

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I have many plans and dreams for the future, including finishing my college degree in nursing. I dropped out of school many years ago to get married and raise a family. I know that I could find a better paying, more interesting job when I complete my education, and I still feel the same passion for working as a nurse that I did as a teenager. But instead of taking classes, I find myself collecting all kinds of information about these classes, reading books about returning to school as an adult, and talking with people about my plans. My kitchen table is filled with catalogues from a number of colleges that offer the classes I need to finish my degree. I can afford the time and the money to return to school and I've been "investigating" for the last four years, but still haven't taken a single class. What's wrong with me?

-- Shirley

Dear Shirley,

Plans and dreams for the future are wonderful. They define a vision and set the course for our own destiny. But it sounds like you are spending all your time preparing without ever really starting. This is sort of like being on a rocking horse. You're moving, but not making a lot of progress. Yet, you can still convince yourself that you're "working on it" by collecting all this valuable data. A wonderful poem by one of India's most brilliant modern poets and Nobel Laureate for Literature (1913) Rabindranath Tagore elegantly describes what you are experiencing: "I have spent my days stringing and unstringing my instrument while the song I came to sing remains unsung."

It seems like you've done your homework. You've investigated the educational opportunities available to you, and thought about how to fit school into your life and budget. You have a vision, but now it's time to make a decision and take action. Action without vision leads to randomness, as we go off half-cocked and without a sense of our true direction. But vision without action—the situation you are in—is nothing more than a dream state. Confucius once commented on the lack of action-taking of a friend. "Chi Wen Tzu always thought three times before taking action. Twice would have been quite enough," he said. Exactly how many times have you been thinking about taking action? Do you put Chi Wen Tzu to shame?

Take a moment to reflect on why you are avoiding the actual decision and actions required to return to school. Are you afraid of failure? Or are you afraid of success? Do you keep putting off the decision until "tomorrow?" (If so, you are not alone. A Spanish proverb reminds us that "Manana is the busiest day of the week."). Will you get emotional support for your decision from your family and friends, or will your goals create conflict with them? Zero in on what's holding you back, then work on solving that.

After you have done this inner work and looked at your reasons (excuses?) for procrastinating, select one of the classes at a nearby college or university and sign up! Don't talk about doing it. Don't think any longer about doing it. Make the best decision you can with the abundant information that you've collected, and then, as the Nike shoe

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commercials advise, “Just Do It!” The secret to getting ahead is to get going. Feel a sense of urgency about going after your dreams with gusto. Don’t keep stringing and unstringing your instrument. Instead, sing your song.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.