



Newsletter

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Stuck in a Rut

Do you feel like you are trapped on a hamster wheel, spinning in circles and getting deeper into your rut? As *Mastering the Art of Quitting* explains, human beings are hardwired to have persistence, which may be helpful when life is going well, but sabotage our happiness when we are moving in a negative direction. If you feel trapped in a negative cycle, it's probably not due to lack of ideas or opportunity.



To get things moving in a positive direction again, you may need to adjust how you think about change.

We persist in doing things that do not bring the results we want for 4 key reasons:

- **The “Sunk-Cost” Fallacy.** Concentrating on what you already invested, such as time, money, and effort, may keep you stuck.
- **Pipe Dreams.** Thinking about running away to Tahiti or winning the lottery may help you feel better, but probably will not bring about real change.
- **Wishful Thinking.** Longer work hours at a harder job may land you the promotion, but then again, it may not. And in the meantime, you may get burned out.
- **Intermittent Reinforcement.** When caught in a negative situation, small positive cues may signal that things will improve eventually when in fact they may not. Instead of remaining in a dead-end situation, determine objectively whether things are actually improving overall.

If you are trapped in any of these four sticky mindsets, here are 5 strategies to get you moving again:

1. Embrace Regret

Regret may paralyze you from making progress, but studies show that *counterfactual thinking* can actually help motivate you to act. Counterfactual thinking is the process of constructively assessing how something might have happened, asking the question, “What might I have done?” It prompts a new and empowering resolve: “*When X happens (or doesn’t happen), I will do Y.*”

There are two kinds of counterfactual thinking, and only one of them has positive benefits. For example, say you are stuck because you did not get the job you wanted. You could employ *downward*

counterfactual thinking—"Well, it could have been worse. At least I got the interview"—but this will not induce any progress. The positive alternative is to try *upward counterfactual thinking*—imagining a better alternative that allows you to see how you might have acted or reacted to seek solutions. While mentally reviewing the interview, you realize that you could have been more forthcoming. So you modify your future interview behavior and get a job offer.



2. Understand Your Comfort Zone

To get out of your rut, understand what keeps you *in* it. You may be caught in your comfort zone, a situation that feels familiar because of your early childhood experience. Those that grew up in loving and supportive families rarely find themselves in a negative rut.

Those who grew up in harmful emotional environments, however, may have a comfort zone that feels familiar but is still harmful. When trying to move past a negative situation, ask yourself: Does an aspect of this situation seem familiar? Understanding where your responses are coming from is a first step toward getting yourself on the move.

3. Set Attainable Goals

Sometimes we can be overwhelmed by the amount of change required to get out of a rut, and that keeps us in it. To solve this, set manageable interim goals. Be mindful that we tend to exaggerate our abilities or wrongly attribute failure to circumstances beyond our control. Be ruthlessly realistic about how your talents match up with the goal you set. If your goal seems unreachable, pull back and master *mental contrasting*.

4. Use Mental Contrasting

Mental contrasting helps you stay motivated by that desired future, while keeping you realistic about the steps needed to fix hindrances. To do it, contemplate your ideal future *while* thinking about the short-term factors that stand in the way of achieving it. Just imagining the future alone (*indulging*) or thinking about the possible problems alone (*dwelling*) will not propel you into meaningful action and can actually leave you stuck.

5. Cause and Effect

People use this. Something good happens, and you attribute it to the prayer you uttered, the candle you lit, or the lucky shirt you wore. To get out of the rut, stop inferring cause and effect. It will just keep you on the hamster wheel even longer.

6. Do something fun and free.

Oftentimes we are looking to re-experience those exciting moments. And when they don't come, it can feel like a big letdown. Huge. But we can learn to create our own excitement, and one that doesn't cost us to do it. Children do it all the time. Watch them in the park and see how happy they are just playing. What is it that you love to do just because?

7. Work your body.

It's no secret that exercising releases endorphins that make us feel good. And along with that, it gives us a space to sort out what may be bothering us. I love to run and listen to something inspirational while pushing myself along. And if I'm a little grumpy at the start, I've usually thought myself into a good mood by the end of it.

8. Relax your body.

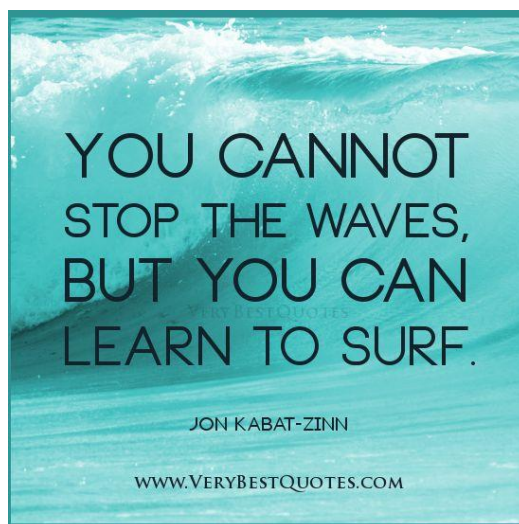
When we don't get what we are expecting or hoped for, we feel the weight of it in our bodies, which in turn reinforces negative thoughts and emotions. We may ache or feel tense which sends the message that we are not happy. But we can change the way our body feels by using some good ol' fashioned breathing techniques, imagery, or meditation. Once we can control how our body reacts to disappointment or other negative feelings, our mind is freer to think more clearly and make better decisions.

9. Write about it.

You probably already know that writing is therapeutic. It can be a place to record your biggest disappointments, failures, or regrets as well as your greatest joys, accomplishments, and goals. Try to write daily about thoughts, feelings, and experiences that are most salient, and include the steps you've taken to improve yourself. This way you can track how you've changed and progressed, and ultimately how you've turned negative experiences into positive ones.

10. Rearrange your furniture.

Our interior space typically reflects our emotional state. So if you're feeling uninspired with life at the moment, chances are your home shows it. As a kid, I used to decorate my dollhouse for hours on end until the layout was just right. I loved the challenge of trying to make something that didn't seem to be working, work. And I always found a solution. Try doing something similar, and rearrange your furniture until you find a new layout that reflects your best self. Then see if you can apply that same tenacity to improving your mood when life circumstances aren't going as planned.



This newsletter has been issued by:

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Play Therapy * Counselling * Trauma Counselling

Please note that this information must not be used for diagnostic purposes. Please visit a medical professional for a correct diagnosis.

Reference<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/tech-support/201403/5-powerful-strategies-get-you-out-rut>