

Changing It Up

Have you ever noticed how some people keep making the same mistake over and over and over again? You sit back and wonder where their common sense went.

Like the gals that keep picking the loser boyfriends time and time again. Or the men who gravitate to women that chew them up and spit them out.

Or how about your co-workers that complain and complain and complain about their job, boss, cubicle, co-workers, whatever, but still show up to work every morning and never contemplate looking for a job they actually like.

We all know people like this. Some days we have the patience of Job and we do our utmost to help, even if it's just to supply an ear. Our sweaters are often soggy from shouldering their tears.

A girlfriend of mine divorced her husband a few years ago. She was a great wife. Learned his sports, loved his friends, and embraced his family. They took plenty of vacations, always at his suggestion and to locations of his choice. He was actually a really nice guy, and for all appearances they had a great life.

She catered to his needs year after year, unbeknownst to the rest of us, at the expense of what she really wanted out of life. One day she had enough. She left that marriage, bound and determined to get back on track with her own interests, dreams and desires.

Then she met a guy. Fell in love, and the concessions started all over again. His interests, which she thought were wonderful. His friends, who were awesome. His family, who loved and embraced her. Again!

Slowly but surely, without her even realizing it, her dreams were once again put on hold as she loved and helped and steered him in the direction he wanted to go.

It was painfully obvious to me she was repeating exactly the same cycle with her new man as she had for years with the old one. Certainly the circumstances were different, he was different, but her willingness to let go of her own dreams for the sake of his was glaringly apparent.

The crazy thing is that we see this cycle or habit of repeating the same mistake in others, but we don't always recognize it in ourselves. And it occurs in every aspect of our lives, not just the big things like marriage and divorce.

Although I have been riding a road bike for eons, I recently decided to upgrade my mountain biking abilities from casual trail rider to full-on mountain biker. With a new, gleaming, full suspension bike under me, I hit the trails. It fast became obvious that I would need some instruction if I wanted to proceed past casual rider status.

I made a quick call to an old friend and her husband. She rides at my level; his skills put him on another planet all together. Years earlier he had coached me in learning the technical aspects of riding a road bike, and I sort of hoped he'd do the same for me with the mountain bike.

My nerves were at an all-time high our first ride together, and it took a bit before I settled into some sort of a groove. The Hubby took it all in stride and let me get my act together.

Eventually we came to a pile of logs stacked about two and a half feet high. I screeched to a halt and shook my head in defiance. I was NOT going to attempt jumping over it, not that day anyway. Although I wanted to be better than a casual rider, when faced with actually having to work at it, I took the easy way out.

The Hubby looked at me pensively as I carried my bike over, but didn't say a word.

Down the trail a ways, we came upon another log jump. I screeched to a halt again, now out of habit.

This time The Hubby spoke up. With his voice of ultimate authority bellowing over me and a feeling of do or die, I relinquished and let him show me how to jump the log pile.

He went over the required technical skills in great detail. Broke down every aspect of what I had to do. He even showed me how it should look by jumping it himself, twice.

Off I went, chocking back tears. I'm not sure if they were from fear of crashing or anger at being pushed, but I swallowed deep, did what he said, and jumped over that log pile. With a prize-winning grin, I looked up expectantly at my master, waiting for a congratulations and a pat on the back.

"That wasn't pretty. You didn't do a single thing I told you - there was no skill in that at all. We're not leaving here until you follow my instructions and master that jump my way!"

So much for the compliment.

He was relentless in making me change my behavior and learn the proper technique. We did that jump again and again and again. Once I let go of my preconceived ideas of how it should be done, and my thoughts that maybe I really was just a casual rider, I mastered it. We jumped many more log piles and obstacles that day, and I made every single one. I was ecstatic and I finally got my compliment.

If only life were that easy. If only we had someone like The Hubby watching our every move or decision and then teaching us the better way. It would certainly save us from a heaping pile of turmoil.

But we don't have The Hubby watching over, reminding us that we're repeating the same mistakes again and again. We're on our own for that, mostly because we're not that open to our friends telling us we're making a big mistake. There is something maddening and argument-inducing about someone cutting through the friend barrier and telling us something we'd rather not hear.

So then, this is the lesson for today. Knowing that repeating the same actions will result in the same outcome, we must be willing to change things up if we expect a different result.

We have to stop and take a good long look at ourselves and the behaviors or attitudes that got us to where we are. When we start to see the patterns, we have to be willing to change things up.

If my girlfriend expects things to progress differently with her new man, she must change up the way she absorbs herself into his life so that she never loses sight of her own. If she doesn't, she will end up in exactly the same position she was in with husband number one. Lost in the Sea of Him.

If we're not good with identifying our repeat patterns, we need to be open to asking for help. Whether that's from a friend, a professional or a stranger who is willing to listen to the entire story, we need to check our ego at the door and listen to what's being said.

Lord knows I wasn't thrilled to have The Hubby point out so matter-of-factly the errors of my mountain bike jumping ways. There is something humbling about having your weaknesses pointed out again and again. But there was a purpose to it, and that's what made the difference. I wanted to learn the correct way, so checking the ego, as hard as it was, was the only way I could be successful.

Chances are one of your friends is more aware of the patterns you are repeating than you are. The question is – what are you more willing to do - make the same mistake again – or have your ego momentarily bruised by having that pattern pointed out?

We all make mistakes. We learn the best lessons on this journey of life from them. Good luck with changing it up – it is hard work, but trust me, the rewards are worth the effort.

Till next time,
Louise

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