



Bloom Where You're Planted ... Then Send Out Runners

by CLAUDETTE E S COOMBS

“... if we are plodding through thorns and weeds we need to protect ourselves against their damage.”

Have you ever felt “planted” somewhere ... against your will? It happens. In our lives, workplace and volunteer positions we may end up being somewhere or doing something that we feel we didn't choose and don't want. Our response to this feeling can have a dramatic impact on whether we bloom or wilt.

How do we respond?

Typically, the initial response is resentment. We tend to resent things that are beyond our control which place us in uncomfortable or unwelcome circumstances. Then we further react by responding less than optimistically toward the people, places and events surrounding us. Finally, we stop looking for the good or positive and succumb to the ever-present negative. We have all realized that if we exude an aura of negativity, we also attract negative responses, comments, stories and feelings. The focus becomes everything “bad” in our school, community, environment or world.

What have we lost?

A great opportunity. We no longer notice the potential to “bloom”; instead we see the rocks, hard ground and poor weather. Of course the difficulties exist and no matter how hard we try to ignore them, they still survive. The rocks, however, aren't the full picture and the lack of choice in where we have been planted does not eliminate our influence on the situation.

By focusing on the negative we create a personal view which rapidly infiltrates other aspects of our lives... in fact, this infiltration occurs in areas which previously had been healthy and balanced. We begin to find that our relationships with colleagues, family, friends and especially students may deteriorate. This is guaranteed to diminish the pleasures we find in life.

When we give up and resign ourselves to the situation, we stagnate. We miss the opportunity to enjoy and take interest in life and we stop trying to improve the situation, atmosphere or conditions.

What do we have to gain?

A new perspective. We have an opportunity to enhance our natural talents and strengths, to create new supports and to explore existing options. We may even find that this unwanted situation has brought unexpected bonuses. If we gain nothing else, we certainly have the chance to develop personal skills and fine tune our coping, patience, tolerance and objectivity. The permanent benefits reaped from those efforts could balance the temporary difficulties experienced in the situation.

How do we make that transition?

The following steps can support our efforts to regain control over this potentially difficult situation and improve our sense of satisfaction with our lives.

1. Identify and compartmentalize the issues.

For example, we have ended up teaching in an unfamiliar or uncomfortable school or subject area. Explore the issues. Socially we miss former colleagues. Emotionally we are uncomfortable with change and unpredictability. We have lost familiar surroundings, routines and events. Professionally we miss the exhilaration of teaching our favorite courses or the challenges of our preferred student group. The increased demands required to re-adjust rob us of our precious, limited resources of time and energy. Great! We have just spent more of our valuable time making ourselves feel more miserable about this new, unwanted situation. What's next? Find solutions.

2. Look for options.

Now we know what is really bothering us. Let's start to improve the situation. We have not made it this far in life without developing some very useful skills. Change may still be a source of anxiety but we have proven that we are capable of successfully maneuvering through it. For each issue, consider how it could be improved.

3. Take reasonable action. Improve conditions.

Become part of the new social milieu by participating in, or creating, staff social contacts. Seek avenues for professional challenges by taking on special projects or creatively addressing the curriculum. Add courses or

skills to our repertoire. Become familiar with the new surroundings, atmosphere and context of our lives.

Separate from the incident or circumstance and continue to build on what is needed to thrive. We can experience the compassion and support of friends and family as we live through the grief and challenge of our difficult circumstance.

4. Minimize the trauma. Maximize the resistance.

When there are things in our new setting which are harmful to our physical, emotional or professional well-being, we must take specific action. There is a crucial difference between working through growing pains and actually causing damage in the process. Decide which is happening. If we are winding our way through new obstacles, we need to be gentle with the expectations we have for ourselves. However, if we are plodding through thorns and weeds we need to protect ourselves against their damage. We do this by avoiding or eliminating unnecessary tangles and by strengthening our resistance to the things we can't pull up by the roots!

5. Make the situation temporary. Send out those runners!

Much in life is temporary. Priorities, life stages, current interests all regularly change. We need only look at children and remember the hectic and exhausting few years of infancy and toddlerhood and watch how quickly the focus becomes the trials of adolescence. We change with our situations and adapt to the needs and opportunities around us. Life will continue to be that way ... things will change or can be changed even when we try to prevent it. Sending out "runners" allows us to expand beyond our current limitations, find a new perspective and make a fresh start.

Work to make the unwanted situation temporary. Increase personal skills and expertise so that when a new position opens up, we are ready for it. After all, we can't expect to fit into a different situation without being the best match for the job.

By taking advantage of the context to learn new skills, or to brush up on unused ones, we are better able to deal with the current and future situation ... and we become more "marketable". Surely we know the value of being marketable, especially if we want to move to a new environment. As we collect new skills and experiences, we change our personal resume and become the new improved version of ourselves. By cultivating desirable assets we prepare ourselves for advancement.

6. Recognize the potential.

Too often we negate what can be accomplished or the pleasures that can be enjoyed because we don't like some component of our personal or work lives. We choose to refuse to bloom because we don't like where we are planted! Refusing to use our talents and expertise when it could be beneficial to others (or ourselves) may be a way to "get back at" the powers that planted

us; however, it doesn't take long to realize that under those conditions there is no winner. We lose the most. We can use the opportunity to give and receive exactly where we are. Examine the situation closely to determine what can be acquired. What is needed and what can be found in new skills, personal lessons and planning time, in preparation for change.

Blooming

We need to be healthy where we are. We inoculate against the unhealthy or hazardous components in our environment as we reinforce our supports and strengths. When the environment is overwhelmingly negative we make plans to create change. That change can be in our situation, our immediate environment, or ourselves. Yet, it is important to know that we can find or design some positives in even the most difficult of situations. There will still be the innocent wisdom of that one student or the compassion of a colleague or the thrill of successfully imparting knowledge to bring us to that realization. Because life is so valuable, and so unpredictable, we cannot afford to waste time and energy waiting to be happy.

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Attention Elementary Teachers!

The Elementary Teachers Special Interest Council is currently inactive. If you are interested in forming a new Provincial Executive for this organization, please contact:

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