



*Go To The Balcony
To Get A Grip*

2nd Edition

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Go to the Balcony to Get a Grip!

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About the Author - **Suzanne Bird-Harris**



As a life coach, Suzanne uses her experience, strength and hope to support and inspire women to live a life authentically their own, realize their potential and leave their mark on this world in a way that is meaningful to them.

Suzanne spent 20 years as a computer programmer in Corporate America, specializing in teaching and training others in the use of the programs her department created. She “translated” computer-speak to users and bridged the gap between their understanding of their jobs and how to use the systems. She was definitely not your stereotypical “computer geek” and found great satisfaction in helping others to make sense of things they didn’t understand.

In 2000, Suzanne was introduced to Network Marketing and found a way to leave Corporate America, yet maintain her income. Over the years since, she has coached and mentored many women in pursuing a vast array of goals and dreams using network marketing as the vehicle.

Feeling still a bit unsatisfied, she made the decision to make coaching and mentoring women her primary focus, which frees her to offer a wide variety of tools and resources to women who are ready to make positive changes in their lives.

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Through her coaching practice, Suzanne now offers a guiding hand to women who are:

- Procrastinating
- Living according to others' expectations to the exclusion of their own
- Quitting before they start
- Unable to make decisions
- Lacking a direction and/or a plan
- Feeling frustrated and overwhelmed with areas of their lives
- Feeling they're not heard, understood or accepted for who they really are
- Finding it hard to remain enthusiastic and focused
- Lacking confidence, or low on self esteem
- Full of plans and ideas, but are unsure how to get going and move forward

Suzanne provides personal coaching, group coaching, newsletters, articles, teleseminars, workshops and keynote addresses focusing on shortening the learning curves in life for women ready to create the life they really want to live out of the life they wake up to each morning.

Suzanne is the single mother of Joey, Tyler and Alexis, and a soon-to-be grandma. She resides in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

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Introduction to the Balcony

I am an ordinary woman: Simple as that. Same as you, same as the next woman either of us might meet. At the same time, I am an extraordinary woman: Complex as that. Same as you, same as the next woman either of us might meet.

My goals are simple, but not easy. My dreams are vivid and, some days, are all that keep me going. My life is complex, convoluted and insanely contradictory, at times. Sound familiar? Out of this chaos, I am creating the life I was born to live.

Of all the skills I've developed over the years, "going to the balcony" ranks in the top ten skills responsible for creating the happiness I live on a day to day basis today.

I've been "going to the balcony" far longer than I've had a name for it. I was first introduced to the phrase when I read William Ury's *"Getting Past No: Negotiating With Difficult People."* It occurred to me that going to the balcony was useful across many areas of life, not just in negotiating. You may have other names for it, but what I'm talking about here is the ability to step outside yourself, gain a bird's eye view of your life, the people in it including you, the events, the relationships, and the drama - everything your life is today.

That view, without the emotional connection to what is going on, is what allows you to get clear about what is working in your life and what is not. We all know how easy it is to see things in someone else's life that need to change, how glaringly apparent those things are, yet how we can be so blind

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to those same things in our own lives. Learning how to go to the balcony is as close as we can get to the kind of objectivity we have about others' lives in our own lives.

In other words, going to the balcony allows you to see the forest that is your life, in spite of your trees.

How to Go to the Balcony

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts...*

William Shakespeare, "As You Like It", Act 2 scene 7
English dramatist & poet (1564 - 1616)

Imagine your life is being played out on a stage. On stage, you are involved. You are invested emotionally in each act and each player sharing the stage. Because you are emotionally involved, seeing your own behavior objectively is next to impossible, and only slightly less difficult, the behavior of others.

But objectivity is what we need to make good decisions. Since the quality of our lives is simply the cumulative result of each and every decision we have made, making good decisions, decisions that will influence the *rest* of our lives, is important, to say the least.

Now imagine leaving the stage and walking upstairs to the balcony. In the balcony, you become a third-party, emotionally-detached witness to what you see going on in your life. From this vantage point, you can think constructively, instead of defensively. You can make good decisions with a cool head versus reacting and making things worse. Best of all, you can put

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yourself in the shoes of the other people involved and consider the situation from their point of view and work to find win-win solutions.

Go to the Balcony Instead of Going on the Defensive

How many times have you blurted out something in the heat of the moment, only to immediately wish you could take it back? Once spoken, your words have their impact on the other person, your relationship, the other person's image of you and the direction the conversation takes.

Those closest to you know where ALL your buttons are. Sometimes the urge to push them, if for no other reason than to watch you react, gets the best of them. Keeping you stirred up is a way of controlling you, keeping you off-balance and "making you pay" - in a very passive-aggressive way - for all the wrongs they feel you've committed. And if you're honest, you realize the same is true in reverse.

Instead of reacting, to go to the balcony the next time they start to push your buttons. In the balcony, you can listen as someone other than the target of the torment and look for ways to remain in control of yourself and your words.

You likely won't have to wait long for the opportunity to try out your new plan. What you'll likely notice first is how calm you feel, even though they are pushing one button after another. Just mentally detaching from the situation is enough to do the trick, because you no longer feel backed into a corner. The feeling of being in control of yourself, especially when you're under attack, is quite liberating. You can tune the button-pushers out and

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repeat over and over to yourself, "I am in control of myself and do not have to respond."

After a few visits to the balcony, you'll notice they won't try to poke at you as much as before. When they don't get the reaction they wanted, they stop pushing the buttons! And all that changed was your behavior!

Go to the Balcony to Restart a Bad Day

You know how sometimes we "wake up on the wrong side of the bed?" Everything goes straight to you-know-where in a hand basket and it seems to get worse as the day goes on.

Next time you wake up in a "funk" and don't want to be bothered...try going to the balcony before you do anything else.

Take some time to ask yourself why you're feeling the way you are? Root around until you can give a name to your pain.

Better yet – write down what you find. When it comes to feelings, it helps to write them down so you can see them on paper, mostly because it forces you to be specific and clear about what is really going on. You might find the mountains you've made go back to their molehill state fairly quickly just by writing them all down.

Here are 3 steps to restarting a bad day:

Step 1: Recognize the funk for what it is - just a funk - and mentally review any possible causes or contributing factors. Write them down! Seriously, and don't censor yourself - write whatever comes to mind.

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Just make a list. There is no right or wrong – just write what you find.

Step 2: Look at the list you came up with. Any recurring themes or items caused by other items on the list? Write 'em down.

Step 3: Based on what you find, brainstorm ways to avoid the same funk-producing combination in the future. Some will almost jump off the page at you, they'll be so obvious. Others might require a little thought, but take the time because you are worth it. So are the people around you.

Here is an example of one of my recent Step 1 lists:

- I overdid it physically the day before and was feeling it that morning (sore all over, muscles screaming each time I move), no doubt due to several weeks of not doing much of anything physical
- I had watched what ended up being a sad, sad movie late, late, late the night before which stirred up many emotions in me, and then went to bed with all that swirling in my mind
- I didn't get enough sleep the night before (or woke up too early that morning, one)
- I got a phone call from my oldest and in his voice and words I heard all the mistakes I've made as his mother...yet again

Ick! No wonder I was in a funk! Ok, on to my Step 2 list:

- I see being tired and sore as the underlying problem, making me ultra sensitive to everything else.

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- Maybe my reaction to the movie was due to my being tired and maybe a little more vulnerable than usual.
- Maybe my reaction to my son's call had more to do with the fact that I was physically worn out and tired and reeling from already stirred up emotions than anything he said.

On to Step 3.

Ok, it was obvious I needed more rest! That one jumped off the page. And with everything I know about how our minds work on unresolved issues, I probably didn't do myself any favors watching that movie and then going to bed immediately afterward, letting my mind run wild reacting all night long. And my son did not need to hear anything from me while I was in that funk because I might not have been able to be rational. So what was my plan?

1. Take a nap! (If it had not been a weekend, I would have substituted going to bed early for the nap.)
2. Only watch movies beginning at a decent hour and allow time to journal afterward if I feel unruly emotions being stirred.
3. Most importantly - when I recognize a "funk" has overcome me, take the time to do these steps and DO NOT attempt to push through it. Even if I can only take 10 minutes, take the 10 minutes, go to the balcony and do these steps. It really does help.
4. Remember to be kind to myself.
5. Give myself permission to tell myself and others, "I am not feeling like myself at the moment. I will have to get back to you later."
6. Breathe. (Or meditate.)

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Having taken the time to do these steps, I felt MUCH better. I give myself credit for recognizing this "funk" and taking the time to figure it out. In years past, I would have reacted all day long, spewing my sour mood at whoever crossed my path, only to make matters worse, in the long run. This is such a better option!

Go to the Balcony to Walk a Mile in Their Shoes

Another advantage of being in the balcony is that you can more easily consider the position of others – how they think, why they say what they say; why they do the things they do, and therefore, not have to take it all so personally.

When someone is being a particular pain in your neck, go to the balcony FIRST to see if there might be some reason they're being such a pain. Now, do not misunderstand me here – we each are responsible and accountable for our own behavior, so I am not suggesting we go to the balcony to allow people to walk all over us. NO!

But, because we are all responsible for our own behavior, I suggest going to the balcony in these types of situations so that we can replace our natural reaction with a more conscious response.

Example: My daughter's father tends to become a bit overbearing when we discuss issues related to her. It's not long before he's barking orders at me about how I should run things in my own house, which definitely does not set well with me! The first few times after we separated and tried to have discussions concerning her, they quickly deteriorated into arguments.

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My daughter is young and we have many more years to be parents before she's grown and out on her own, so I knew something had to change, and I knew it was going to have to be me and my behavior (that's the only thing I have any measure of control over, remember. I can't control him.)

So, I went to the balcony and put myself in his shoes. I tried to feel what he was feeling and see things from his point of view. I know he really does love our daughter and wants the best for her. I also know that nothing frustrates him more than feeling like he's not in control, that he doesn't have a vote, and that his opinion doesn't count. As a result, he quickly becomes overbearing, barking out orders about what will and won't be happening regarding her. I realized that much of what I was hearing was pure frustration on his part – he just didn't pay much attention to how he expressed it. I decided to let most of his blowing and going go in one ear and out the other and not take it all so personally.

A great example of this happened not long ago. He called to talk to her and asked about her homework, if it was done, or not. She told him it wasn't done, that she had been playing outside since she came home from school. Then he asked to talk to me.

I got on the phone and he proceeded to tell me, in no uncertain terms, that he wants her homework done before she does anything else after school. My natural reaction to being treated in that manner is to bristle up and remind him just who he's talking to. Instead, I went to the balcony and let him talk. When he was finished, I calmly said, "Now, may I explain to you why that will not work?"

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He reluctantly agreed to listen, and I told him that during the winter months, when we have decent weather, I prefer to let her play outside, ride her bike and run her energy out in the hour or two between school and dinnertime. It gives her a break from “school stuff” and there is still plenty of time between dinner and bedtime to complete the little bit of homework she has at her age. Plus, I am more available to help her at that time than right after school. I explained that if we were to do it his way, she’d have her homework done, yes, but without as much help from me, and she’d have no time to play outside. I asked if it was more important to him for her to have her homework done each day, or for her to do her homework at the time he said it was to be done.

Reluctantly, he told me that he was just concerned that her homework was being done and not ignored.

Again, I RAN to the balcony before I blurted out that there was no way my kids were allowed to ignore doing homework and who exactly did he think he was talking to, anyway? Instead, from the balcony, I simply said, “Good then. We agree and her homework will be done.”

An Important Distinction

In my own experience and in my experience with my coaching clients, initially, going to the balcony may *feel* like you are giving the other person free reign to stomp all over you, hurt your feelings, tell you how wrong you are and generally be abusive. It is extraordinarily difficult in the beginning to catch yourself in time to go to the balcony in the first place, especially when someone is pushing your buttons left, right and center.

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Remember, the whole point of going to the balcony is to distance yourself from the emotions swirling around you so you can think clearly and act, instead of react.

To those of you who might be thinking the idea of letting someone rant on and on unchecked is somehow giving them permission to treat you badly, let me offer this: You can only control yourself and your behavior. When you choose not to react, you are actually making the decision not to play in the mud puddle with them. There is great power in that decision, alone! Let them continue to act like a raving maniac – *you* don't have to anymore. You can stand firm in the knowledge that you are taking steps to improve yourself so that you can improve your life. You will find your happiness while they continue to rant on and on. And I promise you – one day, their antics will actually be funny to you.

I remember the first time I found myself in exactly that situation. I went to the balcony and my first reaction was, who IS that crazy woman ranting and raving down there, anyway? I was behaving as badly as the other person, maybe even worse, if I want to be honest with myself. Sometimes, seeing the situation from this perspective is all it takes – when we return from the balcony, we have different behavior simply because we saw how outrageous we had been and that kind of behavior does not match the person we are becoming.

Going to the Balcony is a Tool, Not a Crutch

Sometimes it is difficult to see the difference between acting and reacting. Sometimes what we call acting is actually reacting in disguise. We can become so conditioned by our past experiences that when something similar

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happens now, off we go in our response to it before we know it. That is how the merry-go-round pattern both starts and continues.

If you want off the merry-go-round, then it is up to you to jump off, which can be very scary. Think about it – if you were to literally jump off a merry-go-round while it is in motion, you might break a bone, clunk your head, or at the very least, lose your balance for a moment or two. Jumping off the figurative merry-go-round feels just as scary. What it all boils down to is the fear of the unknown, and in that, you are very definitely not alone! But when you are miserable and you finally accept that you are the only person who can improve your life, then the desire for peace and happiness outweighs the fear of the risks you must take to make that leap.

Going to the balcony is not a way to hide from your life or avoid making decisions. Quite the opposite is true. It is a way to take a deep breath, calm down, slow down the pace of your life for just a moment and make choices based on what you want for your life. You can play “what if” with situations and practice standing up for yourself. But, you don’t want to get stuck up there, either, because the joy of life is in the living of it. So, make frequent visits to the balcony, rather than trying to figure out the rest of your life the first time.

Start Today

There are so many skills we need to learn to effectively create the lives we want to live, it can feel overwhelming. No matter your age or experience, it is NEVER too late to start. To shorten your learning curve, go to the balcony. You may find, like I did, you do your best thinking up there.