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# 10 Things You Can Do to Create the Life You Want After Any Loss

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Loss of any type, rather it be a divorce, a job termination, the end of a friendship that you held dear, or the death of a love one can send you reeling into uncharted territory. For some it means the loss of an identity. You may have found pride in calling yourself a CEO, a partner, a wife and now that this title is removed you don't know what to do. For others, loss leaves you emotionally gutted with no sense of direction.

I was 33 in 2007 my husband died from advanced adrenal cancer. I spent over three years interviewing widows about their circumstances for my book *A Widow's Guide to Healing*, and often the conversation would shift to a widow telling me that she wants to start a new life for herself and her family but isn't sure where to start.

This widow isn't alone in not knowing how to begin a new life post-loss. A few months ago, I was at a dinner party and someone asked about my book, and as she began to tell me about her move, new job and starting over, I thought she was a widow. Actually, she had divorced her husband of 20-plus years and felt the loss was similar to a death.

Loss is very painful, and even thinking about it can cause a knot in your stomach, and you immediately feel a lump in your throat. And yet you do desire to shift your energy, mind and heart toward a different direction. In other words, what can you do to begin to create life that you want after your devastating loss?

Here are 10 things you can do, and these items are no particular order of importance. What is key is that you begin somewhere, and these items are here to help you create a new path for yourself. Some of these things may not work for you, while other items you may find to be a better fit.

**1. Set a goal.** The reason goal setting is important is because your self esteem took a major hit when your loss occurred. At some level, you thought you were able to control things and then you found you couldn't. Setting a goal and being able to achieve it will help you see that you still have control over some things and reaching the goal will bring back some confidence.

This goal does not have to be work-related. The goal should be small enough that it can be attainable within a reasonable amount of time. For example, if your goal is to exercise more and you have never gotten off the couch, setting a reasonable goal would be to exercise two to three times a week, not running a marathon within four weeks. Do not set yourself up for failure.

**2. Seek a mentor.** Look for someone that is doing what you desire to have for yourself. It would be ideal if you could actually talk with this person, but if you can't for some reason carefully study what they have done to be at the level you strive to obtain. For example, if you want to be a yoga teacher, then read the biographies, articles about yoga teachers you admire. You will see what lifestyle habits they adapt and begin to follow their lead. They didn't reach overnight success by taking one teacher training class. Their lifestyle incorporates multiple things which brought them to a certain level.

**3. Become very clear about what you desire.** Many times in a time of crisis, which is what loss is, you can feel that you need immediate relief and this can bring about impulsive behavior. If you want stability, then a decision made on a whim may not bring the consequence that you seek because you are not thinking everything out. If you seek trust, you can't get this from others if you do not trust yourself. Finding clarity can after a loss often takes time because the water is very muddy after the upheaval created by the loss. Don't expect to know exactly what you want within days or even weeks of your loss.

**4. Observe your thoughts.** Begin to monitor this. Don't judge your thoughts, just observe. Do you find yourself perseverating on the loss? Do you find yourself talking about some aspect of the loss in many of your conversations? Are you engaging in critical self talk? Our thoughts influence our actions. And many times, we are unaware of what we are thinking until we begin to observe our thoughts. You may be in the habit of negative self talk, and you don't even realize that you engage this behavior several times a day. You can't change something that you are not aware of, so getting an accurate picture of your thoughts is important.

**5. Stop one thing.** This may sound very remedial, but it can change things for you. Pick one behavior that you find yourself doing which is causing havoc and eliminate it. This can be very small. For example, a widow I talked with said that after her husband died, she would eat fast food every time she dropped her daughter off at gymnastics classes. Her daughter was going twice a week and this meant that this widow was eating fast food twice a week. This meal choice was reeking havoc on her blood sugar levels, which was impacting her mood and in turn she found herself being short with her daughter. This didn't mean that this widow never ate fast food, but making this one change helped on multiple levels.

Ending one behavior will allow space for something new. It will also show you that you do have control over something.

**6. Engage in new conversations.** Engaging in conversations that you haven't had before doesn't always mean that you are seeking out a complete shift in your life. If you have always loved modern art but have no intention of becoming an artist, then start going to modern art exhibits. Just being around artists and this environment will bring something positive to your day.

Also be mindful that certain friends are not healthy. Having continuous conversations with a negative tone is not going to spark a new flame. This doesn't mean that all of your friends are not healthy for you. What I am trying to be clear about is that some conversations are not a good fit for you post loss.

If you are thinking about a new career, then start to enter those conversations as well. For example, if you want to become a physical therapist, then begin to talk with other physical therapists. They will naturally bring up certain topics that are relevant to their profession that you may be unaware of if you had not spoken with them.

**7. Practice gratitude.** Now this may sound like a snarky platitude that is overused, but often in our sorrow we find it difficult to find things that are good. Part of creating a new path means changing the way we see the world, and when we view things through the lens of gratitude, our world is richer. It is difficult to bring about something new when you are not able to see that which is already present in your life.

**8. Be open to all that is unknown.** With any loss comes enormous fear and this fear can cause restriction in our thoughts and behavior. Some people literally shut down and refuse to listen to anyone. Others are not ready to listen to different opinions or views. When you live with a restricted view, it is like breathing with one lung, you are unable to expand your breath properly.

At some point opening yourself up is necessary to creating a new path. This doesn't mean that you quit your job and are now unable to provide for your family because you are practicing being open. What I am referring to is that once you allow yourself to be open without seeking an immediate answer. By being open, you will be able to see things in a different light.

**9. Accept the unresolved.** This is very painful because the loss created an amputation and you may never know why it happened. This item is not for the faint of heart and takes tremendous courage. So, I am providing this suggestion because if you are continuously seeking resolution to your loss you may find yourself deeply disappointed. Some losses will never bring answers. They do not present themselves with a reason. Seeking a reason for your loss can lead to countless tears and more loss.

**10. Ask yourself this deep question.** If you can only do one thing on this list, then this is one you may want to seriously consider. With every decision and conversation you find yourself in post-loss, ask yourself this: *"Is this going to expand my growth or restrict it?"*

Growth post-loss is very possible, if you properly nurture it. I will write more about this in a forthcoming piece. The bottom line is that new growth comes with fertile environment, and making healthy choices post-loss promotes this.

*Kristin Meekhof is the author of [A Widow's Guide to Healing: Gentle Support and Advice For The First Five Years](#). She is a speaker, writer, licensed masters level social worker and member of the University of Michigan Cancer Center Board in Ann Arbor, Michigan.*

*This post is part of [Common Grief](#), a Healthy Living editorial initiative. Grief is an inevitable part of life, but that doesn't make navigating it any easier. The deep sorrow that accompanies the death of a loved one, the end of a marriage or even moving far away from home, is real. But while grief is universal, we all grieve differently. So we started Common Grief to help learn from each other. Let's talk about living with loss. If you have a story you'd like to share, email us at [strongertogether@huffingtonpost.com](mailto:strongertogether@huffingtonpost.com).*

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