

## **The fear of closing doors**

In a time when stress is adversely coursing through, and ruining the quality of, so many people's lives, why are folks reluctant to slow down and stop living life at 90 miles an hour, or unwilling to make healthy choices for the sake of their own mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological well-being? Why is lifestyle change such a threat, such an overwhelming and fearful challenge?

Rather than cutting back, or narrowing down choices in the face of overwhelming stress, juggling options seems to be the day-to-day self-management tactic that has so many feeling trapped, exhausted, overwhelmed, depleted, fearful, and over-medicated (chemical and non-chemical) at work, at home and at play. Yet, they trudge on.

Why do such folks always need to keep their "options open" and consider everything and everyone — as one client said to me recently about an event he was considering — "a definite possibility? A definite possibility!?" Hmmm.

Why are life and lifestyle choices so painful? Why does every door have to remain open? Why does one need to consider "every" option?

Whether it's an attachment or add-on (they'll never use) for a new digital camera, or a continued relationship with an individual with whom they have nothing in common, or staying connected to a Yahoo or other online group to which they haven't contributed in years, or an event to which they have season tickets and never attend, there's a story that keeps them feeling attached, belonging, not allowing themselves to disconnect or detach. Loss feels overwhelming to these folks. Their story soothes, and excuses, their feeling of loss.

Exhausted and overwhelmed by daily decisions about where to go out to eat every night, who to socialize with, exhausted by the myriad activities that are depleting one's own and one's child's physical and emotional energy, for example, folks cannot or will not choose to step back and see the self-destructive results that come from their obsessive need to "keep on keeping on", from "keeping all the doors open."

So, what is this attachment folks have to keeping all the doors open? What's really, really underneath needing to have every option a possibility?

For many, when options go away, when doors close, they experience a certain sense of loss, of "missing out." This experience is deep, visceral (they feel it in their gut), and frightening. So, in order to feel they "belong", to feel connected, to feel they are not missing out on life, and to maintain a much-needed sense of security and control, they make up stories about why they need to "keep all my options open", and refuse to let go.

For many folks, their attachment to unlimited options, to unlimited choices, unlimited activities — even when they are overwhelmed and exhausted by the limitlessness of it all — they are driven by the fear of what might happen if they eliminate just one option or close just one door. For them, this fear is infinitely greater than the distress, anxiety, overwhelm and exhaustion they experience from keeping all the doors open.

Emotionally and psychologically, many folks would prefer to die slowly from their stressors than face the emotional loss of opting out or closing a door. It's the devil they know vs. the devil they don't. Fear of the unknown is too painful.

So, folks work more hours, longer days, take on more and more tasks and responsibilities, spend an inordinate amount of time in constant contact and IM-ing on their electronic leashes, drain their time and energy social networking and in communities of practice and blogs, go out eight nights a week, spend

inordinately on “stuff” to have all the options, bells and whistles, stay connected with toxic people who deplete their energy, agonize obsessively over career and work changes and opportunities (the “everything is possible” self-destructive syndrome), so they can “keep all my options open”, and “narrow down” choices of places to move to twenty-five!, and on and on. Why? So they can keep all the doors open, feel engaged and feel they are in control.

So, there it is overworking, overbooking, over-engaging, over-spending, over-socializing, over-exercising, over-committing, over-doing, in a word — over-obsessing — for fear of giving up an option, or closing a door. Stressful and debilitating. It doesn't have to be. And, that's worth thinking about.

**So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

- Is it painful for me to give up options? If so, why is it so painful?
- Do I take an “everything is possible” approach to life to the extent that I am mentally, emotionally and physically or spiritually exhausted with choosing among possibilities?
- What would happen if I (my spouse/partner, child) closed one door, or eliminated one option to a life or work choice I am considering today, this week, this month or this year? How does that thought make me feel in my gut?
- When considering options, do I take an “everything is a definite possibility” approach? What does that approach get me?
- Am I in relationships that are draining or toxic? Why do I choose to stay?
- At work, do I take on more and more tasks and responsibilities to the extent they are affecting my health?
- Do I (honestly) engage in blogging and social networking to stay connected and feel I “belong”? How would I feel if I stopped, or cut back? Is social networking and blogging detracting me from other work, life and family responsibilities? What does social networking get me?
- How do I feel about being alone? Do I feel comfortable and secure in my own skin? Am I OK being in silence?
- Growing up, was I surrounded by a sense of abundance or lack?
- Do I need to have “all the information” before making important life or work choices? How do I feel when I don't have all the information?
- Is decision making at work, at home or at play generally an “OK” or stressful experience for me?
- Is my outlook on life generally happy, pleasant, anxious or fearful?
- Do I always need to be “doing something”?

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