

Unforgiveness

RECOGNISING UNFORGIVENESS AND THE NEED TO APOLOGISE

The ability to forgive and the willingness to apologize are essential and very powerful relationship strategies that everyone is required to master if they wish to retain personal freedom and remain 'whole'. This does not come natural to everyone and for most requires becoming 'learned behaviors'. If you are not prepared to either apologise when it is your fault, or to forgive when it is the other person's fault you will become trapped in a sea of revenge and guilt. You will become anchored to the past and prevented from moving on to the future.

Unforgiving people are likely to be bitter and resentful, often seen to be bearing grudges. They may react inappropriately to a particular individual or situation, thus revealing unattended past hurts. This may well be the precise area where forgiveness is needed. The resultant inner stress in the form of resentment, bitterness and self-criticism indicates the need for forgiveness or self-forgiveness. Furthermore, the unforgiving person will often demand reparation from those who have hurt them.



GAINING REVENGE

The need to gain revenge is a strong motivator rooted in a need for justice due to a sense of personal injustice. This arises from our perception of an event or circumstance and assumes we know all the facts, have all the necessary information, the answer is black & white, and the conclusions we have come to are accurate. Rarely is this actually the case.

We allow our hearts to harden, we strive to “get even” with our adversary and to punish them for the way they hurt us and made us suffer. We want to hurt them and see them suffer; after all “it’s only what they deserve!” Our actions put us back in control, we have got one over on the perpetrator and they have received their ‘just rewards’.

Our hurt or hurt pride often deprives us of objectivity, and encourages us to retaliate, often out of all proportion. We persuade ourselves that our actions are both necessary and justifiable and that revenge is the correct course of action which would help alleviate our pain. Sadly, it never does remove the pain; instead it often adds guilt to the mixture which in turn heightens our anger.

THE NEED TO DEAL WITH FORGIVENESS

An inability to forgive taints a person’s view of life. Through growing resentment, suspicion and bitterness, enjoyment of life is distorted, personal development inhibited, relationships become fragile, and even physical illness may result. The mature person aims to be free of such restraints induced by past experiences, so they can live in the present and for the future. Forgiveness is the most powerful response to any sense of injustice. Forgiveness acts as a starting point for reconciliation, once released and received, it produces healing in both parties.

“Unforgiveness is a poison you swallow yourself expecting the other person to die.”



STEPS TOWARDS FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

1. Recognizing the Hurt

The individual needs to pinpoint the hurt which lies at the root of the problem. This, like the initial incident, may not always be obvious at first and can easily be obscured. The prevalent emotion is likely to be anger - which should be expressed in an appropriate manner, not simply recognised.

2. Taking an Objective View

A subjective view of the circumstances which caused the initial hurt, while that hurt is still being felt, will not necessarily be reliable. An objective perspective is essential to avoid blaming others unfairly. It is important to establish whether expectations placed on others were unreasonable or unrealistic. Objectivity also allows a person to both recognise and accept responsibility for his or her own part in the event.

3. Understanding the other point of view

Understanding the view of the other party, who may have acted without any malicious intent, can also help to clarify the situation, especially as deep hurt can be experienced through misunderstanding. Understanding the other person's viewpoint reveals those elements which can be excused, and those that still need to be forgiven.

4. An Act of the Will

Having examined the past hurt, how it arose and the other party's viewpoints, the individual is left with a choice - to forgive, or not to forgive. To forgive is an unconditional pardon for hurt received, relinquishing all rights to, and expectation of, any compensation. Forgiveness means actively replacing resentment with acceptance.

5. Learning to Apologise

Having decided you need to apologise, do so wholeheartedly and with humility. It is important to apologise to a person directly and not through a third party. You can do this in writing or by phone if they are at a distance. Wherever possible however it is best done in person, face to face. This allows you to communicate not only the words but the tone and the body language all of which will help towards reconciliation and personal freedom.

Avoid being half-hearted and diluting the message. Take care not to present conditions ie, "If I hurt you then I am sorry....", or to project, "I am sorry if you interpreted...." Come out with it, "I am sorry that I....", the message is clear, your guilt and anger will dissipate, and the receiver's heart will begin to heal, laying the foundation for reconciliation.

6. Apologising to and Forgiving Yourself

During the examination process, you may discover that a) you have been particularly hard on yourself over a situation, and that you need to let yourself off the hook, by forgiving yourself. Likewise b) whilst being honest with yourself you may have identified certain behaviours which have caused you to let yourself down, and which you are not particularly proud of. You may have to apologise to your authentic self, forgive yourself, and move on.

7. Ready to Forgive - Forgive!

Once you are ready to forgive (this may be after you have written down your thoughts stemming from the pain or anger you carry, and in an effort to identify the particular hurts, incidents and people involved), follow 'The Forgiveness Pathway' on the next page. Select a quiet and private place, speak out the words and emotions (don't just report the facts). It is important to speak out the words because until you do, you do not exactly know what is reverberating around inside. There is no need for the person to be present (they may have already died), it is important that you say and do it, not that they hear it.

		WHEN BOTH PARTIES ARE AT FAULT	WHEN SOMEONE ELSE IS AT FAULT	WHEN YOU ARE AT FAULT
F	FOCUS on only one particular incident at a time.	Prepare to deal with all the offending incidents and all the corresponding pain.	Headline the incident and particular hurt you want to deal with.	Identify the incident and signal readiness to apologise.
O	OPENLY accept and apportion responsibility where it is appropriate.	"We are both wrong in this and both responsible for where things have gone wrong. I take full responsibility for my actions and acknowledge that I have caused you suffering as a result of my actions."	"What happened was as a result of your actions and therefore all your fault. I am not responsible for what you did or for the outcome."	"What happened was as a result of my actions and therefore all my fault. I accept full responsibility for my actions and the outcome."
R	READILY identify and separate the 'sin' from the 'sinner'.	"What happened between us was wrong; however it would be wrong to define either of us by that incident. You did not deserve to suffer as a result of my actions."	"What you did was wrong, and I did not deserve to suffer as a result of your actions. Although I do condemn your actions, I am not condemning you as a person."	"What I did was wrong. You did not deserve to suffer as a result of my actions. Although my behaviour was wrong, I would not want you to sum me up as a person, based on that incident."
G	GIVE up any excuses.	"There was no justifiable excuse for my behaviour towards you. I chose to act in that way and I did not need to do it."	"There was no justifiable excuse for your behaviour towards me. Your actions were a free will choice; you didn't need to do it."	"There was no justifiable excuse for my behaviour towards you. I chose to act in that way and I did not need to do it."
I	IDENTIFY the extent of the hurt.	"I know I have hurt you badly and caused you a great deal of damage."	"You hurt me very badly and caused me a great deal of damage."	"I know I have hurt you badly and caused you a great deal of damage."
V	VOLUNTEER forgiveness or apology where required.	"I am deeply sorry for the hurt I caused and I apologise unreservedly for my actions. Please forgive me for.....? Wait for the person to consider and respond. Give them time..., If they don't, repeat the process.	"I want our relationship to be healed and restored. I forgive you unconditionally for what you did and release any bitterness I felt towards you. You no longer are responsible or have any influence for the way I am."	"I am deeply sorry for the hurt I caused and I apologise unreservedly for my actions. Please forgive me for...?" Wait for the person to consider and respond. Give them time..., If they don't, repeat the process.
E	ENGAGE for restoration of future relationship.	Identify ways in which you can 'bless' and help the person you have wronged, in order to restore the relationship.	Identify ways in which you can 'bless' and help the person you have forgiven. Plan another meeting to restore relationship.	Identify ways in which you can 'bless' and help the person you have wronged, in order to restore the relationship.