

# Our Obstacles, Our Teachers

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*We all have good days when everything seems to go as planned, and bad days, when unforeseen issues or problems show up to throw us off course. When we begin to look at these obstacles and the challenges they present as valuable lessons, our problems take on a whole new meaning.*

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When things are going pretty much according to plan, life flows as it should, free of the difficulties that impede our progress and leave us falling short of expectations. But we all have days when something shows up that throws us off course. At times we find that our usual approach to completing a task may no longer be effective. We may find colleagues uncooperative or unavailable to support us as a deadline looms closer and grows more daunting by the minute. We may find ourselves struggling to make a difficult choice or a painful decision. An accident or sudden illness may derail our smooth and predictable daily routine and pace of life.

We label such events and situations as obstacles, and we perceive obstacles as negative. We wonder whether we can handle these curveballs, challenges, and interruptions. There's an old saying that life doesn't give us more than we can handle. Whether or not we buy into this notion, when we're dealt an obstacle, we're going to learn from it before it goes away.

When something comes up that we see as an obstacle, it is stressful. We fear that we won't know how to cope or deal with an unanticipated problem. We often envision catastrophic worst-case scenarios. Fear is simply the absence of faith, a lack of faith in your ability to handle whatever challenges come your way.

## **Challenging our fears**

It is important to challenge our fears. Why? A big step in handling our fear is to examine the possibility versus the probability of a dreaded worst-case scenario taking place. Here's an

example: Jane goes water skiing on a weekend get-away — something she has done without incident on many occasions — and breaks her leg. Lying in a hospital emergency room, she begins to imagine worst-case scenarios in the weeks and months ahead. She thinks: *'What if I can't work, and get fired for taking time off... or worse if I can take time off but the person taking over for me does my job better than I do, and my boss and co-workers realize that I'm not as good at what I do as they think I am.'*

In Jane's situation, of course, anything is possible, but how probable is this outcome? In this situation, Jane can challenge her worst fears by bringing in what she knows to be true: *'I work for a great company with generous sick leave. I am respected by my boss. I'm good at what I do, and my colleagues love working with me. And even if I can't work full-time, I can still be of value to the team, and be available to work remotely. Whatever happens, I'll handle it!'*

## **Valuable life lessons**

Life is trial and error. We often fail to learn the lessons that present themselves in recurring challenging situations, dynamics, or patterns in our lives. For example, if I find myself struggling repeatedly in an area of my life, but fail to learn that a particular type of person or job or living situation is not a good fit for me I am at risk of endlessly repeating the same mistakes... at my own expense. When at last I learn the lesson that a controlling boss, an unreliable friend or partner, or an isolated working environment is not in my best interest, I can move on, and make better

choices about who I allow into my life and how I spend my time and energies.

Once you learn the valuable lessons your obstacles are showing you, every time you're faced with a person or event or situation that falls into the same pattern, it's a test. Have you truly learned your lesson? Can you recognize a repeated pattern? Can you stand up for yourself, and find opportunities that work for you, rather than repeating negative patterns?

### ***Taking the bad with the good***

We need to recognize that in life we all have good days and bad days. On a good day, you go with the flow. On a challenging day, you struggle. On days like this, you might need to slow down, add some extra care, lighten your agenda, or lower your expectations for the day. Most importantly, take the time to examine the lessons that show up, and consider what you can learn and change in your life.

Remember, life only gives you what you can handle, and to date, you've handled whatever has come your way. Embrace everything that comes into your life as a lesson. Embrace every obstacle as a lesson for your growth. Remove labels and on hard challenging days, add in some self-care, like a treat, a walk, a chat with a friend, a movie night, a hobby, or

dinner out... something that brings you joy. And reinforce your belief that you can handle whatever comes your way.

### ***The upside of uncertainty***

We often judge the changes in our lives as negative, but these changes often show up for our betterment. Remove the judgment. Allow yourself the confidence to embrace things that come up in your path. Consider the possibility that any obstacles you encounter have shown up for your betterment and growth. We need to embrace our life experiences — including the negative ones — as valuable lessons that show us what we need to address. We need to make our faith in our ability to handle life as it comes bigger than our fear, no matter what stands in our way.

### ***On difficult days***

- ***Slow down***, consider your options and strategies
- ***Bring in*** the supports to help you through
- ***Add in*** self-care when the going gets tough
- ***Have faith*** in your skillsets and resources to handle whatever comes your way
- ***Embrace*** and grow through the lessons your obstacles bring



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### ***About the author***

*Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021.*

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*Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>*

