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- Wellness
- Work-Life Balance
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**Personal Development  
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## **SURVIVE AND THRIVE**

### ***Unpack Your Emotional Baggage***

***By Barbara Rubel***

I can't imagine traveling without baggage. It's usually at the exact moment when I stand by my airline seat, when I realize the bag I packed is too heavy to lift into the overhead compartment. This past month, I took several flights across the country. With each trip, I remind myself that I must lighten my load. I do not check my bag. Rather, I lug it along with each flight I take. As I think about traveling with suitcase in hand, metaphorically, I realize that a suitcase holds everything together and gives a solid border to my emotional and powerful story.

Imagine that you are carrying your suitcase and with it, your emotional baggage. You travel through life and pack and unpack your emotional baggage in your own way. Think of a suitcase as that which holds your early childhood memories, which can emotionally weigh heavily upon the bottom of the bag. Incidents of injury, loss, and trauma are wedged into the corners. Life challenges, accommodations, and major life stressors are jammed into the pockets that rest along the side of your suitcase. Preoccupation with people who have disappointed or hurt you are put into the zippered pouch. Moreover, past unhealthy relationships are folded and tightly packed into place.

What I have come to realize is that although I have personally experienced negative events as I travel along life's journey, I don't have to haul those experiences around with me. Whether I have lost someone or something that I cared about or have been deeply hurt by someone that I trusted, I have the power to choose how I currently react to what happened to me at different stages in life. I choose to pack lighter as I rid myself of the negative reactions to my history of difficulties and those things that weigh me down.

What you can learn from this is that you can choose to find meaning in your past experiences and emotional baggage. Move the experience of loss or trauma into your narrative. As you unpack, look at the assumptions you make about what happened and become self-aware. Identify what you have actually lost and grieve that which is gone; focus on your strengths that empower you; explore the tasks you need to complete to let go of the overwhelming feelings; and focus on how you have experienced growth because of what happened.

Being that emotion and memory are tied together, be mindful that looking at emotional baggage can be painful. I think it best to have a greater perspective as we all try to make sense out of our stories. Emotional baggage can change our values, so we need to put positive energy into current relationships, make them memorable and value them. Our lives are an adventure. Let's pack our bag with love, self-compassion and well-being. Let's focus on finding meaning in life and making sense out of the world. Safe travels!

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