

Getting Support in Times of Change

By Kathy Caprino, MA

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As a coach and a psychotherapist, I've worked with hundreds of people each year who are going through dramatic change of some kind or another, and are in need of support from their families, friends, colleagues and others. We often discuss what healthy support is, and how it feels when we receive support that gives us the strength and confidence to persevere.

What does helpful support look like? From my perspective, positive support shows up in many ways, and is expressed verbally and non-verbally, through language, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. Supportive people communicate that:

- They understand what you are doing and why, even if they don't fully agree
- They are positive, encouraging, bolstering, and uplifting in their language, attitudes, and behavior
- They express their belief in your ability to succeed
- They communicate joy at your success and happiness (and truly feel it!)
- If/when they have concerns, they express them calmly and productively
- They know the difference between their agenda and yours
- **Overall, those who are truly supportive want you to be all you can be in this life, and express that desire in their actions and words.**

So what can we do to elicit even more support from family and friends? Here are some tips that can help:

- Present your ideas "half-baked." Allow others to brainstorm and problem-solve with you, which helps them to become more invested in your process and your progress. Avoid "done deals."
- Open a dialogue about the support you need. Don't go "underground" with your need for help.
- Make it clear what you need and want. Say to your family and friends: "It's very important for me to have your support on this. May I please tell you what would be most helpful to me?"
- Identify actions that are *specific, behavioral, and measurable* in what you ask for. For instance, one client asked her spouse, "Honey, I would really like to take this new class which meets two nights a week for a month, but it would mean I'll need some extra help with the kids. Would you be able to give them dinner and put them to bed while I'm at school?"

- Ask, "What can I do to make it easier for you to support me on this?" Then consider the answer, and take action on it.
- Finally, develop a support plan together that you all can buy into, and revisit frequently.

These small steps can make a big difference. But what can we do when we're still not getting the support we need?

There are many factors that contribute to lack of support from family, friends, and colleagues. To understand the dynamic more fully, look at what's going on from a *process* standpoint as well as a *content* level. In other words, ask yourself, "What can my friend's lack of support tell me about myself, my relationship with this individual, and the impact of this new step on his/her life that I should understand?"

Sometimes, a friend is jealous of your success or your expansion, and just cannot be fully present or happy for you at this time. In this case, your compassion helps. But it also might point to the need for a stronger boundary to be developed, so that you will know if and when the right time comes to walk away or limit your interaction with this non-supportive friend.

Other times, non-support reflects a concern on the part of a family member or friend that perhaps the path you are taking seems a bit shaky, risky, or potentially difficult. If this is the case, open your mind and heart, and fully process the information your family/friend is telling you. Look at it, explore it non-defensively, and decide if any of this is information that you haven't considered. It very well may be. If not, then it's time to articulate your stance with confidence and strength. Try to convey how and why this step, from your perspective, is critical to your happiness.

Look at where you are not receiving support today. Get clear on where your buttons are being pushed in the process (what makes you become defensive, insecure, indignant, angry). By examining your own "process," you'll develop a deeper understanding of where you might need a bit more clarity, confidence, and courage to follow your new path.

Here is a crucial point many people don't realize: Once you get completely clear and confident about your new direction, you'll find that you are more able to *attract* into your life the type of support and assistance you need.

When you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that this new step feels right, you can move mountains, and you won't let a few nay-sayers stand in your way.

Wishing you joyful and exciting transitions.

Bio:

Kathy Caprino, MA, is a nationally-recognized women's work-life expert and author of *Breakdown, Breakthrough: The Professional Woman's Guide to Claiming a Life of Passion, Power, and Purpose* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008, www.breakdownbreakthrough.com). Founder and President of Ellia Communications, Inc. -- a women's career and work-life coaching and consulting company dedicated to helping women achieve *breakthrough* -- Caprino is a trained psychotherapist, seasoned career and executive coach, and sought-after writer and speaker on

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