

When “What Is” Isn’t What You Want!—Part 2

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What happens when you find it impossible to accept the things you cannot change? Do you suffer in silence? Do you complain? Do you attempt to focus your attention on something more productive?

I believe strongly that improvement begins with acknowledging the truth of “what is.” I’ve not seen progress occur by denying or ignoring what upsets us or pretending that we’re not offended.

I offered an initial approach last week. It may have seemed rather extreme. Instead of repressing the irritation or pain, I suggested you “let it all hang out,” describing your frustrations in detail.

You’ll need last week’s article. If you missed it, either contact me or look on my website (see below). Click on “Article Archives,” then scroll down to and click on “When ‘What Is’ Isn’t What You Want.”

We’re using “The Work” of Byron Katie as recorded in her 2002 book, *Loving What Is*. Although you can follow this process on your own (using the book or this article as a guide), a skilled facilitator can help you examine your thinking as you work your way through the analysis.

What, exactly, is “The Work”? Byron Katie describes it simply: “Judge your neighbor, write it down, ask four questions, and turn it around.” The article last week covered writing down the judging of “your neighbor” (whoever or whatever is irritating you!).

Now, let’s get into the four questions, using this situation as an example: “I hate my manager. He always promises to address some concern I’ve brought to him, but he never follows through.”

Is it true? This first question is simple yet confrontational. Does your manager always promise and does he never follow through? Really? Never? This question challenges your emotional generalizations and forces you to determine if your conclusions are based on fact.

How can you absolutely know that it’s true? If you answered the first question with, “Oh, yeah, what I’ve said is definitely true,” this question casts doubt on that conclusion. Whether you admit your indecision aloud or just recognize it internally, you become less adamant about your staunch position.

How do you react when you think that thought? What a confrontational question! The thought is obviously the basis for your frustration, your pain, your intolerance of “what is.” When you think about how that manager fails to come back to you with a resolution of your concern, you feel huge anxiety!

Byron Katie offers two potential follow-up questions. One is, “Can you see a reason to drop that thought?” She emphasizes that she’s not advocating dropping the thought; she’s just offering this question to further examine your perspective.

The second follow-up question is, “Can you find one stress-free reason to keep the thought?” Again, this is not an advocacy to drop the thought, but an approach for shedding logical light on a topic that until now has consumed you, unexamined in the darkness of your mind.

Who (or how) would you be without this thought? This question challenges you to imagine that what really bugs you never even crosses your mind. Wow, what a hypothetical situation! Yet it’s another confrontational question that makes you step back from the emotion of the moment and evaluate the situation far more objectively than ever before.

All four questions challenge your perceptions. But the real confrontation is in “the turnaround.”

The turnaround. The next step is to turn the accusing statement around in as many ways as possible. For example, we might consider, “I make promises, and sometimes I fail to keep them.”

Another possibility: “My manager is human; I’m willing to accept that he doesn’t keep his promises.”

Still another is, “I love my manager. Because of his failure to keep promises, I’ve had to do a lot on my own. I’ve established quite a reputation on my team as a person who can get things done!”

Byron Katie is not prescriptive about what you do next. Once you’ve gained greater clarity on situations that irritate you, you are free to choose how you now handle the situation.

The book contains dozens of dialogues as Byron Katie facilitates “The Work” for people dealing with a variety of painful situations. Often the individual winds up laughing at his folly. Sometimes tears flow when the person is freed from the judgmental thought pattern that had him shackled.

We all establish the meaning of circumstances we face. Sometimes, the significance we apply to a situation contributes to our frustration. Challenging our thought process may be personally embarrassing, but it’s often more helpful than continuing to live with the irritation!

Byron Katie points out that the more experience a person acquires with “The Work,” the easier it becomes to drop limiting beliefs. And when we eliminate restrictive thought patterns, we can more productively apply our time and energy against what’s really important.

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Byron Katie’s work helps me accept what I can’t change!

Dennis Hooper helps leaders gain fresh insight on their responsibilities. Send an e-mail to Dennis or call him at 478-988-0237. Past articles are posted on his website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com.