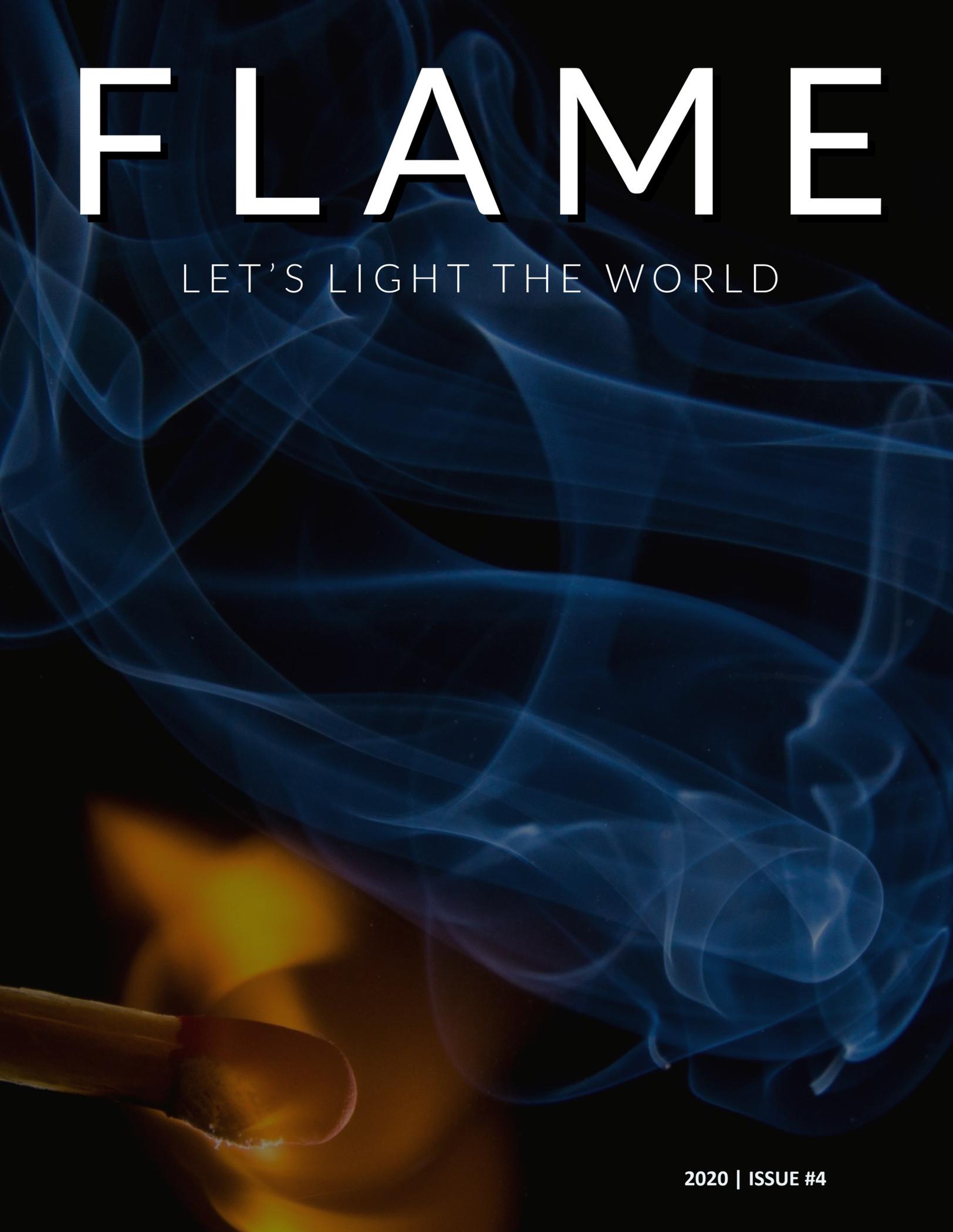


FLAME

LET'S LIGHT THE WORLD



2020 | ISSUE #4

Table of Contents

- Keep Pedaling | Page 5
- Musings From a Tree | Page 8
- Why is having a marketing strategy so important | Page 10
- Nurturing our Customer Relationships | Page 13
- What's your ACTION Plan? | Page 16



Message



Friends,

We cook our food and feed a family with a FLAME.

We light the way in the midst of darkness with a FLAME.

We honor fallen champions and heroes with a FLAME.

When we spark a FLAME within our community, our businesses, relationships, and everyday communication, we see results that are profitable, enjoyable and victorious.

F.L.A.M.E. or Faith, Love, Appreciation, Motivation, and Empathy, change the course of the things that matter most in our lives both personally and professionally. We empower our own success and that of those around us when we go to business and life with F.L.A.M.E.

I encourage you to pour into others, and allow wisdom and value to pour into you through the lens of FLAME. Now, please enjoy this edition of FLAME, which is powered by Collaborative Solutions Group, our supervising editor Christina Bartolotta, and all of our amazing contributors!

About CSG

Personal and professional growth only happens after YOU start growing. Taking action is key when your expectations are to fully develop skills and enjoy meaningful results. There are six core elements that we focus on to help you grow in to the best version of yourself. These elements do not exist on their own. Each element influences the others and how you balance these interactions is vital to personal growth...

Opportunities For Growth

1. Growth Events:
2. CSG Premium—Private Coaching
3. CSG Lite—Group Coaching
4. Club CSG
5. The Master Within
6. Solutions From the Huddle
7. Critical Strategy Guide

FAITH



Keep Pedaling

Last month, Collaborative Business Solutions hosted a two-day **Leadership Mastery Summit in Huntersville**. *Just over a dozen speakers shared their unique stories motivating and enlightening those who could join the summit virtually.*

While I was excited to be one of the speakers on day two of the event, perhaps a bigger thrill was sharing the stage with some of the nation's outstanding motivational speakers. Among them was Nate Salley, former Ohio State National Champion Safety who played for the Carolina Panthers from 2006-2009.

Nate now speaks to groups with his company *Audible Coaching and Consulting*. *As a huge College Football fan, I remembered Nate from his playing days with the Ohio State Buckeyes and enjoyed watching him on Sunday afternoons with our Carolina Panthers.*

Salley's program entitled, *"Three Steps to Walking in Your Purpose,"* spoke about the challenges' individuals face as they define their purpose in life. *As I write this column, perhaps no time in our career have we faced greater challenges than those presented by this COVID-19 pandemic - Challenges to our health, to our business, and to our relationships.*

If the virus we battle were not enough, we are dealing too with the issues related to diversity and inclusion. The death of George Floyd a few months ago, at the hands of the Minneapolis Police, has become a *"Tipping Point"* for African Americans as we all begin a much-needed dialogue about race in America.

I listened intently as Nate began discussing the life lessons he shared with his own son. Pausing to look around the room, Nate beamed as he discussed how he taught his son how to ride a bike. He shared how he held him firmly on the seat of the new bike and promised he would be right there to keep him from harm. As his son started pedaling, and panicked, realizing he was easing out of his father's arms. Nate assured him, "He would be there...keep pedaling and even if you fall, I will get you back up."

I could not help but think back on my first experience on a bike. While many others in my neighborhood began with training wheels, my dad simply started me off on a hill, and like Nate, urged me to keep pedaling!

Keep Pedaling

For weeks, whenever I wanted to stop the bike, I would have guided it into bushes, up against a tree, or simply fallen off before one of the other kids asked why I didn't just use the brakes?

"What's a brake?" I asked back.

No one ever told me how to slow down, stop or dismount. All I understood to do was to watch where I was going, pay attention to cars and the people around me, and keep pedaling.

Both Nate and my dad had similar advice – Whether on a bike or in life, you will fall and some of those falls will hurt a little more than others. But you always get back up and keep pedaling.

As Nate Salley was wrapping up his talk, he reminded everyone that pain had its purpose. Even this pandemic we are experiencing will provide us new opportunities as we adapt, grow, and learn from the challenges we face.

As I thought about those lessons my dad imparted on me, Nate turned, and his eyes met mine. It was as if he was reading my thoughts when he paused, smiled, and talked about "Legacy." The Legacy we leave is not all the toys we have, wealth we have amassed, or places we have traveled – it's the impact we have on others and the difference we have made in their lives.

There will be days when you feel you have given it everything you have. Perhaps a day when you have stumbled or fallen. That is when, as Nate reminded us all, you remember your "why" – your unique purpose... and keep on pedaling.



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LOVE

Musings from a tree

“That tree shouldn’t have grown exactly how it did.”

We never say that.

We would never say that.

The way a tree is formed is a marvel of nature.

A work of art.

We knew it took time...a lot of time...for it to form in the manner in which it did.

We never find ourselves saying “that branch should’ve developed just one more branch.”

“One more group of leaves.”

“It should be leaning this way. No. That way.”

You see, the tree simply remains as is. It takes in the sun. It endures the storms. It bends and blows with the wind. It doesn’t have to try.

Yet we continue to say about ourselves “I should’ve been this way.” “I should’ve grown and developed another way, a different way.”

But why? Why do we put that undue pressure on ourselves? We don’t do it to nature. And if we are of and by nature, it should follow by reasoning that there is no need to put pressure on ourselves.

It’s time to stop that way of thinking. Let nature do what it does. You do what you do to keep growing, developing and branching out (yes, pun intended!). Keep taking in the sun, enduring the storms, and blowing in the wind. That’s your only job. Allow it to happen.

Say to yourself: “The tree is my teacher. A teacher about how to bend with the wind. How to stand firm, proudly even. How to be flexible. How to accept who I am and how I grow, in all of my uniqueness.”

Because you, my friend, are an amazing creation of nature.



Dr. Damon Silas is an entrepreneur, a healer, and an artist who tackles the subjects of mental health, personal development and professional growth with a dynamic twist. A former contractor with the military and DC school system employee, he has used the challenges he has witnessed and experienced in order to help countless others to increase and improve their healing and growth process exponentially. A two-time published author (with another on the way), radio and podcast host ('A Mental Health Mixtape' which can be found on the WDRB radio station on iHeart radio as well as on iTunes; and 'From Mourning to ACTION' out on iTunes), and hip-hop dance instructor, this father of 2 fur babies and husband is originally from the Boston area and loves calling NC home now. and improve their healing and growth process exponentially. A two-time published author (with another on the way), radio and podcast host ('A Mental



enjoy
the
little
things

APPRECIATION

Why is having a marketing strategy so important?

Do you ever wonder why your marketing efforts seem to never generate the amount of business you desire? Are you spending lots of money and not generating quality leads? In most cases it is because you are marketing the way that most small businesses do. You buy a list, put down some great offers and hope that the phone will start ringing. This doesn't work and will continue to reinforce the general feeling that marketing doesn't work. For any of your marketing to have an impact you need to have a strategy first, before you do any tactics. Sometimes we put the cart before the horse.

Marketing isn't just about generating leads, it is about everything your business does. It is about finding a way for your ideal client to get to know you, like you, trust you, so they will try you out, buy from you more than once and then refer you to everyone that they know. We often forget this point and only see marketing as a way to get a name to a salesperson. Without a strategy, you can't move a client all the way through your business processes from start to finish with consistent results.

What does strategy really mean?

1. A [method](#) or [plan](#) chosen to [bring](#) about a desired [future](#), such as achievement of a [goal](#) or [solution](#) to a [problem](#).
2. The art and [science](#) of [planning](#) and marshalling [resources](#) for their most [efficient](#) and [effective](#) use. The term is derived from the Greek word for generalship or [leading](#) an army.

[Definition from BusinessDictionary.com](#)

What does tactics really mean?

[Means](#) by which a [strategy](#) is carried out; planned and [ad hoc activities](#) meant to [deal](#) with the [demands](#) of the moment, and to move from one [milestone](#) to other in pursuit of the overall goal(s). In an [organization](#), strategy is decided by the [board of directors](#), and tactics by the [department](#) heads for implementation by the junior [officers](#) and [employees](#).

[Definition from BusinessDictionary.com](#)

So a marketing strategy is a plan to attract your ideal client through consistent marketing tac-

Why is having a marketing strategy so important?

tics. Then it is a plan of how to keep them and get them to refer your business.

Spending time to develop your strategy is time well spent. It can mean the difference between wasting hundreds, if not thousands of dollars on marketing or attracting lots of qualified leads that turn into hundreds and thousands of dollars of profit for your company.

You must be able to differentiate yourself or run the risk of getting lost in all of the other me too marketing that no one pays any attention to. As our attention spans become shorter and shorter, your company has to find a way to cut through the noise and help your ideal client understand that you are the right choice to solve whatever problem they have or reason for looking at your products/services.

When you have a strategy that helps your ideal client understand that you are the best person to work with because you can solve their problem better than anyone else they may be talking with, you almost always can eliminate the price conversation.

A good strategy includes:

- Truly understanding your **ideal client**
 - Who are they?
 - Where do they get their information?
 - What problems are they trying to solve?
- Having a **unique** way to talk about your business and the services/products.
- Truly understanding your competitors and how they talk about themselves and you
- Considering packaging and combining services/products as a way to **differentiate** yourself
- Defining what you are the **expert** at. What do you know more about than the majority of your competitors that will help your potential clients see you are the obvious choice
- Making sure that marketing and sales function as a cohesive **team**
- Distinguishing only those tactics that will truly get your ideal clients attention and move them to **action**
- Understanding how you will execute the tactics you select, so that you have a **consistent** marketing effort, not just a tactic of the week
- Developing a way to **track** your efforts to decide what is working and what is not



Over the next several months I will attempt to guide you through understanding how to put a great marketing strategy together. As always if you need help, contact me at laura@team-csg.com or pick up the phone and call at 704-699-4099.



MOTIVATION

Nurturing our Customer Relationships:

Communication + Appreciation + Empathy = Strength

Maintaining relationships, whether with customers, friends, or even spouses, takes a lot of work. We'd like to think that once we have "won" the relationship that the hard part is done. The truth is, that is the easy part.

It's too easy to take a relationship for granted. If you have a customer that has been with you for years, it is easy to think that the status quo is going to keep them with you indefinitely. So, as you work on acquiring other customers or building relationships with other clients and prospects, it's easy to lose sight of the relationships you already have.

In the consumer/business world, relationships are built around needs. Your client has a need, you have a solution. That was the basis for the relationship. But needs change over time. What a business needs in year 1, may not be the same 3 or even 5 years later.

In the personal world, friendships and more emotional relationships work very similarly. Though defining the basis for the relationships as "need" and "solution" probably oversimplifies things. Friendships are forged from respect, from shared experience, and from a mutual understanding of each other's goals and ambitions. But as individuals, we all continue to grow, adapt, and change.

Change is constant, in both life and business. We, as businesses and as friends must evolve with the changes those around us go through. As a customer's needs change, our products and services should evolve with them.

We need to be sensitive to the changing needs that we see in our customers. The only way we see these changes is by continuing to maintain an open line of communication. We must show appreciation for our customers' continued presence in our business and empathy for what is going on in their business.

As we maintain these lines of communication, we will see the cues and clues for how our business and our relationships with our customers need to evolve.

This isn't just true in the business world. Communication, Appreciation, and Empathy are very much necessary in our personal relationships. Friends, family, spouses all have different relationships with us that require open communication, mutual appreciation for the position they hold in our lives, and empathy for what is going on in their lives.

Without communication, friends drift apart. Without appreciation and empathy spouses don't realize how their relationship is changing.

Nurturing our Customer Relationships: Communication + Appreciation + Empathy = Strength

Nurture communication with the relationships in your world. Let them know they are appreciated for the role they play in your life or in your business. Be observant, listen to what they say, with a servant's heart. Look for ways to show your appreciation with new ways to provide value to their life or their business.

The continued growth, development, and evolution of the people around us means that the relationships we have are changing and we have to work to maintain them. The easy part is what we have already done. The hard part is what we have yet to do because it is more than just the next change or the adjustment.



Matt Swanson is the owner and founder of [MS Digital Solutions](#), a digital marketing agency that focuses on helping businesses make the most of their digital footprint. 15 years in the media industry and experience a variety of marketing roles has prepared Matt for helping businesses understand the possibilities and processes of a strong digital presence. Matt is married to Jen, his wife of 19, and together they have 1 son, Ryan, and live in Mooresville NC.

EMPATHY



What's your ACTION Plan?

In my book entitled What's Your ACTION Plan: 6 Powerful Ways to Get Unstuck in Your Life Now!, I discuss ways to move through periods of stuckness, as we all have encountered at one time or another in our lives. And what I've been seeing for a lot of people in my work and conversations nowadays is a pervasive feeling of stuckness - people wondering what to do next, how are they going to get there, and what is the point of it all. It's almost as though we're all having a collective 'mid-life' crisis trying to figure out if we're all truly in our purpose.

What do we wanna do when we grow up?

This process and consequent questioning is a good thing. Sometimes things happen in life that really shake us up, shake us to the core, wake us up to the rest of the world around us.

What's interesting about these days is that we are all collectively going through this, simultaneously. It truly is a once-in-a-lifetime thing, similar to 9/11, but on a much larger (i.e., global) scale.

Oftentimes, loss can bring about this feeling of stuckness. And let's be real. We all have lost some significant things in 2020. This year has not been easy on us, yet whoever said change would be easy was lying to you!

We have lost a sense of 'normalcy' with COVID-19, aka the Coronavirus. We lost a sense of freedom in our everyday lives, a sense of being able to move about and go where we want, be how we want, when we want. We have to shift to wearing masks when out in public, and the amount of places we can go without thought have slowly dwindled, even if they are coming back in some places.

Some of us even lost jobs, if not temporarily, some for even longer. Some of us may have even lost a family member or loved one during this time.

Loss stuns us. It can stunt our growth if we allow it. It freezes us. Or for some, it can force us to keep pushing as though nothing has occurred. Keep moving, nothing to see here!

Yet that all eventually catches up to us. We can't escape it. We must face the elephant in the room. Thankfully, COVID allowed us to face this.

And when we face something, we can then take action. Don't get me wrong, sometimes action looks like slowing down, taking a break, a breather. Other times it means moving

What's your ACTION Plan?

through the pain, discomfort, tough feelings in order to get to a new, updated, different space.

So what is this ACTION Plan all about?

It's an acronym where I will break down each letter, detailing what each of these letters are and how they can help you get through this time.

This is the first letter, 'A,' is all about Affirmations and Affirmations. These are positive, but realistic statements you can say to yourself regularly that can help keep you on the positive track. As with all affirmations, they are stated in the now, since your mind doesn't understand the difference between past and future. So what do you choose to say to yourself on a daily basis that helps keep you focused and in action?

In regards to affirmations, they're kinda like an affirmation, except they're stated in question form (a la Jeopardy!). The point of asking whatever question you decide is not to necessarily answer, but to acknowledge just how effortless and easy something really is. We tend to over-analyze, over-complicate, and over-think so much.

The 'C' of this ACTION Plan is all about finding your Creativity. I know you have something you've been wanting to do - start piano or guitar lessons, take a dance class, start painting, writing your blog, taking photography classes. So get to creating!

The 'T' of this ACTION Plan is all about Talking to a professional. Who are you going to talk to about what's going on in your life now? Who will you decide to open up to in order to let off some steam, let some things off your chest? We all need it, especially nowadays. And here's the kicker - you don't have to be "crazy" in order to seek out help. You just have to be "human" with "life experiences." We all have those, right?! See. Isn't that amazing how that works?!

So who will it be? A therapist? A coach? A mentor? Or someone else you know, like and trust?

Whoever you choose, know that there are plenty of people out there who have been trained to deal with exactly what you're dealing with or want help with. And if you don't find them immediately, don't give up!! Keep searching - the right fit for you is out there!

The 'I' of the ACTION Plan is all about taking a deep dive within to do some Introspec-

What's your ACTION Plan?

tion. So now it's time to do the internal work. Take a dive to conduct an assessment as to how your life is going up to this point.

Are there areas of your life you know could use some improvement (and if you say no, then I truly am envious and honestly, a little skeptical!)? There's always work to do, something to improve upon. Journaling, writing, and quiet time can help guide us in these areas.

Next is the importance of 'O'pening up. Let someone know what you've been dealing with, holding in, and keeping close to your vest. By starting to open up to others about what you've been going through, you will soon find that you are never alone, nor have you been alone. That's all been in your mind. And sometimes our minds are dangerous places to stay (at least in silence and darkness)!

Finally, the 'N' of the ACTION Plan is all about being present in the here and Now, aka, Nowness. Oddisee, a rapper out of the DC area said in one of his songs "I live every day like it's my last but I plan for tomorrow as if I will never pass." This embodies this last portion so perfectly.

While we tend to get caught up in planning for the future, we tend to forget about the present moment. How can we bring ourselves back to the now, and appreciate the journey. Appreciate every step we're taking instead of only looking off in the distance. It's so important to revel in each of these moments in your journey.

Meditation, as found on Insight Timer, Calm and Headspace, are all great apps to assist in this part. Keep exercising that muscle in the mind until it gains strength...and then keep going. Don't give up.



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MINDSET



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The image features a dark background with intricate, flowing patterns of light blue and purple, resembling flames or smoke. The patterns are dynamic and layered, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors transition from a deep blue at the bottom to a lighter, more ethereal purple at the top.

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