"Turning Loss into Found"

Understanding the negative impact of loss and allowing oneself to positively change with it.

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What is Loss?

According to most experts, two general categories of loss exist: physical loss and psychosocial loss.

Physical loss is the loss of something tangible.

- Your car is stolen
- Your house burns down
- You misplace a treasured memento or keepsake
- You lose a limb or a body part to disease or injury
- You lose a loved one.

Psychosocial loss, sometimes called symbolic loss, is the loss of something intangible, psychosocial in nature.

- Divorce
- Retiring
- Developing a chronic illness
- Having a dream dashed

These types of loss are often not recognized as losses that require processing or working through.

There are often secondary losses associated with both physical and psychosocial losses which coincide with or develop as the result of the initial loss.

The Impact of Loss

We are all impacted in some way by our losses, whether physical or psychosocial. Not everyone experiences similar losses the same way. But everyone does experience the impact of the loss in some way.

Not all loss is negative. Losing can bring change that results in positive gains.

- A couple now become three with the anticipated birth of their child
- A son or daughter gains his or her independence from parents
- An individual overcomes a fear or gains a skill that improves personal outlook

Changes that involve loss

1. Developmental Loss

- Naturally occurring loss due to human development or the aging process
    Strength diminishes
    Eyesight deteriorates
    Thinking process slows

2. <u>Loss resulting from normal change and growth</u>
- Couple welcomes a baby into relationship
- Young person gains independence
- Maturation brings new responsibilities (put away childish things)

3. <u>Competency-based loss</u>
- Attainment of certain abilities, capacities or functioning
- Achievement of certain goals

Strategies for Addressing Loss

1. Recognize that loss is a natural part and event of life

2. Refuse to allow personal identity to be integrated with the loss

3. Review the implications of the loss and allow/plan for adjustments

Looking at Retirement (Loss) as Reinvention (Gain)

One of the most immediate and impactful realities of retirement is the loss of structure. Going to work each day and planning one's life and activities around a career provides structure and a sense of unity that often is not appreciated until it suddenly changes by retirement.

The loss of this structure or routine leaves many a retiree feeling disoriented. Some comment that they "miss their Saturdays." Working all week made Saturdays special. Now every day of retirement is a "Saturday."

The rush of Baby Boomers towards retirement is unprecedented. Many are choosing to postpone retirement by working past the normal retirement age of 65. Still others are viewing retirement as an open door to reinvention, moving into a new career or launching a new business.

Retirement reimagined or reinvented

The average individual of retirement age today has twenty or more years of life ahead of him or her. Many of those years can prove to be productive and profitable, not inactive and uninvolved.
- Rediscover a passion and follow it through to one's own enjoyment

- Going back to school to earn a degree or certification

- Utilizing skills or knowledge gained on the job to benefit a small company, community service or non-profit organization as a consultant or volunteer

- Start a new business or enterprise

- Volunteer in a completely new field unrelated to previous work experience

- Serve on the mission field in relief of missionaries on furlough or short break

Sources: *"Treatment of Complicate Mourning"* (T. A. Rando, 1993); *"Grief and Loss Across the Lifespan: A Biophysical Perspective"* (Walter and McCoyd, 2009); *"Unretirement"* (Chris Farrell. WSJ Book Review. Sept. 23, 2014)