

6 ways to unleash your inner freedom

Release your emotional baggage and start afresh this spring with a brand new you!

WORDS: Tracey Lattimore

1 Banish past relationships

We often fall into the same traps and patterns with new partners that we had in past relationships. If your last romantic liaison knocked you for six, then unless you've had time to regain your inner strength and sense of self, the same negative patterns could continue in your new relationship. According to life coach Gladeana McMahon, if you were dominated by your previous partner, you may have lost a sense of who you are. 'To avoid falling into the same destructive patterns, learn to be yourself again. Watch those DVDs your last bloke hated, listen to music you like and eat the food you love,' says McMahon. 'In your new relationship, you and your partner need to have your own interests so you can bring something fresh to the relationship.'

Do it today Recapture a lost interest, such as team sports, and regenerate that bit of yourself you lost in an unhealthy relationship.

2 Filter your friends

So, you've all known each other since you were at playgroup, and it's great you've stayed friends. Or is it? What attracted you to your mates 20 years ago might not be the same today, especially when your friend has landed herself a well-paid job she never tires of bragging about, making you feel like a failure.

'Don't resent those who appear more positive, confident or successful than you,' says stress expert Liz Tucker. 'Instead, learn from them and find out how they achieved

things.' But, she warns, anyone in your group of friends who doesn't want you to change will try to sabotage your efforts – they might be threatened by the thought of you improving yourself. If certain friends try to put you off applying for that new job, taking up a new hobby or buying a house, it's time to distance yourself from them and spend more time with friends on your wavelength.

Do it today Draw up a list of people you want in your life, and those you can distance yourself from. Make an effort to call close friends and arrange to meet regularly. You'll naturally drift apart from the friends you don't see so often.

3 Stop feeling like a fraud

Ever feel you landed your job by accident, or that you're not really qualified or trained and it's only a matter of time before someone finds out? Don't worry, you're not alone. According to a study by Yale University in the US, over a third of us feel fraudulent at some point, and it's usually the most successful people who feel like this.

'These feelings can be quite beneficial,' says organisational psychologist Dr Guy Beaudin. 'It can spur people to be more creative. When they feel they have to prove themselves, they'll work harder. But when it goes too far, it leads to the "impostor syndrome".'

The first step is to recognise you're suffering from impostor syndrome, then find someone whose judgement you trust to run

ideas by. Remember, in any job, you're expected to grow into the role over some months. And try to separate feelings from fact – just because you might feel inadequate doesn't mean you are.

'I was so worried that my new boss would discover she'd made a huge mistake and see that I didn't know what I was doing,' says recruitment manager Heidi Walker. 'But once I'd made some small changes in my department, I realised how disorganised my new colleagues were and what a difference I was making,' she says.

Do it today Make a list of all the qualities that make you good at your job. Are you artistic, organised, creative or good with ideas, for instance? There's a good reason why you got that job, so don't let yourself forget it.

4 Shake off criticism

We face criticism in all walks of life, and the only thing that differentiates you from your confident friend who bounces back is your attitude. If you suffer from a lack of self-confidence, you'll soak up criticism and find it difficult to shake off.

'Handling criticism is something that will test your foundation of self-belief and can shake you to your very core,' says life coach Fiona Harrold. 'When it happens, examine the claims and if there is genuine fault on your part, face up to it and make amends.'

Beating yourself up about something you've done wrong will only make you feel worse, so give yourself a break and move on! Saying sorry is not as hard as it seems, even if you're not a confident person, and you'll find it opens lots of doors. If you find it difficult, talk to the person concerned in private – they're probably a lot more amiable when they're away from their colleagues.

If you're being unfairly attacked, on the other hand, defend yourself. 'Reaffirm who you are so you emerge stronger than before,' says Harrold. 'Clear up ambiguities from the past that have left their mark, and move on.'

Do it today Go for a stroll at lunch time in a local park. The fresh air and exposure to nature will help dispel negativity and boost your self-esteem. Think positive thoughts about yourself, and repeat a personal mantra such as, 'I am good at what I do,' to help rebuild your confidence.

5 Face up to failure

It's natural to worry about not being the best or not succeeding, whether it's within your relationship, making new friends, making an impact with your job, climbing up the social ladder or buying your

own house. But despite our rational voice telling us that we have to give things a go, it's not always easy.

'I've seen people hang on to relationships and businesses long after they should have admitted defeat or shut up shop,' says Harrold. 'I've initiated heaps of ideas that haven't worked out, and just as many that have – it's vital you address any failures so you can get it right next time. Break free from this way of thinking and you'll be a lot lighter on your feet.'

Do it today Stop focusing on how frightening the risk is, or worrying about what will happen if you fail, and concentrate on the solutions available if things don't work out. Find someone you trust to talk to and explain what's holding you back. Remember, if something goes wrong, you always have choices – you just need to find them!

6 Jettison jealousy

We're all aware of the dreaded green-eyed monster's emotionally-crippling consequences in relationships. If you've already been cheated on, this may cause you to be more possessive and controlling in your relationship because you fear the same thing will happen again, says McMahon.

In small doses, jealousy can protect love as it reminds you both how much you value each other, but it can easily get out of proportion, leaving your partner walking on eggshells and you swinging between self-blame and justification.

It's important there's a shared trust between you and your partner – you need to allow each other your own space and friends without fear of reprisal. Remember, the jealousy you feel about your partner's new female friend is not simply that you're threatened by her – something happened in the past to spark off those intense feelings, such as a previous infidelity or worry that your partner wasn't committed to you. You're the one feeling bitter here, so it's your emotions that you need to tackle.

Do it today Give yourself a reality check. Are the things that trigger your jealousy realistic? How likely is it that your partner wants to leave you for his attractive new colleague? Use positive self-talk to remind yourself of your qualities, and if you're really concerned, talk to him about it and ask him for reassurance. Don't nag or snap at him – he won't feel sympathetic towards you if he feels he's already being punished for something he hasn't done. ■