

By Carlin Flora * Photo Illustration by James Porto



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Analyzing risk in the classic "Should I stay or should I go?" scenario can bring on headaches or even paralysis. Lubetkin recommends that you write down the pros and cons of each situation and then weight them numerically, according to how important they are to you. But then you must also factor in the more subjective "gut" feelings. Flip a coin in order to hypothetically decide your fate, then take note of how you react to the outcome.

A skewed perspective can tip the scales, though. "If you stay in a bad situation, it generally makes you feel worse about yourself—which makes you feel more pessimistic," says Leahy. If you're contemplating a breakup, the painful costs will largely be upfront. As with an exercise regimen, it will hurt at first but get easier over time.

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Create a New Internal Vision

MASTER THE "ART of possibility," says Sills, author of *The Comfort Trap*, by projecting a new you on the big screen of your mind's eye. "There are two poles related to change," Sills says. "One pole is being unsatisfied and uncomfortable where you are. The other is a compelling vision." If you're so miserable you're crawling out of your skin, you may not need a fantasy to push you out the door. Most of us are in situations that may not be great, but are nevertheless stable—which means we need something to run toward, not just an excuse to run away.

The first step to conjuring this vision, says Sills, is to tune into your discontent rather than numb it: "After two bags of Doritos, some TV shows, and maybe even a scotch, you don't remember how bad the job is, and soon you're overweight and you think that's the source of your unhappiness."

Once you've figured out why you're unhappy, try to trace any hint of interest or passion that flutters up during the day. Think back: "As a child, how did I envision myself as an adult?" If you can't pull a dream scenario out of your head, ask, "Which of my friends' lives would I most like to live?" And "If I had to stay in this job or relationship, what would I want to change about it and what would I want to keep?"

The image may prime you to act, but taking the first steps will still be difficult. It's easy to tell your mother, "Can you believe he got drunk on my birthday?" But it's hard to say to him, "We're done. Don't ever call me again." Make it easier by thinking through the small consequences first. For instance, you can rehearse what you'll say to your friends

when you ask them to set you up on dates.

Once you start realizing your fantasy, keep altering it to match reality. Otherwise, the vision could remain dangerously intangible. If your mind has a clichéd montage of the rock star's life on a loop, it can't effectively measure incremental progress in your guitar career.

Prepare yourself by imagining scenes full of misgivings, too. "In the last two weeks of your job," says Sills, "all of a sudden you'll fall in love with all of those coworkers who annoyed you." Change equals loss, but if you don't have a series of things you've walked away from, adds Lubetkin, you're probably not leading a rich life.

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Expect (and Enjoy) Discomfort

IF YOU WANT to whip yourself into shape or renovate your apartment, don't wait until you feel ready, says Leahy, because no such time will come. Instead, commit to doing something that you don't want to do each day. After all, if your goal is to lose 15 pounds, you'll have to consistently deny your desires in order to achieve it. Resourceful people, Leahy says, are not having fun all of the time. But they do feel empowered when they force themselves to do what's needed.

Such self-directed whizzes also reward themselves for maintaining the habit of tackling dreaded tasks, not just for the results. They embrace "constructive discomfort," Leahy says. When you feel hungry and antsy because you can't have that piece of cheesecake, remind yourself that those are victory signals. "It's like when ballet dancers say a workout was good because it hurt good."

The athlete's body and an artist's masterpiece are a long time coming. But you can mentally divide the time you are investing in your plan. "Think of the salesman who is selling something that costs one-thousand dollars," says Lubetkin. "If he meets with ten people before he sells it, each of those meetings is still worth one-hundred dollars—the paycheck is just delayed." You can break your abstract idea of "being healthy" into the concrete daily choices—such as reaching for an apple instead of a Snickers—that will eventually make you so.

If you don't hang in there and wait for the payoffs, after all, no one else will. "This is the only life you'll ever have," says Pelusi. "The universe is indifferent and even people who love us only love us with sobering intermittency. So look within and choose to direct yourself." **PT**