

Unfinished Business—a Mini-Monograph

Clean up your unfinished business

©Arlene R. Taylor PhD
www.arlenetaylor.org
Realizations Inc

*Unfinished business always comes back to
haunt you.... —Alice Hoffman*



Unfinished business. It's an increasingly familiar term, although coming up with a precise definition can be challenging. Webster's Dictionary is no help, since the term isn't listed. A synonym for *business* is *concerns*, and the word *uncompleted* works for *unfinished*. So my working definition of completing unfinished business simply means addressing issues or concerns that have been unresolved or uncompleted, or that a person has not yet come to terms with.

It can also apply to situations where the younger generation takes on issues that older generations were unable or unwilling to come to grips with. Those issues then continue on down through the generations. Many try to walk away from childhood homes without sorting out and dealing with the emotional baggage they take with them. Some even try to deal with the past by forgetting it. However, you may not be able to truly understand yourself in adulthood without uncovering who you were in childhood.

Living with unfinished business is a bit like moving to a new house and bringing everything from the old place without sorting through or cleaning it up. Or, it's like running endlessly on a treadmill, no end in sight. In reality, it is living without a clear sense and clarity of purpose.

*If you do not make peace with your
history (mistakes, disappointments, failures), you will forever be
reliving them, and you will unconsciously
infect your future with the unfinished business of the past.*

—John Hamm

Examples of Unfinished Business

You can't finish reading a book (hard copy or electronic) without completing each chapter. In a similar metaphorical sense you need to close each chapter as you turn the pages of your life's book.

There are many different types of personal unfinished business, likely as many types as brains on this planet. Here are a few:

- Tasks that need to be completed
- Emotions or grief that may not have been expressed
- Decisions that need to be made
- Personal relationships that lack completion or closure
- Characteristics that were suppressed due to lack of acceptance
- Apologies that need to be made for hurtful behaviors
- Vendettas that should be halted

Unfinished business may trigger members of the younger generation to repeat specific behaviors that already showed up in previous generations, including these:

- Unwed pregnancies or pattern of abortions
- Inappropriate sexual acting out
- Addictive behaviors
- Eating disorders
- Abusive relationships
- Habitual choices with negative outcomes
- Maintaining family secrets



The phrase *unfinished business* may also explain many—if not most—undesirable behavioral patterns exhibited in family systems. An extreme example might be the so-called vendettas or bad blood between family systems that are so strong they could result in continuing periodic bloodshed, even if none of the individuals currently involved in perpetuating the pattern were alive at the time of the initial incident, much less present in person.

Similar patterns may be found in gangs, which are merely another type of family. These may involve family scripts and/or cellular memory, as well. (Refer to other mini-monographs for additional information: *Scripts for Living*, and *Family-of-origin Work*.)

One generation's metaphors may eventually become another generation's realities. That is, some unfinished business may involve the fantasies and metaphors of previous generations and behaviors observed in the present may be an attempt to act out such fantasies and metaphors.

According to Howard Bloom, a generation without violence may need violent metaphors to exercise the instinctual equipment that is languishing unused in the cerebral storehouse. Some point to bands in the 1970s and 1980s with songs like *Shoot to Kill*. They entertained a generation to which real bloodshed was mere fantasy. But the next generation tended to imprint on the metaphors and turn them into realities. So in the 90s one could ask whether mass shootings by young people were triggered by individuals who took the previous generation's fantasies as blueprints for action.

*Even though you may want to move
forward in your life, you may have one foot on the brakes. In order
to be free, we must learn how to let go.
Release the hurt. Release the fear. Refuse to entertain your old pain.
The energy it takes to hang onto the past is
holding you back from a new life.
—Mary Manin Morrissey*

Listening In . . .

Cassie was a parish nurse and loved everything about it. She enjoyed meeting new people and giving them health suggestions. For those interested, she liked discussing about how to hone their spirituality. She often told her family, "It's like working in a hospital without walls."

About the time her daughter Anna turned 13, Cassie was diagnosed with aggressive multiple sclerosis. Two years later she could get around only by wheelchair.



When Anna, now 15, was trying to decide on a career, her mother pushed parish nursing. "Carry on my vision in my place," Cassie would say. "You can do it—for both of us."

Anna did not feel strongly about following in her mother's footsteps, but neither did she feel strongly about any other career, so she enrolled in nursing school with a minor in spiritual emphasis.

Cassie lived long enough to see her daughter graduate and become a parish nurse.

Anna worked in parish nursing for three more years but became somewhat restless and increasingly found the work unfulfilling. What she was drawn to was working with toddlers. One of her assignments took her into the local Montessori school. "Now that is something I could get excited about," Anna told her husband.

"Go for it," Stan urged her. "You've finished up your mother's dream of parish nursing. Find your own passion." That passion, it turned out, was teaching toddlers. She enjoyed how the Montessori school's unique curriculum, practically applied, was making a positive difference in children's lives. And with her nursing background, Anna also served as the school nurse.

"I've found my life's work," she happily told Stan, and he agreed.



There is nothing wrong with choosing to do something that was important to a person you care about. However, when you do this without conscious awareness, you may spend a lifetime trying to finish up their unfinished business. And enmeshed in that process, you may deprive the world of what only you could offer had you been going about your business.

*You need to release the past and
forgive everyone in order to be healed, even if that just means
forgiving others for not being the way
you wanted them to be.*

—Louise L. Hay

A Comment about Relationships

Many potentially successful relationships have failed not because there was no basis for success but because unfinished business brought into the relationship (along with expectations and dysfunction) derailed them.

When issues are not resolved in a timely and satisfactory manner, people have a tendency to replicate familiar patterns and repeat previous behaviors, perhaps to unintentionally “get it right this time.” Usually at a subconscious level, a person may even expect someone else to somehow carry the burden of the needs and wants that were not fulfilled in the last relationship(s).

If, as a child, a man felt unloved or unworthy or in the way, he might often try to push these feelings aside, compensating for them by trying hard to be a loving husband, father, provider, or you-name-it. And often he does a good job. However, his earlier feelings of being unlovable or unworthy can emerge and undermine his present sense of security.

A negative/abusive father-son relationship can be especially deadly. When a father habitually neglects, criticizes, or rejects a son, a powerful and destructive message is turned loose.

According to Kenneth Druck, a man's unfinished business with his father is the most persistently recurring emotional block in his adult life. And according to Bill Glass, he has never met one man in prison with feelings of respect or affection for his father. Instead, the full range of emotions towards a prisoner's father usually runs the gamut from indifference to resentment to all out hatred. This will impact the man's entire life until and unless he becomes aware of and addresses unfinished business. Indeed, it may be a lifetime project for some adults, especially *adult children*, so called.



*Two things rob people
of peace of mind: work unfinished and work
not yet begun. —Unknown*

Listening In . . .

Neither twin was doing well in the convent. Both were on anti-depression medication that seemed to be accomplishing little, if anything, to brighten their spirits. Mother Superior recognized that and (to her credit) had arranged for the two young women to speak with a healthcare professional. A couple of meetings with the nuns, plus an interview with their mother, and it wasn't too difficult to piece together the story. But it went back more than half a century.

From her earliest recollection, Anna Marie had wanted to take vows and spend her life in an order. A quiet girl, she loved the nuns from church and school and wanted to be just like them. At age 15, when Anna Marie began expressing her wish to go into a convent, her father went somewhat ballistic.

"You know your mother isn't well," he stormed. "How selfish are you? I need you at home to help take care of her and your three brothers!" Anna Marie cried herself to sleep many a night while struggling to accept the reality that becoming a nun was not to be.



Fast forward 15 years. After her mother's death, Anna Marie felt she was too old to become a novitiate. Because the youngest brother was just finishing high school, her father left most of the parenting to her. When the young man graduated, Anna Maria took a secretarial job and soon met and married the son of the local butcher. Ten years and three sons later, Anna Marie found herself pregnant once again. This time, she got her desired daughter. Daughters, actually: twins.

Fast forward another 15 years. After finishing high school, the twins were accepted into the local convent and began the process of preparing to take their vows. They planned to teach in the parochial school. Anna Marie was almost beside herself with joy. She spent every possible minute at the convent, volunteering for this, that, and the other thing. Even though she didn't see much of her daughters, Anna Marie soaked up the environment. She began wearing navy blue, trying to look as much like the *sisters* as possible, sometimes imagining that she had taken vows herself.

It was a surprise—a shock really—when Mother Superior asked Anna Marie to speak with the healthcare professional. Anna Marie's twins depressed? Couldn't be! How could they possibly be depressed? They were nuns, for heaven's sake!

"No," Anna Marie said, in response to the counselor's many questions. "No, I don't ever remember telling the twins how much I wanted to be a nun. It's just that from the time they were born, I absolutely knew they would choose to become nuns."

The twins had followed the script that had been handed to them. Unfortunately, their brains being very different from their mother's,

convent life was not working well for them. Again, Mother Superior was able to arrange a transfer to a much larger and more secularized school.

Out of their *habits*, with more stimulation for their extraverted brains, their depression lifted considerably. Several years later, anti-depression medication a thing of the past, the twins left the order, married, and had children of their own.

Anna Marie, on the other hand, sank into a deep depression and gradually became less and less functional. She seemed to have no awareness of the impact her denied wish to take vows had had on her twin daughters. Neither did she realize how she had been trying to live vicariously through her daughters' careers in a convent. Anna Marie moaned and bemoaned to anyone who would listen, wailing, "How could they leave the convent?"



No surprise, when Anna Marie's husband died, she found a small, cloistered convent and took vows. Finally Anna Marie had her heart's desire, was serene and felt at peace, and her daughters were no longer caught up in their mother's unfinished business.

*Everyone is made up of parts and pieces
of their family's music. The saddest thing is to forget where our
songs end and our parents' begin, because each of us
plays the next note for them.*

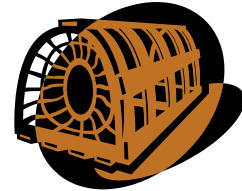
—Deborah Smith

Issues Often Related to Unfinished Business

Everyone has unfinished business, both personal and generational. It's what happens with human beings. According to Charles Sell, you can free yourself from the past only by facing the past. You can only deal with what you can label and identify. Therefore, becoming consciously aware of your issues gives you the option to choose to do something about them. Without this process, you risk some part of those issues coming back to haunt you or the next generation. The potential for unfinished business lurks as a possible complication every time there is a major relocation or a change in the status of a friendship, a family unit, a career, and so on. It can linger in the brain and sabotage a person for months, years, or decades—sometimes for generations. It not only saps your energy but impacts future relationships.

When issues remain unresolved, there is a tendency to replicate patterns, either because they're familiar or in an effort to get it right this time. Or you may expect, usually at a subconscious level, that the next person will somehow carry the burden of the needs and wants that were not fulfilled in the last relationship(s).

Following are examples of issues that others have faced. Reviewing them may provide you with insight into your own unfinished business. Remember, increasing your awareness may be the first step in the process of cleaning up your unfinished business. To get out of a trap you have to first figure out that you are in one.



1. Cleaning up unfinished business often involves forgiveness. Whom do you need to forgive? Often you need to forgive yourself first and foremost. As Deborah Smith put it, the hardest memories are the pieces of what might have been. Decide that you did the best you could at the time with what you were dealing with, with tools you had at your disposal, and what you knew. Accept that and move on.

If forgiveness involves others, be very clear about what it means to forgive. Many people believe forgiveness involves a concept that is likely beyond the realm of human brain function. It doesn't mean pretending the event never happened, or telling yourself you were not hurt or damaged by the event, or expecting that you will erase the event from memory.

My definition of *forgiveness* is giving up the right to have someone pay for what they did to you (beyond what the law requires). It does mean that you can remember the past without searing emotional pain and vindictiveness and without wasting your precious energy on something that cannot be changed.

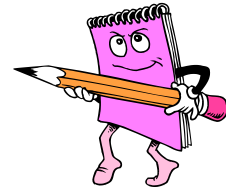
When you forgive, as Claire Frazier-Yzaguirre put it, you free yourself from the bitter ties that bind to the one who hurt you. If you expect to maintain a relationship with the other individual, forgiveness helps both of you. If you plan never to see that person again, forgiveness helps you—and can be the best revenge.

[For more information, refer to Taylor's article on her website: *Can You Afford Unforgiving?*]

2. Cleaning up unfinished business may involve releasing resentments. Doctors Arnold and Barry Fox believe that millions of people on this planet have unfinished business involving unresolved hostility, unforgiving guilt, and gnawing doubts. To have a good tomorrow, they recommend finishing up things today.

Borysenko, author of *Minding the Body, Mending the Mind*, wrote that letting go of resentments and regrets is a way of freeing yourself from the past. It's finishing up old business. You can only really enjoy the present when all your energy is available to be in the moment rather than tied up in the threads of unfinished business. This can be critically important when embarking on a new friendship.

It's serious business. Make a list of the regrets and resentments you are holding on to. Be honest. It's so easy to blow things off, to perceive you've let something go when you really haven't, at least not yet.



Do whatever it takes. That may involve making phone calls, writing letters or e-mail (whether or not you send them), apologizing where appropriate for things that you are sorry for. It may involve telling people whom you respect about your respect, and telling those you love how much you love them.

Starting a new relationship is best done when most resentments from the past are first eliminated. To better understand unfinished business, ask yourself: Is there anyone I need to thank, apologize to, or seek resolution with? The courage and openness it takes to deal with any unfinished business in your emotional history will create the kind of space in your life required to invite in someone new.

Sure, you may have regrets, but no studies I've ever seen indicate that hanging onto regrets helped a person live a more functional life in the present. Identify the lesson, learn it, accept that what happened did happen, make amends where possible, and then let it go. Finish it.

3. Unfinished business may be tied up with losses. Everyone has losses; not everyone knows how to resolve them. When a relationship changes, it is vitally important to identify and complete unfinished business, then wrap up loose ends so you don't trip over them or become entangled down the line. This is especially vital if the decision is to dissolve the relationship as it presently exists.

Ideally, completing unfinished business is both an individual and a collaborative effort. This is not always possible. What happens when the other individual has died, refuses to participate in the process, or makes a unilateral decision? You can still work your process undeterred and complete the steps to the best of your ability at your current level of understanding.

How do you know when issues are resolved? You'll know that you've grieved to completion about a person or a relationship when you can remember the person, the relationship, or the experience with only peace in your heart. This also means no longer feeling panic or intense loneliness when viewing an empty bed or crying when finding something unexpectedly that belonged to the other person.

*To acquire knowledge
one must study; but to acquire wisdom, one must
observe. —Marilyn vos Savant*

Listening In . . .

Whenever Zelda watched tap dancing in person, on TV, or in a movie, her entire body felt like it simply had to move. At the very least her foot would tap or her finger would keep time on the arm of her chair. Although it was not a problem per se, it greatly puzzled her.

Be very clear that Zelda did not know how to tap dance, had never taken lessons, and had never even put on a pair of tap shoes. In fact, dancing had never been permitted in her childhood home, and there had never been any dancing *talk*. Nevertheless, her body responded every single time. This simply increased the puzzle and Zelda's curiosity. She described it to her best friend as an overall tingling in her body, a sense of excitement, and an overwhelming need to move.

When her mother turned 60, Zelda hosted a birthday party. Several out-of-town relatives made it a point to attend, and everyone seemed to be having a wonderful reunion. As the dinner hour approached, Zelda left the family room with its lively conversation and moved to the kitchen to put finishing touches on the food.



In the game room off the family room, one of the teenagers was surfing channels looking for a sports event to watch. A tap dancing troupe popped up on the screen and knowing how much Zelda enjoyed tap dancing, he called, “Hey, Mom, tap dancing!”

Zelda left the kitchen, cut through the family room, and stepped into the porch. Sure enough, Michael Flatley and his Riverdance troupe were tapping their way across the screen. After watching for a few minutes, Zelda walked back through the family room commenting, “I don’t understand the reason I love to watch tap dancing so much.”

“Well,” said her aunt, glancing over at Zelda’s mother. “Tell her.”

Zelda’s mother smiled as she said, “I was a championship tap dancer all through high school.”

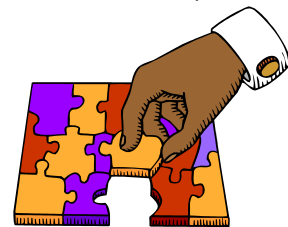
“She sure was,” agreed her older sister. “She won any number of prizes.”

Zelda was so stunned she sat down. Bewildered, she looked from one to another. “Actually,” her mother continued, “I was pregnant with you during a cold Calgary winter. I used to tap dance around our little duplex for exercise, at least until my sixth month or later.”

“Was there some reason I didn’t know this?” asked Zelda.

“I stopped dancing when I met your father,” said her mother. “It didn’t fit in with his chosen profession, and I just put it out of my mind. There was no reason to talk about it because I had decided to stop doing it.”

Still shaking her head, Zelda made her way back to the kitchen. *What if this hadn’t come up at this particular event, at this particular time, with the right people present? Zelda thought to herself. I might never have solved this puzzle. I might have died not knowing my mother was a champion tap dancer.* In fact, had Zelda been asked, she would have sworn her mother had never set foot on any dance floor.



While not a huge deal in and of itself, Zelda wondered what other family secrets she didn’t know, secrets that might shed light on other behaviors she never understood. *But I don’t even know what questions to ask,* she thought. Therein lies the rub in many family systems. What questions do you need to ask? What don’t you know you don’t even know . . .

*It ain't what you don't know
that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that
just ain't so. —Mark Twain*

Completing Unfinished Business

Completing unfinished business is not about you and them. Every person on this planet has unfinished business. It can be a friend you lost touch with or a mentor you never thanked. It can be a call you meant to make or a promise you let slip. It may be experiences that might enrich, enlarge, or benefit you that fell to the end of your to-do list. Tackling your unfinished business (even just one item) can transform your life. It's like putting a puzzle together and then moving on to complete another one.

What is involved in completing unfinished business? What does the process look like? Again, a precise definition can be difficult to craft because every brain is unique. Here are a few tips, however, that may help you accomplish this process successfully--in no particular order:

1 Define the situation clearly

Identify and describe the situation as honestly, completely, and objectively as possible. Until this happens, you don't really know what you're dealing with. And then it will likely be impossible to finish up anything. Or you may try to finish up the wrong thing, something that does not cleaning up.



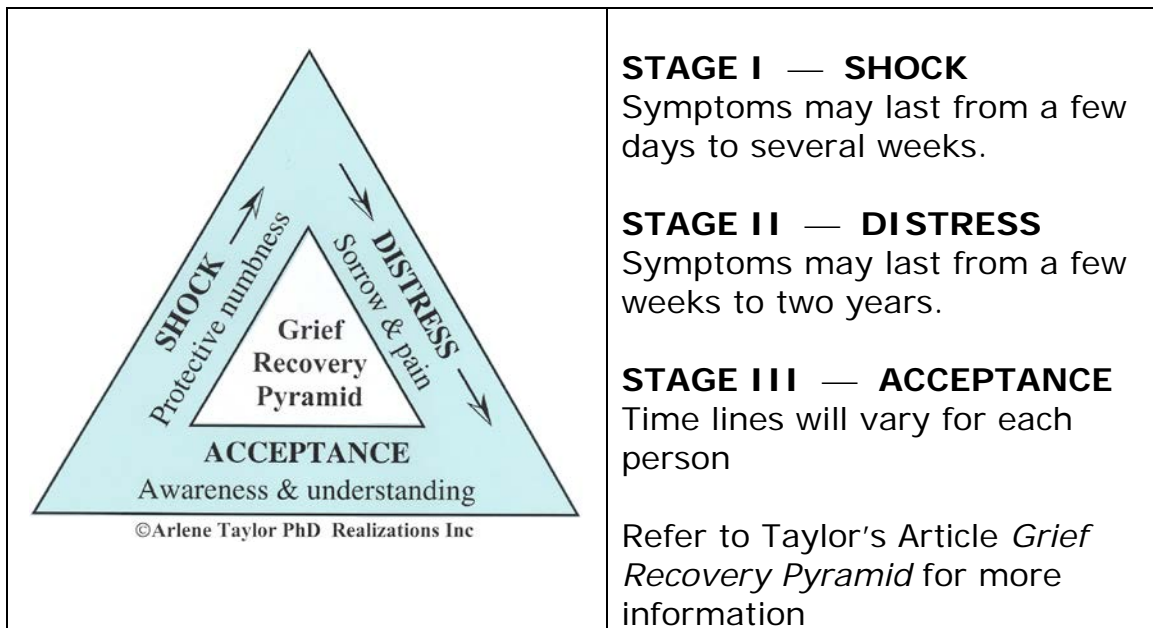
Ask yourself some specific questions:

- Does the situation require or involve change?
- What are the desirable and less desirable aspects of the change?
- Does the situation involve an actual loss?
- Is it the loss of the entire relationship, or just part of it?
- Is it the loss of a potential dream more than the reality?

Are you dealing with your own issues, with those of your family system, or struggling with the unfinished issues of previous generations? Try to identify which is which to get some clarity.

If an actual loss is involved, you may want to create a loss line starting from your date of birth to the present. Write down every loss you can recall along with the approximate date. That will help you to picture what has happened over your lifetime.

Know that previous ungrieved losses may impact the present and make the process of recovery more difficult. Remember that the Kubler-Ross model of death and dying was designed for individuals who were personally facing death. The *Grief Recovery Pyramid* that follows may be more helpful for survivors.



2 Identify your emotions and feelings

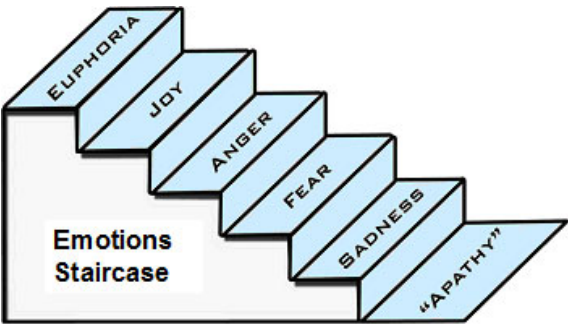
Identify the entire range of emotions related to the event or relationship, and there may be more than one. Allow yourself to experience each emotion, especially as it relates to your choices and decisions. Unless you can experience the entire range of emotions, it may be difficult if not impossible to locate your position on the Emotions Staircase. [See below.] In addition,, you may miss vital information obtained from your emotions-information to help you identify and deal appropriately with a variety of situations.

As you identify and experience your emotions, you create a variety of feelings from your thoughts (your cerebral interpretation of the physiological changes in your body resulting from the emotions). It is important to identify your feelings as well as your emotions. Only when

you know what you are feeling right now can you make a decision about whether or not to maintain those feelings or to take any action based upon them.

Some find it helpful to describe their feelings to a trusted individual. If so, do it without blame, censure, or expectations. You can do this in person, by phone, in writing, or in pantomime if the person involved is dead or chooses to be incommunicado.

Simply share your feelings as succinctly as possible so the individual doesn't have to guess, imagine, or assume. Then make a decision about whether or not to maintain your feelings. If you want to change the way you feel, change your thoughts because feelings always follow thoughts.

 <p>The diagram shows a staircase with six steps ascending from bottom-right to top-left. The steps are labeled with emotions: EUPHORIA (top), JOY, ANGER, FEAR, SADNESS, and "APATHY" (bottom). The text "Emotions Staircase" is written in the lower-left area of the diagram.</p>	<p>Refer to Articles on Taylor's website for more information</p> <p>www.arlenetaylor.org</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Emotions Staircase• If a Child Can
--	---

3 Debrief when possible and advisable

Every relationship is its own research project and is only complete when conclusions have been reached and the outcome stated. Debriefing a relationship is a way of bringing that research project to a conclusion and defining the outcome. Both individuals can benefit from the process and can use the information to help each be more successful in the future.

Even when the individuals agree to design a new relationship, the old relationship likely needs to be debriefed and that research project completed. If the other person is willing to debrief with you, the process of healing can be facilitated and enhanced for both. Admittedly, debriefing takes a degree of functionality, an openness of communication, a determination to avoid blame, a willingness to set aside defensiveness, a desire to assist each other to complete unfinished business, and a thirst to learn from the relationship experiment.

This is also the time to review promises or commitments made to each other. Did you promise to return a cherished book? Did you commit to attending an important event? Insofar as possible, it's probably a good idea to follow through on those promises/commitments as long as to do so would be appropriate, functional, safe, and in your best interest. That way there are fewer loose ends waving out there in the wind.

Debriefing includes making others in your life aware of changes that are occurring in your life and the way in which their lives may be impacted. This is both functional and courteous. Be aware that some individuals may be happy for you and applaud the steps you are taking; others may dislike the direction in which you are moving and may even try to sabotage your progress. Still others may be quite neutral.

Debriefing is not always possible, advisable, or even safe. Sometimes the person has died. Sometimes you could be in danger if you meet with the individual. Sometimes your requests are met with silence. Remember that silence is a decision, a choice, and a communication. When you request debriefing and receive no response, that is, in and of itself, an answer. The answer is no. You can still go through the process and complete your unfinished business to the best of your ability.

If you are working through a generational issue and the individual in question is deceased, there are a number of techniques to help you debrief. Here are two examples.

- The Chair Model. Write the name of the individual in large letters on a card and place the card on a chair. Talk aloud as you would like to do—or wish you had been able to do—when the person was alive. It helps to get thoughts and feelings out in front of you where you can relate to them more objectively and completely.
- The Journal Model. Place a picture of the individual on the table where you can see it easily. Take a ruled tablet and write down what you want to say and would if it were possible. Again, that is another way to move thoughts and feelings outside your head. They may look quite different when you see them on paper in front of you.



Think of debriefing as a form of confession. While the old axiom says that confession is good for the soul, it says nothing about blabbing to the universe. There have been times when lives and relationships have been seriously damaged because someone wanted to tell everything to everyone. Be very wise in what you share with others beyond the individual involved.

Telling people more than they need to know or perhaps have any right to know, actually places a burden of information on their shoulders. Be wise. It may have been Bill Bradley who was quoted as saying,

*I have always believed that people have a right to know
if I'm a crook but not if I'm a sinner, since we all are.*

Debriefing can include making amends where indicated and when possible and advisable. The message of the 9th step of the 12-Step Program is to make amends when it won't cause additional harm or damage to the other individual(s).

Note: I'm more than willing to apologize any time my actions (however well intended) negatively impact others. This doesn't include my taking personal responsibility for the other person's perception, however. Their perception is theirs because their brain created it.

4 Learn to Detach

Detach is really a wonderful word. Webster defines it as "the act of separating from a larger mass without violence or damage." If a decision is made to end a relationship or if that already happened in the past, you need to detach. If the relationship is going to continue, (albeit in a changed format), you will likely need to detach--at least at some level.

Detachment doesn't mean you've stopped caring. Rather, you care so deeply that you choose to step back from the relationship without blame or censure.



As you move through the process of cleaning up unfinished business, detachment means you refuse to exhibit dysfunctional behaviors that can do violence or damage to you or others. If you are dealing with another person, detachment means (metaphorically) that you get out of each other's way, leaving the other as unencumbered as possible from your emotions, feelings, and even desires.

This can be even more critical if the relationship contained elements of competition or manipulation. All persons need to be free to concentrate on their own issues, handle their own stuff, and complete their unfinished business. This is vitally important if one person is struggling with major decisions. You really cannot have your feet in two different worlds at the same time and be very objective.

Think of detachment as a gift you give to yourself and to others. Refuse to participate in game playing or be manipulated into exhibiting a conditioned reaction. Learn to respond in a different way. It can be difficult (even painful) to detach. However, it may be absolutely necessary in order for you to become the healthy, functional individual that you were intended to be. Eventually, you will recognize the gift that detachment can offer.

5 Learn from the process

One common definition of *insanity* is to continue making the same types of choices and exhibiting the same styles of behaviors while, at the same time, expecting a different outcome.

By that definition most people have been insane--at least for brief periods. Regretfully, some seem never to learn from their experiences. They continue to make similar mistakes over and over again *ad infinitum*. Often they wonder why life isn't working better for them. A failure to learn from one's experiences and mistakes is a long-term recipe for disaster.

Most of the time, if you take a step back metaphorically and purpose to be honest and objective, you can usually figure out some way in which your choices and actions contributed to the dysfunction. With that in hand, you can also brainstorm more effective choices and behaviors, should a similar situation arise in the future.



Every time you go through this process it's as if your life becomes a bit more prevention-proofed. Gradually you can actually begin to recognize ahead of time potential problems that you can sidestep or protect yourself from serious negative outcomes. Or at least you will have a leg up on being able to identify them almost as they are occurring and can take appropriate action to resolve them on the spot.

Be alert for defensive behaviors that may have slipped into your repertoire of habits after being repeated frequently. In most cases, defensiveness and overreaction are historical. They usually arise from distressing experiences in childhood or from some unfinished business not cleaned up.

Something in the present reminded your brain of something from the past. And your brain brought to bear in the present all the unresolved emotion associated with that something from the past.

Learning to separate your *history* from the *present* can be key. Implementing this skill can reduce your tendency toward defensive, over-reactive, and unhelpful behaviors.



6 Course correct as necessary

Working the process offers you a wonderful opportunity for personal evaluation. This can be a good time to reaffirm who you are innately, re-identify both your innate giftedness and your challenges, review your life script, and check your map for the future.

Is the path you are following still the best one for you right now, or do you need to course correct? You may need to tweak your script, your map, or both.

This step includes affirming how you want to live the rest of your life and identifying what you need versus what you want, and it's important to know the difference! It also gives you the opportunity to select individuals with whom you would like to have a primary relationship.

Your wishes do not guarantee that others will share your same desire. However, when you know what you want, can visualize it, and articulate it clearly, you'll have a much better shot at achieving your needs and fulfilling some of your wants.

Create an internal mental picture of what your functional, healthy, thriving self looks like. Once you have that picture firmly in place, simply do something every day to move toward the fulfillment and actualization of that internal, mental picture.

7 Learn to let it go

Take a deep breath, smile, and let it go. Make a graceful exit. (Granted, it's sometimes easier to say than to do.) Letting go includes acknowledging the choices you've made, understanding to the best of your ability the reason you made them, and accepting complete responsibility both for your choices and for the consequences of those choices.



Completing unfinished business and healing past wounds allows you to access all your memories in perspective without experiencing the sting from those that were painful initially. That is, you can recall positive memories related to a relationship without continuing to act on those memories in the present. Your memories are always part of you. Take them with you as you make a graceful exit without allowing them to dictate your present feelings or choices.

Move on, literally or metaphorically. Take with you the lessons you have learned. Realize a higher level of functionality, enhancing existing relationships and developing new ones as the time is right. Do it gracefully, with as much class as you can muster.

*There are known knowns.
These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns.
That is to say, there are things that
we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There
are things we don't know we don't know.*
—Donald Rumsfeld

Embracing the Process

As you identify and evaluate your relationships and complete unfinished business, you can anticipate that your everyday life will work more functionally. Gradually, you learn to recognize the difference between your choosing a course of action based on as many facts as you can obtain versus what someone else wants you to do.

Trying to figure out who you are and what you want out of life (somewhat independent of the influence of others) may be one of the most difficult

tasks of all time. It can be exciting and frightening, frustrating and fulfilling. On the positive side, your powers of observation can improve, and you can start noticing much more quickly when a system is becoming toxic or counter-productive—whether political, religious, societal, family, or personal.

You define and refine your beliefs. According to Anita Alexander, your beliefs are the most powerful factors in your life. The ones you don't know you hold probably have even more power over you than the ones you've identified. As you grow and develop, you learn to make choices and take complete responsibility for them. If you change your mind in the process, you avoid trying to make someone else responsible and give up blaming. Not only do you begin to quickly recognize your triggers for less-than-optimum behaviors, you recognize a lack of congruency in behavior patterns and become aware of your own reactions/responses to others in a more timely manner.



You gain more and more self-mastery (which is a different concept from self-control) and become empowered not only in your own life but are able to share with others in the form of mentoring. As your personal comfort level increases, you project an aura of unconditional acceptance of yourselves as well as of others.

This frees everyone to be real and encourages the removal of masks and facades. The more *actualized* (to be real and to reach one's potential) and *differentiated* (to identify and hone one's innate giftedness) you become, the more positively you can influence your environment.

Embracing and working this ongoing process helps you finish up unfinished business. It can move you from a position of grin-and-bear-it to one of living a life more consciously aligned with what works for your unique brain.

As Satenig St. Marie put it, *Success is never a destination—it's a journey.*

Persevere. Sure it's hard work—but worth the effort! And here's the payoff:

*Tending to your unfinished emotional business
can help you focus your energy on what's truly important: family and
friends; living productively and purposefully in harmony with what you **most**
authentically value and believe. —Lee Kravitz*

