



# Stuck in Denial

2 March 2014

*Hello*

And so time, and the year, marches on, with Easter and Autumn just around the corner. This month we continue with discussing the phases of personal change or grief, and this time discuss denial.

## **Denial**

Sometimes it's not shock, but denial, that is the first response to hearing about change. Denial means you simply refuse to believe what you are being told. Denial is one of the most basic of the mind's defence mechanisms and occurs because we cannot handle hearing what is being said. We have to pretend it's not true because to believe it is true would be overwhelming.

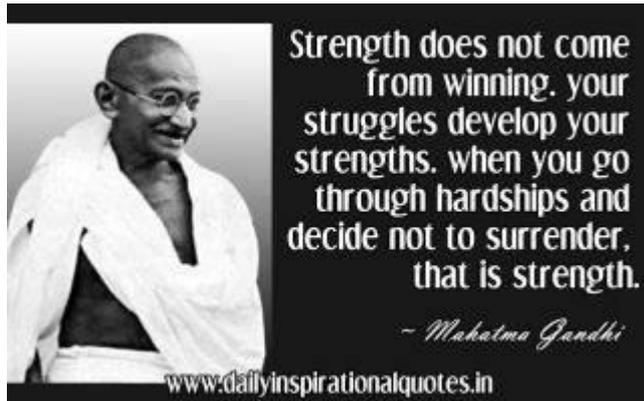
When we go into denial the event is simply too much for us to accept. Our brain cannot comprehend the changed state being true. Effectively we would have a complete breakdown or go crazy if we were to accept the information as the truth, so we deny it to ensure our sanity. Our bodies have developed the means to survive under all types of conditions and so have our minds. Defence mechanisms are important for survival and sanity. Unfortunately people in denial can really frustrate others around them, however denial serves a purpose for the person in denial.

If you start shouting at someone in denial and ask them to face reality, or to get a grip, you are not going to make the situation better. In fact they may just proceed into even deeper denial because you are making them more afraid to deal with reality. They are already overwhelmed and now they are getting even more scared by your actions.

People experiencing change will manifest denial in different ways. Sometimes they may directly refuse to believe what is being said, such as when a patient denies the results of medical tests. Sometimes denial is less direct. Think of the man who cannot tell his wife he lost his job and goes off to his office every day or goes and sits in the park. Denial also occurs when a person is convinced others will change their mind. For instance the man who is told the relationship is over and refuses to believe it and keeps trying to persuade his ex-fiancée that she didn't mean what she said.

It is of course much easier for others to see if someone is in denial. And it is pretty difficult, if not impossible, for someone to recognise that they are in denial. Which makes it difficult to deal with your own denial.

*"And that is how we are. By strength of will we cut off our inner intuitive knowledge from admitted consciousness. This causes a state of dread, or apprehension, which makes the blow ten times worse when it does fall." - D H Lawrence*



## Actions

The easiest way to come out of denial is to build your resilience. The reason you, or anyone else for that matter, is in a state of denial, is because reality is too overwhelming. With a greater sense of competence and resourcefulness, it is easier to see that you can deal with whatever issue is at hand. And so the less the need to deny in order to cope. In order to stop yourself going into denial, in order to come out of denial if you recognise you are in denial, or in order to help someone around you move out of denial you can try some of the following ideas, which are all essentially about building an increased sense of competence and capability to deal with life and the change you are facing.

- [Work on your self-esteem](#). People with higher self-esteem are more able to deal with negative events in their lives. Part of high self-esteem is having a sense of competence to deal with the challenges of life.
- [Improve your coping skills](#). One way to do this is to be around and learn from people who do have great coping skills. Get advice. Get a coach or mentor. Get help to build your coping skills. If your family and friends have poor coping skills you will have learnt some ineffective ways to deal with the challenges in life. Make it your business to learn better ones. It will improve the quality of life you have going forward immensely.
- [Increase your resources](#). People with more skills, friends, money, etc. are better able to face negative news because they are more likely to see a way for them to cope with the change.
- [Get all the facts](#). Having only half the story is like listening to rumours. You don't have the full picture and your brain is likely to make up scary stories to fill the gaps in information.
- [Brainstorm options and solutions for the way forward](#). If there is an alternative or several viable and reasonably pleasant alternatives for the future then a person can face the reality of the change. If you are trying to get someone out of denial you can help them by giving them alternatives and solutions to what may seem to them an impossible or unsolvable situation.

If you are in denial you won't come out of it until you shore up your resources and sense of self and it feels reasonably safe to acknowledge the change. That means you come out of denial when you see an opportunity for living reasonably well in the changed state. If all you see in the changed (future) state is a threat to your survival then denial can seem the only option.