

SEVERE TRAUMA & STRESS RECOVERY WORKSHOPS

14. HOW TO USE THE LETTER FROM THE FUTURE

Now that you have completed the letter, what did you learn? What did you include in the letter that is not yet happening in your life? What would be the smallest* behavioural step you could take towards making one of those things begin to happen? Do you want to try that step?

What difference would that small step make if it continued over time? Are other small steps needed? What would be the next smallest one? What will the result(s) be for each of the steps you can identify? Do you want to start? If not, is it the wrong goal? If you want to start, but feel stuck, are there any advantages to not starting? If so, is there some way that some of the advantages of not starting (such as extra time, etc.) could be preserved to some degree without you staying stuck? What will be the consequences (how will you feel in 5, 10, 15, 20 years, if you do not start?) The purpose of this question is to identify your motivation. If you still want to start, don't be discouraged by the smallness of steps. If you need inspiration for the power of small steps, go and interview a successful quilter, or writer, or tile layer, or anyone who has work that progresses gradually. In fact, what work doesn't progress gradually? You are your own greatest project!

*Sometimes people ask, "Why imagine the smallest sign, why not big, glorious signs?" My aim here is to make whatever changes you desire become unthreatening, to scale them down to a level that is comfortably achievable for you, so that your goal is reachable. I do not believe that people fail to make changes because they are lazy. What passes for laziness is usually fear, demoralisation or despair. The smallness of these signs is intended to overcome fear and demoralisation, and to allow you to complete your own version of the proverbial Chinese Journey of a Thousand Miles, one small achievable step at a time. If the steps you identify seem too small, simply make them larger, taking care to make them no larger than is "do-able" in the next day or two. Then proceed. Remember, if the process stalls, or if you become overwhelmed or stuck, check to see if the goal is truly what you want, and if so, ask yourself if the step needs to be made smaller. Keep making it smaller until it is one you can do. Don't give up; you deserve the life you want.

(Revised version used with permission from Yvonne Dolan; and to whom full acknowledgement is given.)

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