

Getting beyond *surviving* to *thriving*

By Suzanne Douglas Harris

Loss of a loved one. Divorce. Stalled career. Joblessness. Financial setback. Single parenting. Illness. Elderly parents. Death of a parent...by now you can add your own circumstances. In fact, by now you have constructed your own set – the very individual combination of life challenges which *you* are called to meet.

It takes just one glance at a greeting card stand to see that there is an entire section devoted to “coping”. And cope we must! A job loss, divorce, grief, illness...each has to be faced. And we are pretty good at responding in a way that ensures our survival. But can we have more? How do we move beyond surviving to *thriving*?

Here are five key practices that can make the difference.

1. Know that *now* is not *always*.

You hate your job, your car is broken down, you have no social life, you have no time for yourself...but *now* is not *always*! Take a look at all the elements of this moment in your life. Make a plan to “fix” what’s wrong ... but leave yourself open to possibilities you cannot yet imagine! This is but a moment in your journey through life. Those meeting the needs of younger children, rest assured as your children get older they will be more independent, and you will again have more time for your needs. Indeed, you yourself will continue to grow and become more agile in dealing with life's challenges. When you can place yourself firmly in the moment, you will feel the energy of your success and anticipate your future with excitement.

2. Give yourself rewards.

Rewards can be as simple as savoring a phone call with a friend or as extravagant as a dream vacation. In fact, expand your definition of “reward”. Treat yourself to something because it is Friday and you have worked all week – or because it is Monday and you got up for the week. Tell yourself that if you keep your composure through the next phone call from your ex-husband or mettling parent, you will spring for a sitter and go to a movie. Reward yourself for completing a tough project with a special treat, perhaps a manicure, pedicure, massage or yoga class. You are probably already good at loading up on responsibility but when you take on the practice of rewarding yourself you are going full circle. Acknowledgement of success breeds success. A side benefit: you will be more conscious of the good things in your life as you turn them into “rewards”.

3. Enjoy some fantasy.

There is little argument about the power of the mind! With a pull to focus on what you can't do, fantasy lets you focus on the potential wins. When you “make up” stories where you are the heroine, you will find it equips you to slay the dragons encountered during your daily life. Fantasy adds nerve and provides a safe place to make mistakes. Take time to create fantasy in your life.

4. Nurture your connections.

Relationships of all types are central to individual well being. Our connection with family, friends and community help us live up to who we want to be. It is part of the reason that when setting a goal like dieting, exercising or quitting smoking, it often works better when involving a family member or friend rather than trying to go it alone.

It is important to be proactive and discerning in personal relationships. The people with whom you choose to spend your time will impact your self-image. The "high" (**if you want to use the word high, I would suggest putting it in quotes. Euphoria or elation may also convey the same emotion**) one gets from feeling important to someone or from making a real difference in someone else's life is essential to moving toward joyfulness.

5. Trust your spirit and its connection to something greater.

Each person is an indispensable part of this world. We realize this most when someone suddenly disappears from our life. But it is important to know it always, and to acknowledge one's own critical place in the universe. When we accept the awesome place each of us holds, we feel empowered to make and leave our mark.

When we are in the deepest, most perilous part of our life journey, it is imperative to focus on grabbing hold and not drowning. But, there is a time to think past just being on dry ground. When you find you have managed surviving, why not try now to move on to thriving?

Suzanne Douglas Harris provides Personal Performance Coaching services to individuals, and Professional Performance Coaching to business owners, executives or professionals. She recently announced the official opening of her practice at 40 Richards Avenue in Norwalk. Ms. Harris' brings a distinctive blend of expertise and personal empathy to her practice. She maintains a well-honed, real world perspective based on a comprehensive background of corporate, consulting and academic experience, and has personally survived and thrived through many of life's major challenges. As a result, she offers empathy and firsthand, practical advice to her clients. Suzanne Harris Personal and Professional Performance Coaching can be reached by phone at 203.852.6532, or by email at sh@sharriscoaching.com.