Don’t Let Fibromyalgia Limit Your Goals

by STARLA RICH

Fibromyalgia Boxing You In? Think Outside the Box!

Life is an individual journey for each of us. Being diagnosed with fibromyalgia doesn't end that unique journey, but it does change it. The one thing that it must not do, however, is stall you out or stop you dead in your tracks.

It is a challenge not to feel boxed in, confined, limited and deterred. However, just because life has changed to some degree, it does not mean you have to let go of your goals and dreams.

Rather than viewing your condition as a life of pain, flare-ups and fatigue, it is possible to move beyond those beliefs. Instead of viewing your condition in an “inside the box” manner, think “outside the box” to pursue your life’s goals and dreams.

Henry David Thoreau said he sought to “live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.” Those of us who deal with the challenges of this chronic condition do not have to allow the diagnosis of fibromyalgia and its effects steal our dreams, thwart our plans or deter our goals.

Dreams and goals are what give life purpose and what produce a desire to get out of bed in the morning, ready to face challenges of the day with hope and courage. To settle for a life “inside the box” without them is empty and meaningless. Dreams and goals are what fuel that inner drive, determination and desire.

Let It Go

Acceptance of your condition is half the battle. Until you accept the truths of life as you are and where you are, you are unable to develop a plan to move beyond that point.

Fibromyalgia is not tamed with a purely “mind over matter” belief. The pain is real, some days are exhausting, and the ability to stay motivated is daunting. To deny yourself times of grief over the loss of what was and times of reflection over what is, only serves to circumvent healing. You need the necessary process of moving beyond the limitations that have been placed on you physically, mentally and emotionally through the daily fight with fibromyalgia symptoms and complexities.

It’s normal to feel sorry for yourself and to express sorrow for the circumstances you’ve found yourself in. Actually, we all need that time to mourn our “old self.” Beyond the natural grief process though, self-pity has a way of settling in and weaving a lie in the mind and spirit that life is over and dreams are forever dead.

There is a danger in allowing self-pity take up residence in your mind and heart. Wallowing too long can cause you to feel hopeless and can steal your happiness and dreams. So grieve! Cry it out, pray it out, scream it out or work it out. Then let it go.

Life isn’t over, it is just changed. You don’t have to allow your dreams to die. Just understand that it is necessary

to seek alternate paths to fulfill your dreams. Goals may change out of necessity, but dreams do not have to go unrequited.

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The Process

Where so many who deal with chronic pain and illness fall short is in resisting the reality of their lives. We resist the pain, we debate the doctors, we fight and claw for our former place in life, and we resist the change that has occurred and that needs to occur in order for us to develop a strategy for coping and regaining control again.

Resistance brings a lack of peace and produces constant stress and turmoil. Now logically, of course we want to resist pain. Who enjoys pain? But resisting it, trying to be brave through it, denying it or hiding it doesn't take the pain away. It only makes it worse.

So rather than resisting the pain, the fatigue, and the debilitating moments of flare ups, we must stop fighting the very things that are now a part of our lives. Rather, we must move beyond self-pity or even denial to finding acceptance of these conditions so we can effectively begin to think outside the box for ways to cope and ultimately thrive in spite of them and beyond them.

How Long?

You might ask, "How long does this process take from diagnosis, to lifestyle change, to continued pursuit of your dreams?"

Well that depends on you! For me, I fought the change for fifteen years. I tried to maintain a regular work schedule and continue to build a career working forty hours a week.

I ended up struggling through five jobs in fifteen years with months and months of sick days during, and long breaks in between those jobs. I was resisting the inevitable. My body had changed, my energy level had diminished, my routine and structure had been forever disrupted, and I could not do what I had once done.

That did not mean I was not useful, productive, or that my dreams for what I envisioned for myself had to fall by the wayside. It simply meant that I had to shift gears, restructure my goals, stop resisting and think outside the box for ways to get to where I longed to be.

So this process is entirely up to you. You can either be miserable or you can stop resisting and begin to move towards the happy peaceful life that will allow you to fulfill your dreams and even be an inspiration along the way.

Hard Questions

In the struggle to release yourself from the things that hold you inside the box and cause you to resist the changes in your life, there are questions that must be asked. These questions require courage to answer if you plan on continuing the pursuit of your dreams and the things that you desire in your life.

I suggest you take some alone time to ask yourself these questions. I had to pull away from those who were trying to smother me with care and love and help for a short while, to simply sit with myself so I could hear myself think.

My family meant well. They wanted to help me with the daily tasks that had become daunting. My employer wanted to cover for me and protect me from the inevitable. There is a fine line between helping and enabling a mindset of resistance and of denial.

So I found some time alone and asked those hard questions. What was I resisting most? Was it the pain? The reality of a career change? The fear of fragile relationships? The financial decisions? The loss of independence?

Once I looked at myself and my life in the light of truth, I was able to begin my quest for positive solutions to some rather negative answers.

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Creative Solutions

One of the biggest challenges across the board for those who deal with fibromyalgia, chronic pain and fatigue is the lack of mental clarity due to the pain. The “brain fog” that hangs over even the most routine days presents its own challenges to thinking at all, never mind thinking outside the box!

So first and foremost, do what you have to do to minimize the pain and bring your body to a place of manageability. For some that may mean the use of medication.

I have used dozens over the years and found over a period of time by body simply becomes immune to them and they do not work. It has been necessary for me to keep the medications to a minimum, and I’m only using one now that assists me on the more painful days and nights.

I had to learn better eating habits, discover my food triggers, embrace physical therapy and exercise, and create an environment in my home and life that was more structured, organized and less stressful.

When pain is reduced, energy increases, when energy increases, mental alertness improves. Rather than denying and resisting, I embrace and provide self-care with kindness to myself and honesty to others close to me who are affected by my struggle.

Life Outside the Box

There is no one path to reaching goals and achieving dreams. The most important thing is knowing you have the right to dream and you can chase those dreams even if the path has changed.

At my lowest point I was unable to work at all; I had been extremely active in my church and community and worked upwards of 60 plus hours a week at my job. It all came to a screeching halt.

One day I sat down and wrote a blog of sorts. I refused to believe that my worth was tied to what I did but rather in who I was. So I began to share my experiences and encourage others.

I found an online audience with 33 faithful friends and family and developed a writing skill that I had never slowed down long enough to pay attention to. I dabbled in web and graphic design and learned a skill that proved to be a worthwhile endeavor.

The desire to keep going and not give up has grown to an online audience of over 10,000 that I know of on my regular forums, not to mention the hundreds of thousands who I can encourage through my articles. Last year I published my first book. Now I’m in final edits of my second one and working on my third.

It sounds cliché, I know, but it is true: where there’s a will there’s a way.

There are countless stories of corporate executives, international speakers, published authors, business owners and entrepreneurs, and more, who found their backs against a wall and their life trapped inside a box. Yet they chose not to let their dream die and kept reaching for the sky even if they had to have a helping hand to hold their arm up at times.

Think outside the box and refuse to be limited just because fibromyalgia has changed your life. That change may be the catalyst to a dream bigger than you! Never give up.