

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

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Taking the first step. All the time in life, we have challenges before us that loom large on the horizon. A project at work that overwhelms at first sight. A new diet or exercise program. Or, perhaps a career move that will relocate us to another state or nation.

For some of us, these are moves we need to make—moves we no doubt *should* make. However, the prospect of initiating the change is daunting; and we hesitate and keep putting it off. Perhaps we’re tired and weary; or maybe we’re anxious or lacking confidence on some level.

Again and again, the key is *taking the first step*.

If we can muster the gumption, the courage and inner will, to *take the first step*, amazingly, things begin to fall into place. Again, the key: that *first step*.

With exercise, for example, my guess is that your experience is similar to mine. If I can just get started—do the first set of whatever the exercise is, I’m on my way. Taking that *first step* is critical. Getting *on* the exercise bike ... getting in position to actually start the first set of push-ups ... or making yourself go to the aerobic workout class.

It’s the same with our participation in any *self-help* process, like a self-help group or enrolling in a class we need to improve our education and credentials. Eventually, we have to go to the first meeting, attend the first class. The *first step* is the key.

Discipline. Beyond the initial step, a second key is discipline—the discipline to follow through and make the discipline process a part of our life style. It does us little good to start a diet or exercise program, or enroll in a class at a nearby college, if we don’t have the discipline to stay the course.

The good news about a *process of discipline* is that anyone can do it. Any human person can be disciplined enough to achieve their goals. Sometimes we lack the discipline because of the way we think about the challenge before us. In our mind, it’s become too large, too improbable. When in fact, if we can break it down into more manageable parts (manageable size and time frame), the challenge becomes more doable.

Breaking things down into manageable time segments is important also because it reduces our anxiety. Moreover, it’s helpful to realize that we don’t have to have everything all worked out today, at this moment. Part of the discipline process is doing what we can today (without going overboard) and then repeating the process again tomorrow.

In this way, we are able to stand up to the many challenges that are before us without being overwhelmed and vulnerable to stress overload.

Taking the first step in conflict resolution. Many of us are burdened in our lives by the stress of unresolved tension in relationships. We all live with some measure of regret—things we wish we would have done and other things we wish we could take back. And often times, we lay awake at night, anxious over the widening *distance* between us and whomever (usually a family member or friend).

At some point, the key, again, is to *take the first step* toward reconciliation and resolution. Something has to give, and someone has to initiate the process. As a friend of mine used to say all the time: *If we always do what we've always done, we'll always get what we've always gotten.*

What we can easily forget is that each of us has the power to bring constructive change to our lives. With the right attitude, along with the will to find solutions, change can come. And *taking the first step* is critical to launching the resolution process.

If we think *out of the box* about our lives, resolution can come by using our imagination as a means of motivation. For example, if we imagine how we would feel to have some conflict or tension resolved. The absence of stress; the good feeling of knowing we'd done the *loving* thing.

Finding resolution in our stressful relationships, relationships that—over time—wear us down, can add years to our life. It can add joy to our spirit and a sense of inner peace to our soul. And it can take us to new places of meaning and purpose.