

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

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What happens when you struggle to accept the things you cannot change? Do you suffer in silence, complain, or try to focus your attention on something more productive?

I believe that genuine improvement starts with acknowledging the reality of "what is." Denying or ignoring what upsets us--or pretending that we're not offended--rarely leads to progress.

Last week, I introduced a method for confronting these feelings, suggesting you express your frustrations openly rather than suppressing them. If you missed that article, please visit my website and navigate to the "Article Archives" section, then click on "When 'What Is' Isn't What You Want--Part 1."

We're utilizing "The Work" of Byron Katie as detailed 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 coach or facilitator can enhance your understanding and help you explore your thoughts more deeply.

What, exactly, is "The Work"? Byron Katie describes it simply: "Judge your neighbor, write it down, ask four questions, and turn it around." Last week's article focused on the first step, writing down your judgments regarding whoever or whatever is irritating you.

Now, let's move into her four examination questions, using an example situation: "I hate my colleague. He always promises to address some concern I've brought to him, but he never follows through."

Is it true? This question is simple yet challenging. Does your colleague always promise and never deliver? Really? This inquiry prompts you to reassess your emotional generalizations and consider if your conclusions are factual.

How can you absolutely know it's true? If you answered the first question affirmatively, this one encourages you to reflect on the certainty of your conclusion. Whether you admit your indecision aloud or just recognize it internally, you may become less adamant about your staunch position.

How do you react when you think that thought? What a confrontational question! Thoughts typically evoke emotions, and this question challenges your thinking. Is the situation itself causing your dissatisfaction, or is your interpretation of it generating your dissatisfying emotional reaction?

What if you evaluated the circumstance differently? Like it or not, your thoughts are often the root of your frustration with "what is." When you dwell on your colleague's unfulfilled promises, anxiety follows.

Byron Katie offers two follow-up questions. One is, "Can you see a reason to drop that thought?" This isn't about abandoning the thought; it's about examining the thought's impact on your perspective.

The second follow-up question is, "Can you find one stress-free reason to keep the thought?" This helps clarify the relevance of your thoughts, shedding light on the issues that have been troubling you.

Who (or how) would you be without this thought? Imagine if this bothersome thought had never crossed your mind. This hypothetical scenario encourages you to step back and evaluate your situation more objectively.

All four questions challenge your perceptions and encourage deeper understanding. They play with your thoughts in a somewhat paradoxical, counterintuitive way. Although this may feel like hard work, the process helps you confront your issues more effectively.

Byron Katie's real confrontation is in "the turnaround."

The turnaround. The next step involves turning your judgmental 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 colleague is human, and I can accept that he hasn't kept some promises."

Still another is, "I love my colleague. His shortcoming has pushed me to take on more responsibility, enhancing my reputation on the team."

Here's one more: "Situations sometimes prevent me from doing what I want to do. Maybe he's had genuine conflicts that interfered with some of his planned follow-ups."

Byron Katie is not prescriptive about your next steps. Once you've gained greater clarity on what irritates you, you are free to consider options and move forward.

Often, while doing "The Work," the painful thought that once consumed me starts to fade, allowing me to tolerate "what is," even if I can't quite embrace it! If you prefer not to read Byron Katie's book, you can find the essence of her interesting approach at www.thework.com.

To help understand her approach, the book features numerous dialogues where Byron Katie facilitates "The Work" for people grappling with various painful situations. Many find themselves laughing or crying as they break free from their restrictions.

We all assign meaning to our experiences, and sometimes that meaning fuels our frustration. While challenging our thought process may feel uncomfortable, it's often more constructive than living with the irritation.

Byron Katie emphasizes that the more one practices "The Work," the easier it becomes to let go of limiting beliefs. By shedding these restrictive thought patterns, we can redirect our time and energy toward what truly matters.

"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."

Exploring "The Work" of Byron Katie often helps me accept, tolerate, or find new ways to navigate seemingly unchangeable circumstances!

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