**Starting-Over Guidesheet #1**

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**Riding the Shock Waves of Change**

***Judith Couchman***

I felt guilty moments after my mother died.

For the months and days before Mom passed, I felt depressed and distressed, often breaking down into despairing sobs about her terminal condition. But as soon as I felt the last pulse of her heartbeat, I went numb. I felt nothing, and it bothered me.

*I should be weeping like my sister, unable to speak. What’s wrong with me?*

I asked myself the what’s-wrong-with-me question for several days. I held up fairly well during the mortuary visitation, travel to the gravesite, and the final good-byes. I kept telling friends I’d entered into a protective bubble that shielded me from the pain. They mistakenly assumed I was “doing just fine” with my loss.

Days later, the bubble burst. I cried and couldn’t sleep at night. I obsessed over the details of my mother’s death, playing them over and over in my mind. I swerved from emotion to emotion, using up every feeling I’d encountered in my lifetime. I read twelve books about grieving and the loss of a parent. I worked minimally for two months, and I resented my friends and family for leaving me so alone. It took a year before the hard grieving began to subside, before I could move forward in a world without my beloved mother—and to forgive.

Thankfully, those twelve books taught me that loss, both expected and unexpected, shapes differently for every person who meets it. In addition, an individual can respond differently to each loss in his or her life. There’s no set pattern, no exact progression of steps through the grieving process. Regarding our emotions, each of us needs to find our own way.

I’ve been thinking about this lately, as I listen to news about the economy and watch interviews with traumatized workers who’ve lost their jobs. How will they ride the shock waves, the unpredictable emotions of loss? Will they find time to manage how they feel, to let their emotions spill as part of their healing? Or will they button up, trying to look like they’re in control, so they can impress the people around them, as if we’re all job interviewers?

I agree it’s probably not good to sob or vent at a job interview. But somehow, somewhere, it’s important to 1) identify the nature of our losses, our need to start over, and 2) to name, feel, and honor our emotions. If we stuff our feelings deep inside, they’ll eventually fester into bitterness, hopelessness, and even disease. We can endanger our ability to heal and enjoy life again. We can get motivationally stuck. I know. I’ve been there.

As you embark on the starting-over journey, carve out time to speak to yourself honestly about your loss, your starting-over needs, and to explore your emotions. Not expressing how you *should* feel, but how you *really* feel. Even if your starting-over focuses on a happy event—like waiting for your first child’s birth—you still need to explore your emotions. Our feelings help us acknowledge the past and prepare for what’s ahead. And if needed, they help us heal.

These question can help you begin the starting-over process by sorting through your emotions. You can answer them by yourself, with a partner, or in a group.

1. Why do you need to start over?
2. How is your primary attitude about starting over?
3. What emotions have you felt about starting over? Make lists of the positive and negative feelings, and briefly explain each one.
4. Review your list. What seems like the hardest feeling to get past? Why?
5. What positive feeling(s) could keep encouraging you daily?
6. Who could you share your true feelings with? Are you willing to risk sharing with this person? Why, or why not?
7. How can you give yourself permission to express your feelings, allowing them time to eventually subside?
8. How will you know when you’ve hung on to a negative emotion too long, causing harm instead of healing?

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