

## **From Pain to Gain: How Rat Race stress leads to Downshifting Success.**

Isn't life wonderful when you look back on it and see all the lessons you've learned from all the mistakes you've made? :o)

One of the first business development books I ever read was Edward De Bono's "Opportunities" and his words have inspired me at many times during my downshifting years. What I remember particularly is his lateral thinking approach to problem solving. He urges his readers to view problems as potential opportunities, to see beneath each stressful situation that we encounter and to look for the opportunities in it. To do this we need to go beyond just reacting to problems with the first solution that comes into our heads and to brainstorm for lots of potential solutions.

Why spend the time and effort doing that? Because then we have a choice in how we proceed and can choose the **best** solution rather than any old fix so long as it works. De Bono also states "Necessity is the mother of invention – unfortunately" because he says most of us will only go looking for opportunities when our backs are up against the wall and we've got no alternative. When we lose our jobs or fall ill or lose a loved one. If we get made redundant and decide to start our own business, for example, that business opportunity was always there ready for us to pick up whether we got made redundant or not. It's just that we do not generally go looking for those opportunities or have the courage to act on our findings unless we feel forced to.

Those ideas have guided me along the downshifting path, which is why I wanted to share them with you this month.

I've been taking the opportunity over the festive holiday to review where I am with my personal downshifting plan. Looking back over the major decisions that I've made on my downshifting path, I've noticed that many of them came about as a result of one thing - my attempts to deal with various stressful events and situations that arose during my participation in the Rat Race. My approach when dealing with stress has been to identify the problem and then fix it.

What were those problems? For me, Rat Race stress resulted in poor health (physical, emotional and spiritual) both for me and my children. My first downshifting decision was to become vegetarian. Initially, this was a way I saw to solve my health problems. However, as time went

by it became evident to me that vegetarianism was far more than just preventing poor health. I began to learn about the wider benefits, such as the impact on the environment and animal welfare. I was beginning to feel as though I was making a larger contribution to society than just fixing myself. It also gave me the opportunity to completely overhaul how I was looking after myself and subsequently my children. We have all benefited enormously from this.

Making the decision to move from full-time work to part-time self employment was a decision I took after giving birth to my first child. The source of my stress in this situation was the thought that I would have to go back to work full time in order to pay the bills but I did not want to be parted from my baby. I quickly realised, having cut our living costs considerably during my maternity leave, that this was not necessary. I could do what I really wanted to do, which was to spend lots of time with my new baby and also balance that with a couple of days work per week. I also wanted far more autonomy in my work and the flexibility to work from home when I chose. So I elected to become self-employed. The stressful situation of being parted from my baby had been averted and I had discovered some new ways of working.

A few years later, and with my children finding their school environment increasingly stressful, I started researching alternatives and settled on deregistering them from school altogether, electing to home educate them. Initially, this was a way to fix the problem of my children being unhappy and not receiving a suitable education. As time went by, it became evident that not only had we solved the problem but that they were positively thriving and in ways I had not dared to imagine. If you are curious as to how this can be, please see my article, "How is home education sustainable."

Gradually, opportunities emerged that we had not been aware of before. The children were healthier because they were exposed to fewer infections and had a healthier diet. They gradually became increasingly more autonomous in their learning and more self-confident in facing the world at large. We developed closer family relationships as we had more time to spend together and to express ourselves.

When we use the stresses of being in the Rat Race to re-examine how we are living our lives, we can uncover the opportunities we need in order to downshift.

## **Suggested Further Reading:**

Opportunities. By Edward De Bono

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