





FINDING THE COURAGE TO QUIT

SOCIETY CAN MAKE US FEEL ASHAMED FOR GIVING UP, BUT SOMETIMES QUITTING IS THE RIGHT ROAD TO TAKE, SAYS **JENNY ROWE**

When my siblings called me a ‘quitter’ as a teenager, it hit a nerve. I had just stopped playing the violin after almost ten years of lessons and I felt guilty for wasting my parents’ time and money. Though true, I denied the allegation vehemently. No one wants to be a quitter. At the time it felt like an accusation that I had thrown the towel in without properly trying. Since then though, in my eyes at least, what it means ‘to quit’ has been redefined. I used to see quitting as a failure. Now I see the flipside of the coin and perceive my more recent ‘quits’ as successes in their own right.

Life lessons

As I grew up, the message that ‘winners never quit and quitters never win’ was loud and clear. The narrative of hitting rock bottom, only to climb back up to the top with renewed determination, is often celebrated in the media, with sports commentators revelling in that fighting spirit. Yet life is no football game – there are neither winners nor losers – and pushing yourself through a ‘losing’ streak can sometimes do more harm than good.

Unfortunately, the negative stigma surrounding quitting, which makes us feel like we are wimping out, weighs on many of our shoulders. Founder and director of Mariposa Coaching (mariposacoaching.co.uk), Sarah Clark, specialises in using psychological approaches to help her clients effect change, working to apprehend the sinister shadow of this stigma during their sessions. Sarah’s first line of defence lies in the name of her company. The >

word ‘mariposa’ means butterfly in Spanish, symbolising the universality and transformative nature of change.

“The media and the attitudes and expectations of those around us – who will all have different generational influences – contribute to other factors such as status that may play a part in career changes,” explains Sarah. “There may be physical barriers to quitting too, such as the financial implications of becoming self-employed or forfeiting a larger salary or pension.”

All this has you packing the prospect of quitting into a box and pushing it shamefully to the back of your mind. Yet in many cases, quitting should be admired. Realising that something – whether a job, hobby or relationship – that you have invested your time, money and even identity into isn’t working anymore demands a huge amount of courage.

Quitting often requires stepping out of your comfort zone and relinquishing your grip on the systems that have kept you moving along life’s highway. It requires not fulfilling the expectations of others, and rethinking your own expectations. Quitting is that gut-wrenching ‘no’ that might come hand in hand with an equally scary ‘yes’. It is the end of a life in some ways, and the start of a new one. Quitting is far from the easy option, but sometimes it is the best.

Take stock

Sarah says that many people who approach her for coaching aren’t sure what’s wrong: “They say that they’re functioning fine, but that there’s no zest. Things are ticking over, but something feels out of kilter.” Sarah explains that these feelings often stem from an incongruence between goals and values. Leaving something behind in your life might enable you to bring these into closer alignment.

At this stage – between realising that something needs to change and actually doing something about it – weighing up the pros and cons of your options is an effective way to move beyond uncertainty. There will be opportunities, costs and benefits connected with both choices, but by taking time to understand the goals and values that are motivating you, you’ll come to see which path to take.

Quit well

Of course, as a result of social pressure, the overwhelming majority of people are intimidated by what other people might think. The fact is, you can’t change this. Sarah encourages her coachees to take responsibility for change. “It must come from you. Increasing your self-belief and self-esteem will help block out the opinions of others and bring what is going to be healthy for you into sharper focus. You need to prioritise your needs and goals above

– though not at the expense of – those of others,” explains Sarah.

“You also need to consider what needs to be in place in order to bring about the change,” she continues. “You’ll need a good support network. Do you have the support of those closest to you? And if you don’t, how can you gain it?” Sarah works with her coachees on assertive communication, which means helping people express their feelings and needs more directly and honestly.

As well as this inner strength, there will be practical issues to contend with. Perhaps a career change involves upskilling, or the end of a relationship means getting out of a joint mortgage or having to cough up double the rent. Quitting well is not instantaneous: “Quitting on a life-changing scale is an experience, a process,” Sarah emphasises.

“Sometimes it involves reinventing yourself. Be patient. Everyone, yourself included, will need time to adjust.”

In practice, this means quitting slowly. Experiment by dipping a toe in – or taking one out – and gradually progress by spending more and more time with this new venture, person or past-time, and less time with the old.

Reap the rewards

However stressful and complex the process is, quitting can positively impact your life in unexpected ways. “Many say it’s the best thing they’ve ever done, and find that other parts of their lives start coming together too,” Sarah says. “In the long-term, they have improved communication skills and are better at boundary-setting and keeping their own values at the forefront of their decisions. I haven’t ever worked with anybody who has regretted making such a change,” Sarah states frankly.

Quitting is not always a passive, throwaway act. It can be one of the most carefully considered decisions you’ll ever make and has the potential to empower your future. ●



THE AUTHOR
Jenny Rowe is a wellbeing and travel writer, who loves exploring the origins of our habits and beliefs.

