

Battle your mental boxes

Whether you mean to or not, thinking inside the box can limit your wellbeing. Learn to recognize these boxes — and how to break free.

We all know the old adage "Think outside the box." We maybe even use this saying when stuck trying to come up with a new idea to improve our business, personal life or relationship. These are generally some obstacles stopping us from being creative, innovative or improved. Often times, staying inside the box is preventing us from truly finding genuine happiness.

Sometimes, these boxes are mental blocks or limitations that we place on ourselves. Other boxes are people in our lives that place some sort of limitation on what we are allowed to do. Financial boxes are a big one that most of us can

understand. Whatever type of box it is, if it is stopping you from finding your "true North," you need get out of the box.



Drew Mikita
Dear Drewbie

The most successful, blissful and significant

people in this world have burned boxes and lived exactly how they wanted to. Ignoring these imaginary-yet-very-real obstacles, ones that so many cling to as a means of protection from failure, can be difficult. Many hide in boxes as a means of security, a way to avoid failure and stay in the flow without experiencing true highs or lows. While I respect the low risk that this poses, it is also extremely limiting. Boxes are often excuses that protect us from pain and, as such, are extremely limiting.

As a therapist, I see that boxes of all shapes and sizes are what truly prevent many people from being happy. Here are some big boxes and tools to burn these boxes down.

THE PHYSICAL LIMITATION BOX

OK, limitations may exist from physical ailments but not nearly to the extent that some people lean on them. We use the lamest excuses to stop us from doing many things. Understand what limitations may exist, but don't dwell on that. Just modify and adapt.

Combat tool: Helen Kellen was deaf and blind, and yet she did more than most of us will ever do because she focused on what she could do, not what she couldn't do. She couldn't see or hear, but that didn't mean she couldn't think.

Focus on what you are able to do, not on what you can't. They don't call it "skiing for people who can't walk" — they call it adaptive skiing. Be willing to adapt. If you ask an adaptive skier what they are doing today, they will tell you, "skiing." Because they are.

THE MENTAL HEALTH BOX

The box of a mental-health disorder is a limitation that we accept



Life is filled with boxes, and sometimes we let those boxes get in the way of something new and frightening — and ultimately rewarding.

and allow to dictate potential. I am guilty of this. Basically, it's a box ceiling of my own making that dictates a maximum level of happiness because I am bipolar. What ... because I have mood, energy and sleep imbalance issues I can't be happy? BS.

Combat tool: Don't accept the limitations. A mental-health diagnosis is more of an explanation for behaviors and feelings, not an excuse to be lazy, apathetic or mean. Use the strengths of the disorder to your advantage, and learn to minimize the negative elements. Don't forget to take care of yourself.

THE LEARNED HELPLESSNESS BOX

This is basically saying, "I have tried before and failed, so why try again?" The past experience box is one that needs to be shaken.

Combat tool: All successful people have failed before, many times. What makes them different from everyone else is they didn't fall into the pits of learned helplessness — they persevered and succeeded. Understand that nothing comes easy, anything worth doing is worth doing well or any other cliché. There are enough people out there trying to pull us down, so don't be one of them. Be your biggest advocate, not biggest enemy.

THE FAMILY/SPOUSE/PERSON BOX

I see many boxes in the form of a person or people. It's often a spouse or significant other who intentionally or unintentionally limits the behaviors and activities of the other. This frequently seems to happen in marriage and often times can be beneficial. Many people never would have taken a ring out of a box if they knew the ensuing boxes to be placed upon them. This is not true for all couples, but, with a divorce rate nearing 60 percent, it is apparent that the majority of people see a partner as a box. It can also be family members or friends.

Combat tool: Surround yourself with people who encourage you to be the best version of yourself — maybe you current partner, maybe not. You generally know these people because you are happy to be around them, and they are "low maintenance." They also support you and the search to be the real you. Avoid the succubus, the person who sucks the life out of you (also called fun-sponges). Relationships should require effort to maintain but should not be constant, debilitating work.

Communication with a partner about how to better support you and be less box-like is a great tip. Articulating how and what they can do to encourage and support you

will help this shift in relationship dynamics. Counseling may be necessary; work may need to be done. But, after substantial effort and time, you may need to ask yourself: Are you happier in or out of the box? The answer may surprise you.

THE FINANCIAL BOX

This is a big one that places major limitations on virtually all of us. We all have some level of restriction based on our earning and spending. While it would be awesome to imagine a world where money is not a factor, here, in reality, it does matter.

Combat tool: Learn to spend your money on what really matters. Prioritize your spending — if you want to travel more, maybe you eat out less. If having sick gear is your focus, cut back on your liquor store and dispensary trips. Figure out where you want to spend your money and where you can afford to cut back.

THE TIME BOX

This is very similar to the financial box, and time is another limitation that may be unavoidable. Work, relationships, family and other commitments have a way to occupy and demand our time. Time is extremely valuable and should be seen as precious.

Combat tool: Similar to the

financial solutions, budgeting and prioritizing is going to be the best answer here. While some cuts may be extremely difficult, others can be shifted with mere prioritizing. I would rather be busy than bored! Learn to value the time that you have and make the most out of it.

PERCEIVED LIMITATIONS BOX

I have so many friends back in Ohio who tell me, "I wish I could do what you did and move to Colorado." As the old saying goes, "Wish in one hand and crap in the other and see which one fills up first." I stopped telling people, "You can do it!" If they haven't heard it by now, they never will. They have placed some imaginary boundary on what they are capable of, and that boundary seems impenetrable.

Combat tool: Live your dream. However, you first have to know your dream. Understand most of the limitations we place on ourselves are invented, fictitious and nothing but an excuse to avoid taking chances that may result in failure. When I moved out here, I knew it was a huge risk, but I couldn't live with myself if I didn't take the chance. It was the best chance I ever took in my life.

Be the best version of you that you can be, and get your head out of your box, Summit County!