
7 Ways to Stop Living in the Past

Are you Living in the Past

Have you ever wondered why you always seem to end up in the same place in your life, same situations or with the same type of people? Ever wonder why every time you get in a new relationship it results the same type of relationship you were in last? Do you always set the same goals every year, then keep breaking them? Do you find you always end up talking yourself out of everything, or that you always think of the worse case scenario? Surprisingly enough what most people don't realize is that we tend to recreate the past over and over again often times without even realizing it. Ever feel like your trapped in an eternal DejaVu. Have you ever wondered why that is, why nothing ever seems to change?

I find that most of us have one of two ways of dealing with our past. Some of us try to bury it, we don't even want to think about the mistakes we've made or the pain we've endured. Other's of us seem to be stuck in our past, reliving it in our minds day after day. You know research shows that neither of these scenarios is particularly healthy for us. If you think about it, it makes sense. If we avoid facing our past, we end up failing to recognize the many, often limiting, ways our past is influencing our present. On the other hand, if we live in our past we end up over-identifying, ruminating and letting ourselves be ruled by it. Living in our past prevents us from living in the present whereas, ignoring our past leaves us unknowingly ignoring how our past is affecting our present. Neither of these are good for us? So why do we do this?

Principle of Anticipation

Believe it or not our brains work on the principle of anticipation. We as individuals typically can't act without first anticipating what we are going to do or how something will play out. We all spend time contemplating all the possibilities before we act on something and that's normal. There is comfort in being able to predict or anticipate the future. If we can predict the future then it allows us the ability to prepare for it. Our memories are meant to protect us from harm or situations that may result is something negative happening. For example, ever know anyone that was bit by a dog when they were younger and now they are very cautious around dogs or maybe they even avoid them all together? If we encountered a situation or a person that we perceive as dangerous that memory helps us to remember to avoid that situation or person in the future. In general, the ability to predict our future experiences based on what we've learned in the past is a good thing.

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How our Memory can be Self-Destructing

Where the problem comes in is when we want to break free from self-destructive patterns, bad situations, or bad habits. This same exact memory system that protects us can actually keep us trapped too. Based on our past memories we make predictions about our current situation and what we are expecting to happen. For this reason our past experiences can become limiting, preventing us from moving forward. What happens is that as things happen in our lives we tend to incorporate those events into our stored beliefs about our world and ourselves. What happens is we start to believe what I call “false truths”. For example, my son believes he will not be good at the undergraduate courses he would have to take in college so he feels like he would be setting himself up to fail if he went to college. His memory was that he was not good in school and therefore this memory is trying to protect him from failing ultimately, preventing him from taking action to go to college. He is expecting that based on his past experience with school and what he perceives as a failure that he will not do well this time. The reality is he had no interest in school and just simply did not apply himself. He very smart and capable but he has told himself that he isn't.

Let me give you some other examples ... You had a bad marriage so you decide you never want to get married again. You believe that marriage is not for you or that the next one will end up the same way. You were laid off at a job or lost a job so now you are expecting it to happen again and you have formulated a belief that something must be wrong with you or your performance. You were cheated on in a past relationship and now you always worry that the same thing will happen to you again. You were in an abusive relationship and now you believe you are not worthy of love and have a low self worth. None of this is true of course, but you have become to believes the lies you had been told or that you told yourself. Sadly, we all do this; something happens, we formulate a belief about what it means, and then we use that belief to predict what is going to happen in similar future situations. We then act based on what we anticipate will happen. Guess what? We actually end up creating the exact scenario we were expecting. This process is so automatic, most of the time we don't have any awareness that it is even occurring. So How can we work on changing these destructive habits.

Step 1: Awareness

The first step is to notice that you are expecting something negative or unwanted to occur. Take note of your emotions about that particular situation. If you notice that you are expecting something negative then you will be filled with emotions like fear, dread or anxiety. Once you are aware of these emotions try asking yourself what is it you want instead? I know for myself I would get anxiety when I was invited to any social event, I would fill up with anxiety and dread. I just knew I wasn't going to have a good time and my immediate response was to find a way out of going. If I had no other choice but to go I maintained a low profile and had my early escape

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all planned out. Guess what? The result I was expecting was exactly what happened, I did not have a good time. What I learned was that when I was able to start identifying that I was doing this I was able to start working toward a different outcome. The first step is to be aware you are doing this, most of the time we don't give much thought beyond how we are feeling.

Step 2: Acknowledgement

The next step is acknowledgement. For years I felt like I was always the victim of circumstances and that things just seem to always happen to me; that nothing ever went the way I wanted, that I couldn't do anything right. Life just had it out for me. If this is you then give yourself a slap! What I have learned is that almost everything in life we created through our own decisions in one way or another. There is almost no situation where we can say we were completely free from any blame. For my son's situation, if he can acknowledge that his perceived failure was a result of a lack of effort the reality that he really is capable will be more real. Therefore he may recognize that he has the ability to put in more effort this time therefore changing the outcome. Often times if can really analyze a situation, objectively, we can see where we played a role in responsibility for the situation. We need to simply acknowledge that there are some things in life that we just cant control and that what happened in the past is just that, the past. The great thing is that since we have created most of our own circumstances by our own choices we also have the power to change our circumstances too.

Step 3: Forgiveness

Ever wonder what is keeping you in that space? Do you feel guilt or regret? Are you harboring resentment or bitterness? These types of feelings can keep you in that space. Living in the past is essentially a manifestation of non-forgiveness. If you really take a step back and think about what you aren't forgiving, or who aren't you forgiving and forgive you can learn to move forward. This can apply to every situation. Some people are not cut out for school or maybe they weren't challenged enough or just didn't see the importance of school at the time. My son needs to forgive himself so he can move forward.

Step 4 : Surrender, Accept, and Trust

Surrender to what happened and accept the result that it had on things. Trust that your life is meant to unfold exactly the way it is for some reason. For whatever reason, you are meant to be right here right now. You were meant to lose that person, to have that experience, and to feel those emotions. Your job is to learn from them and how to stop living in the past – not to keep reliving it.

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Step 5: Learn to Live in The Moment

Choose to live in the moment, if you are fully present right now, then you can't relive yesterday or condemn yourself for what happened. What happened is done, it is over; it is finished. You can choose to stop living in the past; or you can choose to drown yourself in pity, shame and regret. This is a conscious choice you have to make. If you can learn to forgive the past, and accept that what happened was just that, the past, you will be free to live in this moment. This moment is now, not what happened to you in the past.

Step 6: deposit to the happy bank

Every day take stock of what you currently have in your life and all the things you have to be grateful for. Make a conscious effort to physically write down things in your life that you're grateful for everyday. The more you do this the more grateful you will become and the easier it will be to live in the present moment. As a result, you manifest more happiness in your life. You will begin to notice even the smallest things that you'd previously taken for granted. Next spend some time planning ahead. The future will seem a lot less scary if you have some kind of plan in place, a direction and goals will help you look ahead instead of back.

Step 7: Work on You

When we are filled with self doubt and insecurities, our choices reflect it. We will tolerate things that we otherwise would not normally accept, we tend to expect less of ourselves and others and we end up settling for less than what we deserve. When you can become more confident and self assured everything in your life can change for the better, in ways you could only dream of.

Don't be a victim of your past by reliving it over and over again. You are not those lies you told yourself and you are not your past you have the power to change most things in your life. You just have to realize that you do and know that you can.

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