

# In times uncertain, plan your life with compassion

**It's hard to make plans for the future, given the constant state of anxiety we're in. But if you feel like you have no control over your life, it may be time to take things slow**

In March 2020, when the pandemic first sent people indoors, it started becoming clear that no matter how much we planned our life, there could always be something forceful and unexpected which comes along, upending everything. Today, 14 months later, plotting the future may still seem daunting or even impossible. We are still not sure, after over a year of the pandemic, about what to do with the life we're still lucky to have.

Being unable to envision what your goals are, even after a period of time when you put off major decisions, is being termed "future block". If you happen to be struggling with this, here's what you can do to feel back in control of your life.

## The problem with planning

Ben Michaelis, author of *Your Next Big Thing: Ten Small Steps to Get Moving and Get Happy*, has one piece of advice for everybody: Stop planning. To survive the tremendous changes around us, don't even think about the future beyond the next week or so.

The usual markers that define our lives — birthdays, graduations, weddings — are all taking place virtually, if at all. And that experience isn't the same.

"We're caught in this cycle of thinking Zoom can replicate physical spaces, but it can't," said Jason Farman, author of *Delayed Response: The Art of Waiting From the Ancient to the Instant World*. When every day feels the same, it can cause a weird sensation of time speeding up and slowing down at the same time. "It's why it feels like March 2020 happened both eons ago and just last week," he explained.

## Give yourself grace

Hitting pause on your plans doesn't mean you shouldn't want big and exciting things for yourself. In other words, it may not seem like a good time to get married or have a baby, but it may not be a bad time either.

However, be aware that not thinking about the future isn't going to lessen your anxiety. So, as you aim big, turn down the voice that tells you how your time is ticking. Change might not happen as quickly as you think it should. Let it take the time it takes, and in that space, you may be better able to hone your goals.

## **Reset your mindset**

If you've delayed certain goals because of the pandemic, or now think how you want to do something else and are panicked you're behind, it's all fine. Even if you imagined a very specific future, it can be rethought — there's not only one way life can proceed. Recognising that there are multiple courses your life can take is also an example of good planning.

No matter what, you aren't the only person who had a different vision for the past 14 months. Robert Self, a historian at Brown University, US, points out that when something affects our entire society, delays aren't individual anymore. "This is affecting so many people, and so many of us are sharing in this experience. That doesn't mean it's going to be positive, but you're also not in this alone," he said.

— THE NEW YORK TIMES





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