, emphasize what makes you unique. Spending time on social media sites can leave you envious. Instead of defining yourself by other people's lives, concentrate on yourself. Your path may be different. That's fantastic! Don't be afraid to stand out. Ignore your list of what you believe you need to change about yourself. Instead, emphasize those things as your unique assets. You don't need to be better at something, look prettier or speak differently. You only need to believe in yourself.

Appreciate the discomfort of growing.

It's normal to want to move through discomfort quickly. However, experiencing discomfort is important. You may distract yourself from feeling sad or confused by making a to-do list or by keeping busy. Learn to examine your feelings, and ask why you're feeling that way. Getting to the core of the issues may take several rounds of self-questioning.

Creating tasks to get your mind off your feelings only lengthens the time you feel them. Clarity doesn't come from binge-watching TV or obsessively worrying about the future, but by acknowledging and accepting how you feel today.

“You’ll pull the goodness of the future toward you by being seriously present in your own life.”

You may not always make the right decisions, but learn from each decision you make. Instead of putting energy into determining your path, experience your life and understand that you are where you need to be.

Artist and entrepreneur Ashley Longshore urges women to have positive mind-sets and to appreciate the lives they have. Her three axioms for bolstering other women are:

1. Support and love yourself.
2. Believe that you’ll come out of bad situations better.
3. You can learn from the trials you face in life.

The best-laid plans may not be best for you.

An author wanted to host an ESPN show. She developed numerous five- and 10-year plans connecting smaller milestones to help her achieve her ultimate goal. But as she drew closer to hosting such a show, she realized she no longer wanted to do it. She had focused so much on her destination as her source of happiness that she felt lost when she realized it wasn’t what she wanted. However, not knowing her end goal, while uncomfortable, allowed her to find something that still excited her. Acting on those feelings, even without a clear understanding of the end game, will lead to success.

You can figure out the “essence” of what you want, even if you can’t put it in a five-year plan. When you are true to yourself, opportunities will arise. Only you can determine what sparks your curiosity and interest.

“When you’re doing something that excites you and resonates with your soul...just keep doing it.”

As you take action, your confidence grows. With greater confidence, you take bigger steps. Put your energy into what excites you, and your actions will support your passion.

The author who had hoped to host an ESPN TV show realized instead that her true passion was writing about women’s experiences and sharing them with others. This came to her when a workshop facilitator asked her to write down what excited her. She realized none of her planned goals or current work made that list.

Don’t worry if you’re not an expert. Just have a growth mind-set.

If the idea you find exciting isn’t something you already know a lot about or believe you’re good at, don’t worry. You can learn a new skill or improve those you have. As Stanford professor Carol Dweck explained, people with a growth mind-set recognize that everyone has the ability to improve a skill. Successful people have this belief, and – as opposed to those with inflexible, fixed mind-sets – are able to overcome challenges with a positive attitude.

Be open to not being the best. If you want to write, create a blog and publish your work. Your blog posts may not be your best writing, but they will help you improve. No one is great immediately.

Curiosity can lead you to new discoveries if you only take the time. Being an expert isn't a requirement, nor is youth. Designer Vera Wang started creating gowns when she was 40. A growth mind-set will help you see you can work toward anything you want on your own timeline.

Your friends see aspects of you that you don't.

Your friends often see where you're going before you do. A group of female friends who support, encourage and inspire you help you achieve your goals. Don't believe the cultural myth of competing, backbiting women. Your perceptive friends will point out your positive attributes to help you acknowledge what you can do.

Nurture and honor strong friendships. Have 15 different roles in your "girl gang." Some people will serve multiple roles. They may range from someone whose hug resets you immediately to another who points out when you've fallen short. Other friends can provide energy, be with you in times of sadness, help define what you need to do and believe in you fiercely.

If you enjoy such relationships already, make sure those people know how important they are to you. If you don't have such a group, ask friends to introduce you to their friends, find groups that align with your interests, enroll in a class to connect with new people or send a message to someone on social media.

"If you honor the need, you'll create the solution."

In a 2014 article, personal branding entrepreneur Gina Bianchini suggested asking a friend to conduct an anonymous survey. The purpose of such a survey is to get feedback from people who support and care about you. The questions should focus on what makes you unique, what your strengths are, what restricts you and where they think you'll be in five years. Using an online survey tool, your friend can analyze the responses. This will likely fuel confidence in yourself and your abilities.

Self-care should be at the top of your to-do list.

To generate enthusiasm and energy, be "number one" on your list. Create a ritual of self-care that can be as small as taking a bath every night. The time you take to recharge allows you to be in the present moment and appreciate your life

"The best self-care is simple, like infusing something you already do with intention."

Performing a ritual calms you down, builds your confidence and motivates you. Visualizing how you will succeed can help you do things well. Doing this ritual consciously and repeatedly creates a habit. A habit that supports another habit is a "keystone habit." For instance, gratitude is a keystone habit. Writing down three things you are grateful for every night improves your attitude.

Anyone who succeeds has worked through difficult times.

When you see a polished businesswoman giving a presentation, you may think she never had hesitation or doubts. Those who succeed questioned themselves and felt insecure, but they pushed through. Learning

to move forward when you doubt your abilities or skills builds confidence. Moving forward shows that you can take on new challenges.

Nervousness is normal in challenging situations. Anytime you forge into unknown territory, you feel uncomfortable. That's good. If you are comfortable, you're probably not moving forward. Don't let your doubt win. Approach a new challenge as if you belong on that stage. Believe in yourself, and others will too. If you appear comfortable, your emotions will follow.

Tap into confidence-building techniques. For example, clenching your fists will increase your willpower. If you sit in a soft chair, you won't negotiate as well as you will if you sit in a hard one. During difficult times, emulate someone you admire. This teaches how to convey confidence despite your uncertainty.

Small actions increase your confidence to take bigger ones.

Small actions can lead to big success. Small steps aren't glorious, but they are important. Each time you achieve something, no matter how insignificant, it bolsters your confidence, allowing you to tackle something bigger. Because you're moving slowly and deliberately, if you want to change your ultimate destination, you can.

"You have to allow today to count."

More important than your final destination is focusing on your commitment to yourself. When your enthusiasm falters, think about who you will be in 12 months. Wanting immediate results is normal, but people who imagine obtaining their goals have more discipline in the present. The media give the impression that people become famous in a day, but the reality is that most well-known people worked for many years before they achieved recognition. Your daily work at small tasks helps you achieve your goals. Celebrate everyday events that support your goals.

Make sure your thoughts support you.

Each minute, 1,300 words run through your mind, and 90% of them repeat. This can create a running loop of support or destruction. You control your thoughts and how you interpret events. Your brain's reflexive negative bias – which dates to cave-dwelling days – makes it harder to be positive.

"Words can be your magic wand or your atomic bomb."

Say that your day starts badly. If you rehash the negative event in thoughts and words, it will be foremost in your mind. Choose to find and think about good things that happened. This requires curtailing and changing your inner critic. Words have power. Think of someone you love cursing you. Envision that same person saying "I love you" with equal energy. Relate these emotions to the way you think or talk to yourself. Positive affirmations help keep your inner critic in check by creating awareness. You will always have negative thoughts, but you can learn to disregard and refocus them.

If you are having trouble making a decision, pay attention to your "second brain," your gut. Scientists have found that neurons around your abdomen serve as an "intelligence system" to translate your physical reactions. When you can't make a decision, lie quietly and visualize how your life will be after you make

the decision. How does your body respond? Do you feel different when you try to reason out the decision intellectually? No decision will be perfect. Concentrating on making a perfect decision impedes making one. Reduce your anxiety, and choose the option that works for you today.

Fear arises when you challenge your comfort zone.

Fear and doubt may seem alike, but they aren't. Doubt arises when you question your belief in yourself and what you are doing. Fear responds to a sense of danger. It will appear when you try something new. As you build your confidence and take larger steps, fear will ride shotgun trying to convince you that you will fail. Learn to recognize those feelings, and move through them.

“The goal is to keep fear from running the show.”

Underneath fear, you will find excitement about what you're building and doing. If you can deconstruct the fear and define why you feel it, you may find that none of those reasons turn out to be bad or life-threatening. The moment you understand why you feel fear, it will back down. Learning to work through fear helps you keep moving forward. The goal is not to be without fear, but to understand it. As you increasingly believe in yourself and follow your passions, some people will criticize you, both in day-to-day life and online. They may belittle your choices, but their opinions don't matter. Listen to your own voice.

About the Author

Maxie McCoy, the host and producer of the live-audience show *Let Her Speak*, writes and speaks on female leadership issues.



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