

An extraordinary life

By Debbie Ford

An exclusive interview with Debbie Ford, the bestselling author of life-changing books such as *Spiritual Divorce: Divorce as a Catalyst for an Extraordinary Life*; *The Secret of the Shadow: The Power of Owning Your Whole Story*; and *The Right Questions: Ten Essential Questions to Guide You to an Extraordinary Life*. Divorce Magazine's Editorial Director Diana Shepherd recently caught up with Debbie in Toronto.

Divorce Magazine:

They say time heals all wounds; is this true of divorce?

Debbie:

Well, if you don't mind being in pain, you can wait to feel better. But I strongly suggest that you be in action; people who are active recover much more quickly and completely from traumatic life experiences. Divorce makes you feel powerless; taking positive actions helps you regain power over your life. I am a true believer in taking on your life: make a commitment to do whatever you need to do to heal your heart. You need to ask yourself: "Will I use this situation to grow or to beat myself up?" The pain comes from beating yourself up, so every time you're in pain, ask yourself this question and renew your commitment to use it for growth.

DM:

What's the first step people should take to start the recovery process?

Debbie:

Make a commitment to use your pain as a catalyst to heal yourself completely and have the greatest life possible in front of you. To do this, you need to distinguish the facts of your divorce from the story you tell yourself and others about your divorce. People often get caught up in the drama of divorce, but events aren't what devastate us -- it's what we make them mean that causes this pain. Devastation comes from believing that the end of your marriage spelled the end to all possibility for happiness and fulfillment.

DM:

So after making that commitment, what's next?

Debbie:

Find support. You have to realize that you can't do it alone, so you must find a support group, therapist, life coach, or a wise friend to support you through this transition. Declare to them that you intend to use your divorce as a catalyst to propel you into a great future, and ask them to support you in achieving this goal. You will begin to see your new reality taking shape just by making that commitment.

DM:

I think men particularly fall prey to this notion that they should go it alone -- suffer in silence. But really, sometimes it takes more courage to ask for help than to bury your head in the sand. What's Step Three in this recovery process?

Debbie:

Give yourself a time-frame: "I will grieve for X months." People make things up all the time, and these statements turn into self-fulfilling prophecies. For instance: "It takes two years to recover from divorce." You can actually choose how long it will take by declaring it, so why not commit to a shorter time-frame? You can be in great shape after six to eight months if you work hard. Allow yourself to feel as bad as you want for this period of time, and then you are going to stop. This gives you a deadline: you have to do the work if you are going to "finish" on time.

DM:

I suppose any goal is meaningless without a time-frame; unless you declare when you're going to accomplish a goal, it tends to sit on the back-burner and you never do anything to turn it into reality. So what do you do after you decide how long your recovery is going to take?

Debbie:

Surrender. This is a process of admitting that there are some things that are outside our control. Our natural inclination is to hold onto the familiar because we're scared of the unknown. I like to use the analogy of a river to illustrate this point: the river is moving, so if you try to stay in the same place, you'll get exhausted from swimming against the current and you'll get swept downstream without the strength to avoid the obstacles in your path. But if you let go and literally go with the flow, you have a better chance of spotting and avoiding some of the rocks on your way downstream.

Here's a good exercise to do at this point: write down all that you're holding onto and identify it as fear. When you try to cling to something -- or to swim upstream -- you need to realize that it's fear-driven. Fear can sometimes be useful: healthy fear ensures that you protect yourself against truly dangerous people or situations. But you need to distinguish healthy from unhealthy fear, which makes you cling to people and things that are no longer useful to you. The question you should ask yourself here is: "Is this choice one of faith or fear?"

DM:

I take it that surrender is different from merely doing nothing -- or giving up in the sense that you see yourself as a victim of your circumstances with no power to change anything.

Debbie:

Yes. Once you've let go of your fear-based choices, you can ask for divine guidance. When you're holding on, you're doing *your* will: you're trying to make the river go in the direction you think it *should* go rather than the direction it *is* going. So let go and trust that there's a higher plan, even though you can't see or even imagine it yet. Pain and discomfort can move you forward, causing you to grow and evolve.

If a marriage is in trouble and both partners are committed to saving it -- and they start the work early enough -- a couple can evolve and create a new, better marriage. In all my years of doing this work, I have only met one person who has wanted to go back to the marriage the way it was *before* separation or divorce.

Trusting divine guidance means believing that the universe will provide what you need when you need it. This isn't the same as providing what you want -- or what you *think* you want -- but rather what you *need* to move to the next level. This could be in the form of an old or new friend showing up in your life to offer just the help you need.

DM:

Some people are tempted to just stay in bed and pull the covers up over their heads when they're going through a divorce. When you're depressed, it can be hard to make yourself connect with others.

Debbie:

But it's vital that you do so: you must make a connection with people who care about you on a daily basis. God/Spirit speaks through people: we're not meant to be isolated. So reach out to a community, group, coach, or friend. Ask someone you respect to mentor you. When you're in pain, you often want to be alone. But this may not be the greatest choice for you: listening to the litany of fears and insecurities running through your mind will not help you move on.

DM:

So how do you move on and create that great new future for yourself?

Debbie:

You have to create a clear and compelling vision for your future. As soon as you do this, you start moving towards it. In a divorce, the old vision you created -- that of a happy marriage/family -- dies, and you're left with the pain and loss of this event. When you create a vision that really inspires you, you heal much faster.

The first step is to find a picture of yourself at a time when you were happy before your marriage and enlarge it. Put it up somewhere prominent, and think about one thing you want to accomplish in the next year whenever you look at it. For instance, if you're worried about money, your thought might be: "I will pay off all my bills and have a positive bank balance within one year." If it's in front of you, it will seep into your consciousness and give you a future to live into.

To create a larger context, you need to create a vision map. Take a picture and a few words or phrases that really inspire you -- that bring a smile to your face whenever you see them -- and put it up somewhere you'll see it frequently. For instance, if the thought of a dream vacation inspires you, put a picture of the Greek Islands with the phrase: "I'm having the time of my life!" up on your bedroom wall. Or you could put a picture of a happy, healthy family together with the phrase: "I have the most loving family imaginable." Or choose a really romantic picture of a couple and use the phrase: "I have love beyond my wildest dreams."

Ask yourself what would really excite you -- get you up in the morning with a spring in your step -- then use it to see whether the choices you're making today will get you to this goal.

Making the Right Choices

Debbie Ford's new book, *The Right Questions: Ten Essential Questions to Guide You to an Extraordinary Life*, shows how the unconscious choices you make prevent you from achieving your goals and dreams. For instance, you may truly want to lose 20 pounds, but you choose to eat a pint of ice cream because you have a hidden commitment to the comfort and pleasure it

gives you. In this book, Debbie shows how to identify your self-defeating commitments by asking questions that will turn unconscious choices into positive, conscious decisions. Here are a few questions to ask yourself when faced with a a tough choice:

- Will this choice propel me towards an inspiring future, or will it keep me stuck in the past?
- Will this choice bring me long-term fulfillment, or will it bring me short-term gratification?
- In this situation, am I looking for what's right, or am I looking for what's wrong?
- Will I use this situation as a catalyst to grow and evolve, or will I use it to beat myself up?
- Will this choice empower me or disempower me?

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