

The Limits of Imagination

“Is this all there is? I wake up. I get everyone out of the house. I go to work. I come home. I get everyone fed and ready for the next day. I do some chores, then go to bed. Repeat. I guess I thought my life would be more interesting than this!”

Stephanie’s life had seemed virtually the same for years – same job, same house, same family, same routine. She literally had all of the elements of the life she dreamed about since she was small. It wasn’t that she was unhappy with her life, she was just bored.

I suggested that Stephanie had imagined the best life she could, moved forward to create that life, and then stopped imagining. She found something on the horizon that looked like a good life and went directly there, without ever looking further down the road. It didn’t mean there was anything wrong with her life, but it had gotten stale for her.

We spent a number of sessions exploring what she might want for her life, besides the good things she currently enjoyed. She struggled to imagine anything a married working mom might add to her life that might make it even better. She had found the limit of her imagination.

Once at a conference, Dr. Barbara Love, a retired professor and international trainer and speaker, spoke about her childhood in Dumas, AR. She said that she could not have possibly imagined the life she grew to have. She went on to say,

“not only did I not have the ideas, words, concepts or experiences to imagine the life I would grow to have, nobody I knew- nobody in the world that I inhabited had a worldview as big as the life I have now come to inhabit.”

Dr. Love could think about what she wanted for herself and move toward that. Then, as she got closer to the horizon, more would come into view. She couldn’t imagine all that she could become, but she could pick out a place in the distance that looked interesting and head that way, then adjust her trajectory as she could see further and further ahead.

As we worked over several weeks, things began to shift as Stephanie was able to answer 2 questions for herself:

- What do you want for your life?, and
- When do you/have you felt most like your true self?

With a few small adjustments, she began to feel more engaged in her life. She shifted her few volunteer activities so that she was doing things she loved AND that made a difference. She invited her children to get involved with her, so they could do good things and build their relationships. And she talked to her supervisor about adjusting some of her duties to include a couple of tasks which were more complex and interesting.

Over time, she also learned to keep looking down the road. I encouraged her to be fully present in her life, but also to allow herself to notice what possibilities came into view. A sign of her progress was that her activities did not look, sound, or feel like they had before. She added variety to her patterns of living, working for a volunteer charity, taking fitness classes, and getting more organized to spend time with her friends. Because she freshened up her life to meet her new, current imaginings of “a good life true to herself,” she felt more alive. “Boredom is no longer a part of my vocabulary,” she laughed!

So, how are you limiting your imagination?