

HUG THE MONSTER: HOW TO EMBRACE YOUR FEARS AND LIVE YOUR DREAMS

Excerpt from Chapter ONE

How to Make Changes in Your Life at Any Age So Many Monsters. . . So Little Time

These are high-speed times, and they require ways of living and relating that even the wisest philosopher could never have imagined. Technology may be making us smarter intellectually, but who among us would declare that we are happier and healthier? Social indicators of lifestyle and disease suggest that feelings of fragmentation, isolation, loss of control, and conflict are on the rise even though we are better educated and are enjoying more material comfort than ever before. What's going on here?

We can't become what we are destined to be by remaining who and what we are. This is both the challenge of evolution, and the paradox of change. Learning to manage change suggests mastering ourselves in the process. Individually and collectively, perhaps our greater destinies will be shaped by our ability to make healthy, courageous, and wise choices. All work, as it turns out, is person work. The quality of awareness that we bring to our daily lives is far more important than we ever knew. Or as business management guru Peter Drucker says, "Defending yesterday is far riskier than making tomorrow." But exactly who are we becoming and what kind of tomorrow are we making?

Exercise Number One: Go to Work a New Way
Monster: Breaking Routine

As a student at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, I once kayaked to school, a memorable little misadventure among several I've experienced in my career. It meant navigating out of a bayou, through a sound, onto a river, and into a tributary on campus. The distance was further than I thought (not enough advance preparation), and due to a fasting regimen I was on at the time, I developed wrenching abdominal muscles cramps. Only when spasms were jerking my body and I was near capsizing did I realize the water was full of

alligator! “How embarrassing to die a half mile from campus,” I thought. With great effort, I relaxed my mind and body and made it safely to my destination.

I also lived in New York for twelve years. I used to enjoy running, walking, or biking to meetings instead of taking a taxi or accepting a ride in someone’s car. After having four bicycles stolen, I eventually walked into meetings with my briefcase in one hand and my bike slung over my shoulder.

If our lives are like music, then our routines and rituals are the melody line, providing theme and structure, bringing order out of chaos. Coffee with the morning paper is a ritual that signals the start of a new day for lots of people. Can you make a distinction between your routines and your habits? Awareness is the key. When does a useful routine become a mindless habit? I’ve never had a traditional nine-to-five office job, yet I’ve still managed to find myself in routines that, if I’m not careful, are mindless instead of stimulating and creative. The willingness to take risks has to do with how often you break your routines in other ways, and how much and how deep the habits in your life affect the quality of your daily living. You’ll be far more likely to take healthy risks once you enjoy breaking the little patterns that have the illusion of defining your life.

How to Go to Work a New Way

However you normally go to work, alter your routine. . . your route, your method of transportation, your conversation if you ride/carpool with others, your thoughts if you go alone. Do it for a day, then for a full week. Can you keep it up for an entire month?

If you go to the same place every day, there are plenty of things you can do to break routine and wake yourself up. There’s not much fear accompanying this one, but if you don’t watch it, you can put yourself to sleep by doing things the same way all of the time. How many different ways are there to go to work? Here are a few more examples. With radio on. And off. With tapes. Public transportation. Carpool. Back roads. Dressed up. Not dressed up. Driving straight there, not driving straight there. Normally take coffee? Try tea, orange juice, or mineral water. Leave at different times of the day. What about jogging, biking, or blading to work once in a while? (Note: If there is no place to shower at work, don’t let that stop you. Why not talk to management and see what can be

done to support physical fitness at work? Even talking to management may constitute a break in your routine.)

Think about the other routines in your life where mindless driving comes into play. How many routes are there for getting to the grocery store? To a friend's home? To the fitness club? Have you ever walked, biked, or skated there instead of driving? Get creative you you'll instantly feel alive.

“And the trouble is, if you don't risk anything, you risk even more.”

- Erica Jong