

Giving Yourself Permission

Making a change in your career or educational path can be intimidating — and even frightening. When you learn to trust yourself enough to take risks, however, you might be surprised at how much you're capable of accomplishing.

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I can't do that! I shouldn't do that!

Guess which person is the most discouraging when we want to make a change, take a risk, or try something different? We, ourselves! This is because we often hesitate to give ourselves permission. We can be hard on ourselves in other ways, too. Actions we would forgive instantly if one of our friends did them, we chastise ourselves about *forever*. In this article, we talk about ways to expand your thinking and to start giving yourself permission to move your life forward.

Changing direction

Maybe you've been thinking about going to graduate school — getting an M.B.A., M.D., or J.D. — or you've been on the manufacturing floor or in the field and you want to transition to the office, or vice versa. To change direction, you first need to give yourself permission to do so. Take heart from the guidance sought by and given to a writer from the advice columnist Dear Abby many years ago:

Dear Abby: I've been thinking about going to medical school, but it will take me seven years to finish — and in seven years I'll be 43 years old!

Abby's response: And how old will you be in seven years if you don't go?

Remember, your change of direction doesn't have to be forever. If it doesn't work out, you'll try something else. But the new chapter in your life might be the best thing you've ever done!

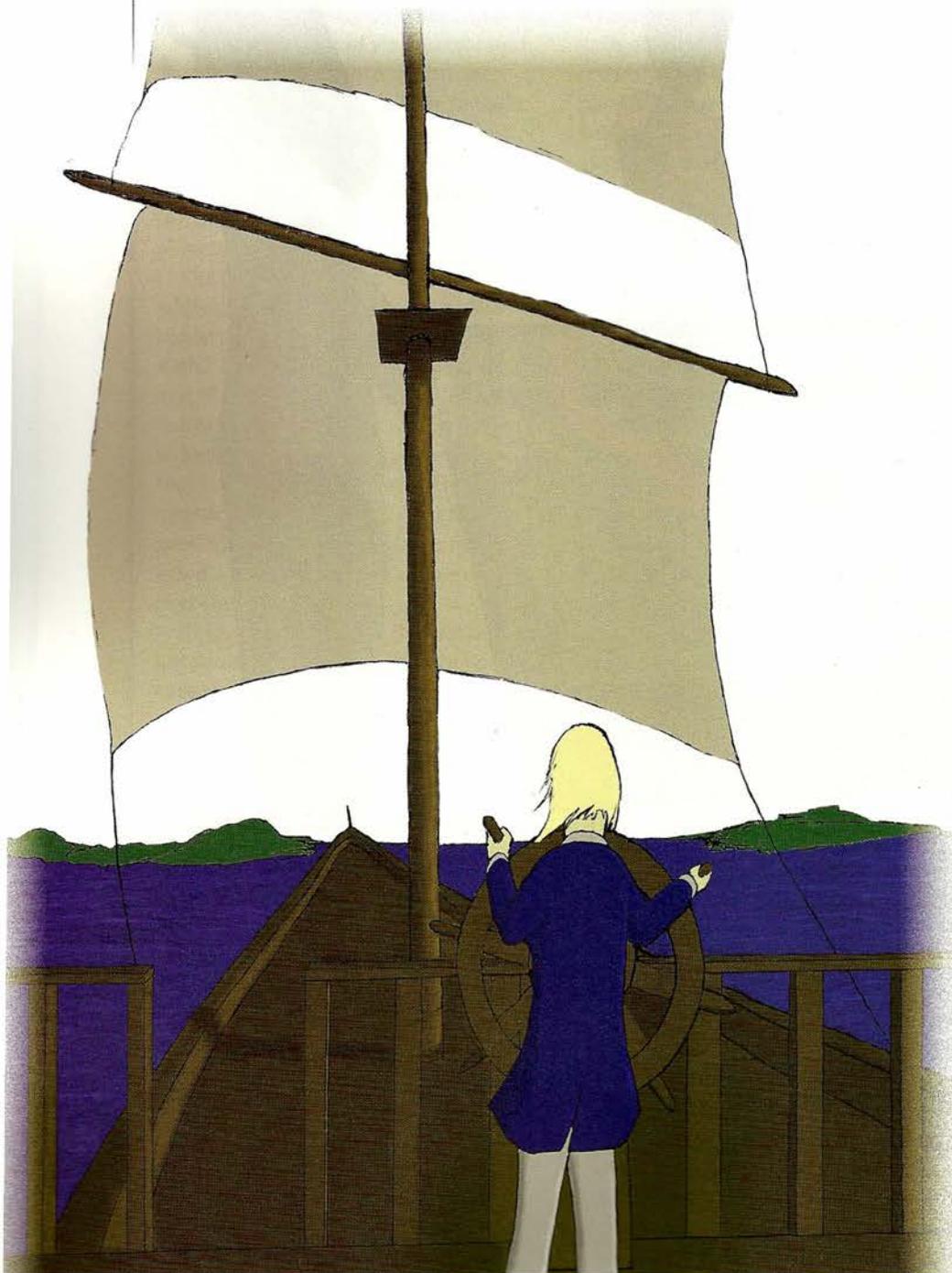


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How many times do you find yourself thinking “coulda, woulda, shoulda”? Well, it’s time to replace this line of thought with “can, will, and shall.” If you’re like us, there are things you’ve changed about yourself without much hand wringing or many sleepless nights.

Ever changed your hairstyle or clothing style to the latest trend? Do you still drive the same model of car you drove in college, or do you now drive something that better fits your lifestyle? Take a look through your old photos and see how many of those close friends and associates are still vital to your social network. Have you embraced texting? Facebook? Twitter? If so, it looks like you already have changed direction.

Now that you have that perspective in mind, is changing direction in your

career or educational path really all that different? When you have made other changes, you first considered the possibilities. You looked at the alternatives, evaluated your options, and made choices that suited you. Perhaps you did this without much reservation because you have made these types of changes a bit more routinely than you have made changes in your career. However, the fear and hesitation you may have had the first or second time you changed your hairstyle or you posted on Facebook didn’t materialize into the awful outcomes you might have envisioned. So you built up some confidence, and changing direction has become second nature.

Give yourself permission to take the risk — with its concomitant possibility of failure. You’ll be surprised at how much you are capable of accomplishing.

afraid of making a mistake. Remember, we are all human; and as human beings, on occasion we make mistakes. An important lesson to learn from mistakes is not to never make another one, but rather to learn from those mistakes we do make. We need to be able to admit when we make a mistake, analyze how/why the mistake was made, and figure out how not to make that specific mistake again. But, rest assured; we will make other ones.

A close friend of ours (“Sharon”), who owns an engineering firm, decided to merge another business with her own. Sharon had previously worked with the owner of the other business. She performed thorough due diligence of the company’s financial position, existing contracts, and employees. While the initial business

integration period proceeded according to plan, it soon became apparent that there were fundamental differences in the culture Sharon was cultivating and the values espoused by her new business partner. The road became rocky, and Sharon found herself spending her time trying to diffuse a tense work environment to allow her employees to perform at their best, instead of focusing on growing her business. The key lesson here is that Sharon realized she made a mistake in not recognizing the misalignment in values between herself and her business partner before buying the new business.

Another important lesson to learn from making a mistake is that you can often make another change. Understanding this, and following up with action can sometimes correct a mistake, or possibly result in an outcome closer to that originally desired.

In our example, Sharon not only recognized her error, but she also took action. She negotiated an alternative agreement that allowed an accelerated buyout of her partner, returning Sharon to sole ownership of her now larger business — and mitigating the undesired effects of her mistake. Sharon has been able to establish the culture in her business that is in line with her values, vastly improving the work environment.

Taking a risk

Not every idea we have or every direction we take will work out. If we don’t take risks, however — sometimes requiring us to step out of our comfort zones — we will probably not ever reach the level of success that we are capable of achieving. Give yourself permission to take the risk — with its concomitant possibility of failure. You’ll be surprised at how much you are capable of accomplishing. Take courage from the words of Eleanor Roosevelt: “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.”

So, that change you’ve been considering? And pondering? And thinking over ... and over? Muster up your courage to make the decision. And, if you make a mistake? Understand why, and make a correction. And by all means, forgive yourself and move on. Just ensure you tuck that learning away in a secure place so you can avoid a reoccurrence.

Now, be sure to celebrate your change in direction; as you continue to give yourself permission to reach and to stretch, you will build your confidence.

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