



EPISODE NO. 342

# How to Get Out of a Life Rut

Do you find yourself waking up thinking the same thoughts, feeling the same ways, doing the same things day after day, and one day you look around and you realize, "I'm in a life rut?" If so, this episode is for you. Let's dive in.

Welcome to the School of Self-Image, where personal development meets style. Here's your hostess, master life coach, Tonya Leigh.

Hello, my beautiful friends. Today we are talking about how to get out of a life rut. Am I speaking to you? Do you feel like you're in a rut right now? You just wake up feeling the same ways, doing the same things, talking to the same people, eating the same foods, having the same kind of thoughts, watching the same kind of shows, going to bed, and then repeating that same day over and over, and you feel like there's got to be more to life than this, but you just don't know how to get out. Having experienced many life ruts myself and coaching thousands of women at this point who have found themselves in their own life ruts, I've seen some common signs that maybe you're in one.

Sign number one is you don't have energy. You know that you need to exercise, you know you need to take action, you know you need to do all of these things, but you just don't have the energy to do it. Now, I want to be very clear, this could also be a sign that you have depression. And so if that is you and you feel like, "You know what,

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Tonya? I think this is deeper than just a life rut. I think there's something going on that I need support and help," go get it. Go see a therapist, go do whatever you need to do to get the energy moving in a direction that's going to serve you. But for many of us, maybe it's not a deep depression, maybe it's not even a depression, it's just we are stuck and we just don't know how to get the momentum going forward, and the stuckness and fighting with the stuckness causes us to have less energy. So that's one sign.

Another sign is you're bored. There's nothing in your life that is giving you that thrill or that fulfillment or something to look forward to. And so at the end of the day, you're just bored with your life. Another sign is you're not excited for the day. In fact, you may wake up thinking, "Ugh, here we go again. Another day." Maybe you find yourself hitting snooze 10 times before you finally get out of the bed. You don't have anything to look forward to. And so of course, you're not excited for the day.

Another sign is that you find yourself staying in your comfort zone. You notice that you're not really doing anything that grows you. You're not putting yourself out there and taking risk. And even though you've tricked yourself into believing that you're comfortable, you're actually miserable. There is no comfort in a comfortable life. How ironic is that? It's trickery because what's keeping you in that comfort zone is fear, and a life built on fear is not a comfortable life.

Another sign that you may be in a life rut is that you've noticed that your conversations are always the same. When you get together with your friends, maybe it's an annual girls trip that you do with your girlfriends, you've noticed over the last few years, you're talking about the same things that you talked about three years ago and maybe five years ago, and maybe even 10 years ago. That is a sign that you are in a life rut.

Another sign is that you find yourself wearing the same things over and over and over again. You look at yourself in the mirror and nothing really has changed. That's a sign of a life rut.

So if any of these feel familiar to you, first of all, know that this is common. I feel like every single person finds themselves at some point in a life rut. So if that is you right now, I want you to know nothing has gone wrong. You are experiencing part of what it means to be a human being. And contrary to what the self-help world may try to convince you, we're not meant to be happy and blissed out and on ecstasy 24/7. It's not sustainable, and it's the contrast of life that teaches us what we want and what we don't want. And so when we're in a rut, there's so much goodness in that because that rut, if you look around, it's teaching you what you no longer want. And from that, you can springboard towards what you do want.

A few years ago, I found myself in a rut, and it was one of those ruts where I wasn't miserable, I wasn't extremely unhappy. It was just this underlying hum of

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discontentment. Now, some of you listening to this would be like, "Well, Tonya, discontentments and emotion, and all you need to do is change your thoughts to feel better." And let me tell you this, I am so good at changing my thoughts, and that's what I did for a long time and it's exactly why I stayed in that rut. And it's why I was happy. I wasn't miserable, and I feel like I did bloom where I was planted, I bloomed as much as I could. And then there was a moment where there was not enough nutrients in the soil to grow me any bigger. I had reached the bigness of who I felt like I could be in that situation.

And listen, I just want to say this. There is a time where you need to stay and you need to work on your thoughts because wherever you go, there you are. And I've seen this in my own life. I've seen this in my friends' lives. I've seen this in client's lives where you just go from one thing to the next, running to the next thing, and then that doesn't do the trick. So you run to the next thing when the whole time it was you, the power was within you, and it always is. But there's a moment where you have done that work and it's time to shake it up. It's time to create movement in your life. It's time to change things up.

And so that's what I did and the things that I did then got me out of that rut that I had been in for quite a bit. And so I know what it's like to be in one. And even today, I can find myself having a week where I'm just off. And I know that if I don't manage my mind and do what I'm going to share with you in this podcast, I could easily spend maybe a month, two months, and before you know it, it's like a year and then maybe it's two years. I understand that that's how it works.

And so when I find myself feeling that way, I'm like, "Oh, it's time to go in and do the work. It's time to go in, look at what's going on, identify the cause, and then create movement in my life," because in that movement, you cannot stay stuck. This is why within the School of Self-Image and the Self-Image method, I am such an advocate of taking action to help you create new thoughts. I believe in changing the circumstance to help you access new thoughts that are so hard to access in certain environments around certain people.

And so when I talk about getting out of a rut, I'm going to be talking about our thoughts and I'm going to be talking about what surrounds us because we must address both. So how do you define a life rut? Well, the way I love to think about it is think about a car. Have you ever gotten your car stuck in a ditch? Growing up in the South, it happened to me quite a few times, and I remember trying to get out of that situation and I would just hit the accelerator, hit the gas pedal, and the wheels would just turn. And the harder I tried to get out, the more stuck I became, and that's what it can feel like to be in a life route. You're going along, going about your life, got your routines, you've gotten your goals, you've gone to college. Maybe you've had some kids

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and you have the house and you're going about life. Then all of a sudden you realize, "I am in a ditch and I don't like this. I want to get out."

And so you start hitting the gas pedal, and the more you press it, the more the wheel spin and the more stuck that you feel. So what happens is you're fighting with it. You're like, "Oh, I shouldn't be here in life." And you're bringing the same mind to the situation that created the situation trying to solve the situation, and that's why we can spin and get even more stuck, and then we're just exhausted and we don't have the energy to try to get this car out of the ditch. And so we just give up and life can start to feel meaningless and we lose creativity and we don't have goals that we're excited about.

And so if we think about the car analogy, what do we do when we want to get out of this ditch? We got to take some kind of different action. We can't just keep pressing the gas pedal because that clearly isn't working. We've got to get the shovel out and we got to start digging our way out. We can call for a tow truck, we can ask for help, but we got to do something different to get out of that rut. And today I want to offer you some of the different approaches that might help.

Now, we're all different, and what works for me may not work for you, but I'm hoping with this menu that I'm going to give you today, you can maybe even just take one and you can begin to execute it and take that action and get yourself one degree closer to being out of this rut. The first thing that I'm going to suggest is actually counterintuitive. It's not what we want to do when we find ourselves in a rut. When we find ourselves in a rut, what we want to do is either deny it or argue with it and resist it, and that just causes you to spin deeper and become more and more stuck.

So the first step is just to accept, "Yep, here we are, my friends. I'm in a rut." Acceptance is the first step to change. I always go back to one of my favorite quotes by Carl Rogers, an American psychologist that says, "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself as I am, then I can change." And I think the same is true for life. When I accept my life as it is, then I can change it. When we argue against it, when we resist it, we're at war with it, and energy is flowing towards the very thing that we don't want, towards the problem versus the solution.

And so for me, I think back to a few years ago when I found myself in that rut, it was admitting to myself, "Yeah, I'm in a rut. Yeah, it sucks, and here we are." But there was this moment of accepting it that I could hear this little voice saying, "Okay, now what? What are we going to do about it, Tonya Leigh?" But as long as I was arguing with it, fighting it or ignoring it, there was no changing it. And so admitting it and accepting it is always the first step to getting out of anything, and doing it without the self-judgment. We are so harsh on ourselves. We act like when we get into these situations, that we've somehow failed at life. And it's because especially for those of

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us who tend to be perfectionist, we tend to think if we're not doing life perfectly, then we have failed, and that causes us to get into these ruts ironically.

And so within the acceptance is also the exclusion of self-judgment and just giving yourself so much love and grace and accepting the fact that you know what? You are a human being having a human moment when you're in a life rut, and just that acceptance and that love and that grace will start to help you get out. That's like you taking the shovel and digging some dirt from underneath those wheels.

The next thing to do to get out of a life rut is to be introspective. Identify what's going on and identify where you don't have fulfillment. Identify maybe what's draining you. Identify what you're doing that you no longer want to be doing. And asking yourself questions like, "What brings me joy? What causes me to be unhappy or stressed? What relationships provide fulfillment and which relationships are draining me?" And my favorite question is, "What would I love?" I love asking my clients this like, "What would you love?" Not what you think you should do, not what you think you can do, but what would you love? What would you love to experience? What would you love to be? What would you love to do, to accomplish? What would you love to create? And allow yourself space while you're in this rut because you're there, not going anywhere in this moment. Use that time to figure out what this rut is teaching you. What is it showing you that you don't want? What is it showing you that you've been participating in that's gotten you here in the first place that you need to stop?

I think about my rut a few years ago. It was during COVID, and during COVID, a lot of people had a moment to just go within and say, "Hey, now that the world has literally slowed down, let me figure out where I've gotten off track. Let me figure out what I want, what's really, really important to me." And we noticed that COVID was like a... It sped everything up that was going to happen. People got divorced, people got married, people had babies, people left jobs, people changed careers. It just intensified emotions that then caused these actions.

And so when you find yourself in a rut, it's a beautiful opportunity to go within and figure out what's going on. I love to ask myself, "Honey, what is happening? Talk to me." That's what you need to be saying to yourself if you're in a life rut. Figure out why you are in this rut and use that information to help you dig your way out.

The next thing I recommend when you find yourself in a life rut is to focus on tiny changes. Now, the next thing I'm going to offer you is the opposite of this because again, we're all different. Our tolerance level is different. We are wired differently, and when I'm coaching people, I'm looking at them as a unique individual and everybody doesn't need the same prescription. And with each human being, there is a host of experiences and things that are unique to them, and our nervous systems are wired

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differently. And so I'm always trying to just calm people's nervous systems down so that they can then change.

And so for some people, what we're going to do is we're going to focus on making small changes because your nervous system can't handle a big change. It's going to freak you out way too much. And these little tiny changes are like taking the shovel and every day digging a little bit of dirt out from under these wheels so you can get out of this rut. And so they're powerful. Now, you may not get out of the rut immediately, but at least you're not spinning and digging it deeper. You're getting the car ready to get out of the situation.

And so the tiny changes can look different for all of us. It's the daily tiny change of thought because at the end of the day, our thoughts are the most powerful things. Thoughts do become things, and our thinking is creating how we feel and our experience of life. And so changing your thought, even just a little bit can offer a little bit of relief, a little shift in feeling state, a little shift in action state. And you can see how this done day after day, putting some tension on that wheel or digging the dirt out from underneath the tire every single day will eventually get you out of this life rut. Five minutes of gratitude journaling, a 10-minute stretch, driving a new way to work, listening to a podcast, wearing a little bit of lipstick. All these little things in the moment may not seem like a lot, but I promise you, the cumulative effect of these tiny changes, these tiny shifts will add up to big results.

Now, another possible way to get out of a rut, and this is what I did a few years ago, is to make a bold move. A bold move is like calling AAA to come get you out. Or it could even be, "I'm just leaving this car here." I'm done. The car's old anyway. Leaving the car in the ditch. I'm out. I'm going to go start again." That's what a bold move feels like and that's what I did a few years ago. I made some big decisions, bold decisions, I call them bold moves. Everything from changing my business completely, moving to a new city, leaving an old community, stepping into a new one. I started to overhaul my style again, and that gave me access to thoughts that I found difficult to access in those old familiar environments. And this is why I am a huge believer, my friends, in changing your circumstance, changing your environment. Not always, but sometimes it is the prescription. It's just what you need.

These new environments that I found myself in didn't contain the same energy and types of thinking that were a part of my old environment. It became very difficult to think certain thoughts in this new environment because it was on a different energetic field. One of my members of the School of Self-Image was sharing with me that she was in a job that she was not happy in. Now, at the end of the day, it is your thinking about that job that's making you unhappy. And sometimes I don't care if you are the Dalai Lama, it's going to be very difficult for you to think happy thoughts in an

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environment that is so triggering and is full of other people thinking negative thoughts. And so the energy is just off, but she told me she had been working with this coach that had convinced her that she needed to stay in that job until she was happy. And so when she came to the School of Self-Image, I'm all about changing the environment. And so she was sharing with me that within six months of being a member, she left that job. And she said that decision completely changed her life. She was like everything else started to fall into place. Everything else started to speed up because energetically she was trying to be someone that that environment did not allow for. Now, could she have gotten to a happy place? Maybe, but I'm always like, why are we trying so hard to be happy in an unhappy place when we could just change where we are and place ourself in a new environment where it's so much easier to be happy?

Now, granted, it is a good skill to have to be able to change your thinking, to feel better around certain people and in certain environments, because we inevitably are going to find ourselves in situations where it's like, "Okay, these are the cards that have been dealt right now. How can I work with my mind to access a more powerful state of being in this situation?" But sometimes all we got to do is make a bold move, leave, change it, step away from it. And then we find that it's so much easier to access these thoughts that will help us get out of the rut.

So sometimes making that bold move is exactly what some of you all will feel deep down that you need to do to help you get out of a life rut. And that could look like booking the trip, leaving the job, getting a makeover. It could look like moving to a new country, starting a business. The options are limitless. There are so many bold moves that are available to you right now. And if you're in a place where you're like, "Tonya, I just can't. I don't have the energy. I'm scared," I get it. Focus on the little small changes because those matter too, but you just got to do something. You can't just sit in that car hoping that you're going to get unstuck because it's never going to happen. You are going to have to unstick yourself. It's up to you. Now, that does not mean you can't get support. It doesn't mean that you have to do it by yourself, but ultimately, you're the only one that can get yourself unstuck from the situation. So whether it's small moves or a big move, just get moving.

The next thing that I suggest is that you stop talking about how stuck you are. There is a big difference in admitting that you're stuck and accepting it so that you can stop resisting it versus indulging in the thought, "I am stuck," and waking up every day telling yourself how stuck you are. I'm just so stuck in life, just so stuck. And a year from now, you're still reciting the same thought because that is a thought, and we do inevitably prove ourselves true and that becomes a part of our self-image. We begin to see ourselves as a stuck human because we've told ourselves how stuck we are. And so

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then subconsciously, because we are always working to stay in harmony with our self-image, we do things or we don't do things to convince ourselves and prove to ourselves this is who we are. We are stuck.

And so, one of the things that I tell my clients, I'm like, "Okay, we're no longer going to tell ourselves how stuck we are," because of all of the thoughts you can think, is that thought going to help you get unstuck? Stop reciting it. Stop cuddling with it. Stop indulging in, "I am stuck." I'd rather you say, "I am resting," than, "I am stuck." Find a thought that feels better and gives you some of your power back versus, "I am stuck." "I'm figuring this out. Every day I get to make new decisions. I'm learning what I love and what I don't love." Find those thoughts that will inspire you and power you and be one shovel of dirt from underneath that will.

The other thing that is crucial, and I've already spoken to it somewhat, but I want to just talk about this. When you are feeling stuck in life, it is crucial, it is necessary to change up your environment because your environment is a mirror to what's going on in your brain. And so what we often do is we think the same thoughts that drive us to do the same thing, so nothing outside of us ever changes. So we're seeing things to reconfirm what we're thinking. Very much like I was just saying, when you walk around talking about how stuck you are, that is the experience you create to mirror back to you.

And so, one of the hacks that has worked for me over and over is just to change up my environment, place myself around new people, place myself in beautiful settings, place myself in new cultures with different perspectives, different ways of life, different cuisine and fashion and art. It will shake your mind up in the most beautiful of ways. Listen to new music. Watch different types of TV. Read different types of books. Go to a museum. Do something that shakes up what you see so that who you see becomes different.

Another way to get out of a life rut is to make self-care a priority, because oftentimes the reason why we're in a rut is that we have neglected ourselves. And so then it makes sense to get out of one to do the opposite of what got you there. And self-care is going to look different for all of us, but I want you to ask yourself this. When you think about the most expansive version of yourself, I refer to her as your future self, the future you who has reached your goals, who is living the life you dream of? How does she take care of herself? And that includes how she speaks to herself, how she speaks about herself, and then what she does to care for herself.

And whatever comes up for you, write a list down. What kind of foods does she eat? Who does she hang out with? How does she pamper herself? How does she treat herself? How does she care for herself? Write down a list and start to incorporate



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some of those self-care practices in your life today. These can be a part of your small changes to help you get out of a life rut.

Another suggestion to get out of a life rut, and this one is fun, and it's served me many, many times and I see this in my clients. It's so fun to watch them use this one and how it shakes them up in the most incredible ways, and that is to shake up your style. When you wear the same things day after day, and maybe you've been wearing the same kinds of clothing for the last decade or two, and you've worn your hair the same way and nothing has changed in the mirror, you can see how that action alone can begin to generate a rut. You look at a version of you who is not changing physically, and so it can appear as if you are not changing, so therefore life is not changing.

But when you begin to change who you see in the mirror, how she shows up, how she dresses, how she does her hair, how she does her makeup, it is powerful in that it is signaling to your brain, "We are changing here. We are not sitting in the car hoping that someone's going to come and save us. We are shaking things up." And so maybe it's time for a new haircut. Maybe it's time for some color. Maybe it's time to ditch the sweats and go invest in a beautiful capsule wardrobe, but do not underestimate the power of style and changing your self-image and helping you get out of a life rut.

The final suggestion that I'm going to offer you to help you get out of a life rut is one that I ask of every member of the School of Self-Image. Because a lot of times women will come in to the membership telling me that they don't know what they want or they want everything and both groups can get stuck. One group gets really scattered because they're trying to go after everything at once. And the other group just.... They don't get the momentum going because they don't decide on what they want, but the end result is you feel like you're not making progress. And so the one thing that I ask every member to do, and I want to ask you to do this, is to choose an extraordinary goal for yourself.

Now, if you are in the membership, this is under the self-image method, step number two, and I walk you through exactly how to define your extraordinary goal, how to solidify it, how to write it, and then we also talk about how to actually achieve it. But for you listening, I just want you to think about this. What is a goal that is out of the ordinary that you would love to achieve? And it needs to be a goal that is going to grow you, that's going to ask more of you, that's going to require you to change your self-image because I find those to be the most fulfilling goals. Goals that demand a new version of us, and that new version's going to be what gets you out of this rut that you're in.

So just ask yourself, what is an extraordinary goal that you would love to achieve? Because that goal can become the guide for who you have to become and who you have to become, as I just said, it's going to be the one that gets you out of this rut.

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She's the one that has the shovel or the phone or the willingness just to walk away from the car, but she knows how to get you out of a rut. And that to me is the beauty of an extraordinary goal because that goal reveals her to you.

So if you are in a life rut, my friends, take one of these suggestions in this episode and apply it, take action on it, and start digging your way out of this rut because the good news is you got yourself there and you know how to get yourself out. And I'm over here cheering you on. As someone who has gotten myself out of some ruts, I know that you are just one thought and one action away from starting this process. So let's go. Let's do it. Have a beautiful week, my friends, and I will see you in next week's episode.

Cheers.

Hey, have you grabbed your free copy of the School of Self-Image Manifesto? If not, what in the world? Head over to [schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto](http://schoolofselfimage.com/manifesto) and get a copy that teaches you how to think and show up in the areas of mindset, style, and surroundings so that you can transform your self-image.