

## Balance with Grace

A monthly newsletter by Grace Durfee, personal coach

Volume 7, Issue #5, May 2008, *Out of Practice*

As the weather warms up, I've experienced a number of instances of being out of practice. I don't enjoy running on icy streets, in bitter cold weather, or on a treadmill, so I find other ways to work out during the winter. My very first run of the season a couple of months ago was a difficult one. My legs felt stiff and my stride was stilted. I huffed and puffed because I couldn't quite settle into a rhythmical breathing pattern. The headwind didn't help either. But I kept going and promised myself that each run would get progressively easier. It has. I'm now able to run three or four miles without soreness.

On Memorial Day I went for my first swim in the outdoor pool. We've had a cool spring, so I wasn't sure I wanted to test the water so early in the season. There weren't many people in the health club's pool—a few kids with their dads and an older gentleman who swam a few laps. As he got out I asked him how it was and he said, "Cold!" He said he'd give me ten minutes, tops. When I first hopped in, the shock of the cold water nearly took my breath away. I kept my head further out of the water than usual during my warm up laps of breast stroke. I noticed that a muscle in my inner thigh began to twinge every time I did the frog kick, so I switched to a crawl stroke and flutter kick. I only lasted twenty five minutes (which was still better than the predicted ten) before my numbing feet prompted me to get out and into the hot tub. A few days later with water a few degrees warmer, I nearly doubled my lap swimming time in the pool.

I've also noticed feeling out of practice while writing this newsletter, playing the piano, and resuming a daily yoga practice after a lower back strain. Soon I'll have other opportunities to see how it feels to be out of practice as I pick up a tennis racquet for the first time since September and as I follow through on my intention to make more regular blog postings. Here are some of my strategies for ways to move beyond initial awkward moments into a more comfortable flow.

### PACING

It's wise to start off slowly and gradually increase the duration and intensity of any unaccustomed activity. Listen to your body, mind, and spirit and back off if you experience pain, undue frustration, or angst. For instance, I chose to get back into yoga on my own, following the cues from my body rather than from an instructor. (Plus, I really wanted to practice outside instead of in a studio.) Now that I've been practicing for a couple weeks, I've built up enough strength and flexibility to keep up in class without getting hurt.

### PERSEVERANCE

Mastery doesn't happen overnight. It takes repetition and consistent practice to create confidence, develop technique, and embed muscle memory. Once you are into a groove with a desired activity, keep it up. Although we all occasionally have

bad days, generally, you'll experience improvement and greater ease with each subsequent session. If you create a regular habit or practice, you'll never have to go through the difficult start up phase again. After publishing my book I took a break from writing. I find that it now takes me longer to polish a paragraph. It feels as if it's time to get back to my habit of writing "morning pages"—a stream of consciousness technique recommended by Julia Cameron in *The Artist's Way*—to encourage the creative flow.

#### PATIENCE

If you hold any expectations about your performance, make sure they are realistic ones. One year my first time back out on the tennis court was a blast because my goal was simply to have fun. It was a beautiful sunny day, my husband and I had the courts to ourselves, and I was pleasantly surprised how strong my shots were. In contrast, last year my first time out was disastrous. My husband and I played a mixed doubles match against year-round players. I was frustrated, remembering crisp volleys and consistent serves from the past that eluded me. This year, I plan to casually play with my family and hit few buckets of practice serves before I attempt to serve 'em up in a match setting.

#### PRESENCE

There are advantages to starting afresh. Habitual practices can at times become rote and automatic, whereas an unaccustomed activity requires careful concentration. When we approach with a beginner's mind, we are fully engaged, open, and curious. This is an ideal state for learning. For this reason, as I begin to play the piano more frequently, after warming up with a few familiar tunes, I will work on a couple of new pieces.

Don't let the fact that you are out of practice keep you from reengaging in the activities you love. Use these strategies to begin enjoying them today.

Copyright 2008, Grace Durfee

~~~~~  
Recommended resources:

*The Artist's Way*, by Julia Cameron

*Kevin Kern Piano Album*—I'm working on a few pieces from this lovely collection of New Age music.

*Children's Album Second Series, Op. 126 for Piano Solo*—These are my favorite warm up and sight-reading pieces.

~~~~~  
Please forward this newsletter to others you think would enjoy it, and encourage them to subscribe. To subscribe/unsubscribe or read archived issues, please visit

<http://www.balancewithgrace.com/newslet.html>.

~~~~~

What's coming up:

If you are attending the ICF Metro DC's Capital Coaching Conference on June 13<sup>th</sup>, please stop by and see me at my expo table.

Mentor Coaching Group forming. I've had some inquiries and will be launching another Mentor Coaching group soon. We will focus on personal, business, and coaching skill development during three one-hour group coaching calls a month. Fees are \$200 a month. Please call or email me if you have questions or would like to join us. The meeting days and times will be determined by the group.