

The Journey...

The Long & Winding Road
that Leads to Entrepreneurship

NEW
FEATURE

Reframing Adversity – Turning Life Challenges Into Life Change

By Tami C. Gaines

I've had chance meetings with adversity for most of my life. However, I've had an intimate relationship with adversity for the last five years. It was five years ago that I had to navigating the most difficult and transformational period of my life. Within just five months, I was placed on hospitalized bedrest for six weeks; gave birth to extremely premature twins who spent four months and 18 months in the Intensive Care Unit, respectively; went through an unexpected divorce after nearly 12 years of marriage (which left me a single mother of four); and I lost both of my grandmothers, who I was closer to than my own mother. During this same timeframe, I also had to put my dog to sleep. She'd been with me for 14 years.

Just when I believed I couldn't handle another thing, something else happened. If one more person said to me, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle," I was going to smack them! During the worst of it, I was sad, distracted, frustrated, angry, afraid and completely confused. When I did, just finding the strength to get out of bed in the morning was a chore. I lost my appetite, lost weight, couldn't sleep, and nearly lost my mind thinking of the "what ifs" of my life. Doing the most basic necessities of life (like taking my two older kids to school) took enormous effort at the beginning of my journey. And then I began to realize that I couldn't live in this place forever.

What most people don't realize is that your mind plays tricks on you. It's only job is protection and survival. Most of the stories we tell ourselves about adverse situations are created by our mind to protect us from our reality. My mind was no different.

It wove a very elaborate story to protect me from my reality: that I was a woman who was going through a divorce, with two children at home and two babies in the hospital. Quite simply, that was my reality. On the other hand, the story my mind created went something like this: "You are a woman who wasn't good enough for your husband, so he left you. You aren't a good mom to the two kids you have now and that's why he didn't want to have any more kids. Your life will be devastated if you get divorced so you should do all you can, even if it doesn't serve you, to stay married. Your kids at home will be permanently scarred emotionally from this experience so protect them from all things and coddle them as much as possible. Finally, there's a good chance that your two babies in the hospital will die any day so you should just sit around and wait for that to happen. And by the way, if they do live, you'll be alone forever because who would want you with four kids? How will you ever support yourself? Everyone has left you, even your dog." And on and on and on...

I lived from that story for a time. I soaked in it like a bath and I was sad and scared but comfortable in my adversity...just as my mind had intended me to be. There came a time when I was sitting at the kitchen table

staring into the nothingness in front of me, completely caught up in my own emotional decay. I hadn't heard my older daughter come in, but I could feel her staring at me. I turned and met her gaze, the tears beginning to form in her eyes. I realized that she was waiting for me to fall apart – just as the rest of her life seemingly had. In the silence between us, she pleaded with me to hold it together because that was the only way that she could find the courage to believe in the simple possibility of a better tomorrow.

It was in that one moment, a split-second of clarity, that I made a decision to rewrite my story of adversity and replace it with a more empowering one – for my sake and for the sake of my children. It took a tremendous amount of reflection and honesty to acknowledge those things that I could not control and those events that I could. In fact, I also had to acknowledge that most of the events that were causing me such pain, were events that I'd created myself. I'd unknowingly created the darkness in my life as opportunities to redefine who I was and how I was living my life.

I'd created the darkness so that I could find my light.

In the light of my darkness, I was able to see the adversity of my life with new perspective. I was able to identify the real truth of each situation. The truth was that I was in an unhealthy, emotionally abusive, unsupportive marriage. The only positive outcome of that marriage remains my four gorgeous children. Because of that relationship, I am now able to identify unhealthy relationships very quickly and run from them as quickly as possible. The truth of my premature twins was that of all the wombs in the world, they chose mine because there was a universal imperative for me to walk my journey differently. Only they could have shown me that. Thank goodness they came when they did and as they did! The truth of my grandmothers' passing was that it took the passing of two extraordinary souls to welcome two new ones into my life. My grandmothers taught me all they needed to and left this world with the knowledge that I embodied all that they were and all that they envisioned for me. I would continue to carry the beacon of light for my family and step into the role that they left behind. There was an even a truth to be learned in euthanizing my dog, Queen. She was in pain. I had to carry her up and down the stairs because her hips were useless. She lost control of her bladder function and was going blind. I believe that Queen knew that I couldn't possibly take care of her, my twins in the hospital and my two kids at home. I was keeping her alive for purely selfish reasons. I should have let her go sooner so that she could leave this world with a sense of dignity and peace in knowing that she'd been a faithful, loving companion for 14 years.

In every case of adversity, I was able to let go of the judgment of the situation, and, in doing so, I released the pain. So many people have asked me how I got through it all and how can they do the same. I developed an acronym for my approach to dealing with challenges – P.E.A.C.E. F.I.R.S.T. It says simply that my

peace comes first. I cannot make sound decisions; help myself or anyone else without a sense of balance and calm in my life. What does it stand for?

P: The power of intention is greater than any current reality. What do you ultimately want?

E: Everything is energy. The universe gives you whatever you say and focus on.

A: All things will move into balance eventually. It's the natural order of things.

C: Caring for yourself precedes caring for anyone else. There is a reason why the flight attendant tells you to put your oxygen mask on first. Help yourself and then you can help everyone else.

E: Everything is exactly as the Universe intended it to be. Accept your current situation without judgment so that you can release the pain of it more quickly.

F: Find the truth of your situation.

I: Insight and self-awareness are the path to transforming challenges into change.

R: Recognize what you can control and what you cannot. Remember that you can only change yourself.

S: Step back and make a plan. What is your vision for the situation? What is the very next step (and only the next step) that you need to take to reach your vision? What resources do you have? What resources do you need? Who is in your life that can help you? Who do you need to find? The plan you create leads directly to the final step.

T: Take action! You are either growing or dying. There is no in between. Which do you choose?

I still have adversity in my life. And I know that I always will. So will you. Life will never go exactly as planned. But remember that in the times of your greatest trials, you may find your biggest triumph. Every aspect of my life is a testimony to that opportunity.