
Making peace with yourself

Disclaimer: In a series of articles I'm going to talk about how I think 'people' go about making, or avoiding, change in their lives. I realise that the word 'people' is a huge generalisation because we are all unique (just like everyone else). But I hope you will forgive me for casting my net wide if you recognise yourself in these articles then you are one of the 'people' ... just as I am.

People would rather rearrange the universe than change themselves.



If you have a stone in your shoe the solution to the problem is quite easy: stop, take off your shoe, take out the stone, put your shoe back on – problem solved. Making a simple change in your environment will solve the problem. It couldn't be easier.

Making peace with yourself

However some problems are not so straightforward: For example: if your partner unreasonably criticises you (again) and you feel bad, resentful, guilty and so forth. What are you going to do?

You could have them bumped off! – This is Mafia style self-help. It's been done before, but it's a drastic solution with all sorts of complications. Prisons are full of people who have tried this approach and may be regretting it.

Even if your critical partner were to be removed from the scene, the chances are that you are still very susceptible to criticism. Somebody else could come along and say the same kind of thing and you are back in the same predicament.

Needless to say, I don't recommend this as a good approach to problem solving.

You could hope that they are going to change – This is the stance of battered wives and husbands. "If I hope hard enough, pray long enough, the other person will change and then everything will be alright and we will live happily ever after". Sadly this approach doesn't seem to work well either.

You could ask, beg or demand that they change – This is the response that gets lots of couples to Relate or into arguments. By cajoling or demanding the hope is that they will stop their bad habits and give you a break.

All these attempts have something in common: they are an attempt to change the circumstance so that you will be comfortable. If you could just organise the universe in just the right way everything will be alright and you will be happy. Even better – you won't have to change in any way.

The big bonus to this way of thinking (and one of the reasons it's so prevalent in my opinion) is that it lets you off the hook. You can blame everyone and

everything else for your difficulty. All your problems become their fault and it's their responsibility to change so that you can be happy. Even if experience shows you there is 'not a cat in Hell's chance' of them obliging you.

"The problem is not the problem, how we respond to the problem is the problem."
Virginia Satir.

Life is full of situations, experiences and predicaments that challenge us. If you think about out a bad situation, it is not a situation that is bad, it is that we are in a situation that we respond badly to. * It's quite possible that in a similar situation someone else would handle the predicament with skill and ease, it's just that we are not that someone else.

If we start to think about situations in this way there are two parts to each problem.

The situation: The circumstances the problem – what is going on, who is doing or saying things that challenge us.

The situation:

- Is often out of our control
- Is often complex, involving other people who have their own ideas about what's going on and what should happen.
- Difficult to change.

The response: This is our response to this situation: the thoughts, feelings, actions and ideas we have when we are in this predicament.

The response is:

- Often complex, involving our history, temperament, disposition etc.
- Possible to influence or change completely if you know what to do.

Making peace with yourself

- Much easier to change than the reality that surrounds us.

When you are faced with a predicament does your response help or hinder you?

If the situation is a problem for you then the chances are that your response leaves you feeling:

- helpless
- overwhelmed
- dis-empowered
- ... add your favourite dis-empowered response here

How would it be if your response to a situation was more resourceful?

If, in the same circumstances you felt

- powerful
- alert
- capable
- ... add your favourite empowered response here

If you were to respond in these ways you are much more likely to get an outcome that satisfies you and would feel that you had done the best you could with the situation, even if it didn't turn out the way that you wanted.

The 'big problem' with this alternative way of thinking, which is why it is less common, is that you have to take responsibility for your actions and reactions. Your responses become your responsibility.

Taking responsibility for our responses is an important step on the way out of being the victim of circumstances.

Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power

to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.

Viktor Frankl

As a little thought experiment, think of a situation that gives you some difficulty.

1. Describe the problem – the who, what, where and when of the situation.
2. Describe your current reaction to this situation – what makes it a problem for you?
3. Describe the kind of response you would prefer to have in this situation
4. How would that response work out for you?

You may not be able to make these changes easily with your current resources. To develop the skills of responding you could take an [learn EFT](#), take an [NLP training](#) or if your difficulties are deep and long-standing you could see a competent therapist to help you make these changes.

*This is not to say that there aren't some really bad situations to find yourself in – bereaved, injured, assaulted, abused and so forth – these are indeed painful predicaments. However bad they are you, as an adult, still have the possibility to respond to them in a resourceful way.

If you read [Man's Search For Meaning](#) by Viktor Frankl you will see an heroic example of someone deciding to choose how to respond in the most dire conditions imaginable.

Image courtesy of [woodleywonderworks](#)