

# Reclaiming Pieces of the Self After a Divorce: Part Two

## A Roadmap

[Maria Alba-Fisch, Ph.D.](#)

While anger, sorrow and anxiety are natural and understandable responses to the dissolution of a marriage, there is a great deal of work to be done. Not only does a person need to reorganize the logistics and relationships, the same person needs to define who they will be in their new future. Often a person discovers how many ways they relied on their spouse for certain functions and fear they will not be able to do those functions themselves. For a more thorough discussion of this point, see the companion piece to this article: [Reclaiming Pieces of the Self after Divorce: Part One.](#) Here are some steps, a person can use, on their own, in reclaiming the qualities they feel they lost to their spouse, or never had in themselves.

### **A Roadmap Towards Reclaiming Your Self After Divorce**

#### **First: What is it your spouse did that you think you do not do so well?**

Try to be honest with yourself and move past the disappointments you have had in your spouse. Try to see what their good qualities were.

#### **Second: Ask yourself: Is this a quality I need or want to develop?**

If your spouse did the checkbook, Yes, you do need to manage your own accounts. If your spouse baked great brownies, you may or may not want to try baking with your kids or for yourself. You may decide this is not essential for you.

#### **Third: If you decide a particular skill is worth developing, think about when and where have you ever been able to do this?**

Are you able to do this in other contexts? Did you have this quality at other times in your life? The answers to these questions are an important guide. If you are out of practice, and know that there are times you can do this, locate what makes it possible for you to be like this elsewhere or earlier and try to recreate the conditions that make it feel possible, again. If you never were able to be like this, the road will be longer and harder for you, but it is still only a road, and these steps do work.

#### **Fourth: If you do have the energy to work on it now, where and when can you practice doing this?**

Pick some very safe situation where you can try being the party planner or the note taker and begin practicing. I remember a friend who wanted to be a good joke teller. She asked her very good friends to listen as she told jokes. Everyone enjoyed her effort. Another friend thought only his wife could make a good chicken soup. He really did not know that recipes could help.

If you do not have the energy, can you get someone to pitch in and help until you do have the energy to work on this.

#### **Fifth: Take small steps.**

So, for instance, you want to be able to plan unstructured time and were never good at it? Do not start by planning a three week vacation. Try a day, first, or part of a day. Ask other people how they do it, and learn from their tricks. Then, increase the amount of unstructured time. Once you have tried, *evaluate* what you did that went well first, before you think about what you could have done better. *Do not forget this step.* Often, we are disappointed when we try new things. And, if this is with kids, there is no harm in letting them know you are trying something new and want to know how it worked for them.

#### **Sixth: Have patience with yourself for the new learning.**

Whatever the quality is that you are trying to reclaim, remember that it may be brand new, or, at least, you are out of practice. In either case, we all learn best with kindness. Be kind to yourself.

#### **Seventh: Be sure to reinforce the new gains.**

Notice them. Take some pleasure in your own efforts. Children and friends may be especially important on this count. It is not a bad idea to tell children or friends something like, "Look, this is my second time making chicken soup. What do you think?" And no matter what they say, be sure to respond: "It will get better the more I practice! This one is better than my first." How many times have you tried to encourage your children to try something new?

## **Eighth: Give yourself deliberate identity corrections.**

Now, when you refer to yourself, you need to take care to correct your old identity, "I cannot cook." to a new identity: "I am a beginning cook" or "I am learning to cook". Initially, your old identity may try to squeeze this new piece of you out as if it does not belong. It is natural for all of us to maintain our equilibrium and to keep thinking of ourselves in our old ways. Force yourself to see the new skill as real and as a growing part of you.

## **Ninth: Keep a journal.**

While a journal cannot do the work for you, it can help you keep on track. You are in the business of creating a new clarity about *you*. So, write it down. Someday, it will be good to review your journey.

## **Tenth: Get help if you need it.**

If all these things sound good but it still feels impossible to find the energy to work at it, or you feel that nothing is progressing, find yourself a good therapist who will work directly on these issues with you. If you want help doing so, please contact me at The Taconic Counseling Group 845-896-7787 ext. 2, or at my Mount Kisco office 914-666-9433, or email me at [Marialbafisch@aol.com](mailto:Marialbafisch@aol.com), or click here for a link to my website at Taconic Counseling Group.