

What will be your wake-up call?

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Quite often we go through life on auto-pilot with set attitudes and behavior. In this mode we sometimes take other people for granted, are not as aware of our surroundings as we should be, or maybe we become arrogant or careless to the point of our own detriment. Sometimes we think we know better than everyone else and aren't concerned with the potential consequences of our attitude or behavior. Then, out of nowhere, we get the proverbial “wake-up call” and it gets our sudden attention.

Whether that wake-up call is life threatening, relationship threatening, or ego threatening, it shouldn't be brushed aside because the next time it occurs, the consequences will be much harsher.

I'll never forget the time I emailed the wrong person while at work. I thought I was emailing a colleague to criticize everything about the organization as well as my boss's role in it all, only to realize I actually emailed my toxic message to my boss instead of my colleague. This was an awakening moment for me as a leader. I realized I had a lot to learn about leadership, communication, and attitude. I learned that leaders above me were privy to more

information than I was and that there was always more to the story or situation than what was housed in my all-knowing brain. I also learned to not gripe about something unless I had a viable solution to improve it.

Sometimes wake-up calls come too late, such as in a chronic health condition that resulted from bad choices, or maybe other personal catastrophes like a divorce, job firing, or loss of finances. Although the outcome in these instances probably can't be reversed, you can at least try to move forward in a positive manner to create new opportunities in life. At other times, wake-up calls can serve as a major attention-getter, allowing you a chance to learn valuable lessons and make significant changes in your life.

Shocking discoveries about our lives may (and should) shake us into action, wowing us with a stark truth about ourselves and offering new clarity about our lives. Such startling awareness can be frightening or enlightening. Some people react by running from wake-up calls. Some simply deny their power and shrug them off. Others hear the wake-up call, sharpen their resolve, and start to transform self-defeating habits into new strengths. But how do they

actually make those changes?

Richard Boyatzis, a leadership development consultant and academic researcher, says it starts with an assessment of your “ideal” self and your “real” self. Ask yourself: “Who do I want to be?” Write it down. Then ask yourself: “Who am I?” Write that down as well. Then evaluate where your ideal self and real self overlap as well as where there's a gap (where they differ).

Next, devise yourself a learning agenda where you can build on your overlaps while reducing the gaps. This should lead you to experiment with new behaviors, thoughts, and feelings that hopefully bring about positive and permanent change in your life.

Lastly, this self-directed learning process typically can't be done alone. For it to succeed, other people normally have to become involved or lasting change does not occur. Interact with people you can develop trusting relationships with, especially those who will help, support, and encourage you every step of the way.

Wake-up calls can be devastating indeed, but your rebound from them can make you a better person in every facet of your life.

~ The End ~