



# Embrace your Difficulties

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More than fifteen years ago I was at a workshop. The facilitator said something that I have never forgotten. You want to have challenges in your life. Challenges make you a stronger, kinder, more compassionate, wiser, and resilient person. I needed to hear that. All too often when many things are going wrong (and there does seem to be a tendency for a whole lot of things to go wrong at the same time) we start thinking and acting like victims and pitying ourselves. And yes, feeling sad and hard done by may be frequent, but it is not helpful.

Life is hard. Life just about breaks all of us. Most of us are conditioned to want happiness as the ultimate goal in life, but perpetual happiness is not what our time on earth is about. And it is not going to be one long party. Part of being able to deal with challenges is acceptance. It is about accepting this is what is happening. And a lot of us need to learn to accept that life is not easy. And it's not going to be about being happy all the time. If you want to progress towards happiness, peace, and wisdom, then you need to grow through everything that happens to you.

Some situations are just horrible and no matter what people say, I don't believe they can in any way be for your higher good. Armed hijackings, rape, murder, child trafficking, are all awful events, and we can only wish people to get out of situations like that and begin to heal. There are however life situations, that are not as awful as we might think they are, and that offer us a tremendous opportunity to grow and learn and become better people. We can choose to be miserable and indulge in self-pity because of difficult situations we are in, or we can look at our situation as an opportunity to bring forth the best of ourselves. Let's have a look at some situations in life where you can do this.

1. Relationships often are difficult. Actually no, they are always difficult, although not all the time. You can choose to bemoan your situation, your partner, whomever you want to, but you do have an opportunity to grow a lot from the circumstances. And how can you do this? You can learn more about yourself. You can learn more about the other person. You can learn a lot about what it takes to make a great relationship. For some reason people think studying for their career is imperative, but studying how relationships work is not. Most of us have not been exposed to people role modelling great relationships and displaying great communication skills. Difficulties are an opportunity for you to learn more, improve your relationship skills, and have much more fulfilling relationships into the future. You don't just fall into a good relationship. You work your way towards having one.
2. Then we have the situation, which lots of my clients have found themselves in, where you get a particularly difficult assignment at work. One that in fact may look impossible to do. When you encounter challenges at work look at them as opportunities to show who you really are. Most of us are not challenged on a daily basis to give of our best. Challenges allow you to call forth strengths you never knew you had, and to do what needs to be done. You will never know just how good you are until you have had to put forth a great effort. Once you have done this, not only do you realise you can do more than you ever thought possible, but you grow in confidence, and are likely to set bigger goals for yourself going forward. Eventually you are doing what you once thought was impossible to do.
3. Suppose someone treats you badly on an ongoing basis in a work or social situation. Yes, it is horrible, I know that. But once again, this is a challenge, and this is an opportunity for you to show that you can rise above this and demonstrate decency, bravery, and integrity. Ultimately, we can only be responsible for our own behaviour. Anyone who behaves badly or cruelly or tries to harm another is showing who they are. You can stoop to their level, or you can show who you are. Once again, this is not easy. But it is a great chance to show your character. In the long run, the truth always comes out. Decent, courageous and honest behaviour stays in the minds of people forever.
4. What happens if you have a really poor leader who is negative and demotivates the team on a regular basis rather than the other way around. Or maybe in your department there just is no leadership. You can, as others do, bemoan your terrible leadership or you can step up to the plate. There is nothing to stop you from helping out a leader who does not seem to be able to cope. Make suggestions of what to do, rather than point out flaws. Make recommendations along the lines of, "the team needs this.....", "I think doing this might help the team to achieve.....". You may not be the formally designated leader, but leaders can be found at all levels. And those with leadership potential need to step up in the absence of leadership and do what needs to be done. Don't use this as an opportunity to throw your weight around. If you are arrogant you are not going to succeed in this role. But if you keep your focus on doing what is best for the team and division, and coaching and mentoring the boss, you can make a difference, and also show your own leadership potential.
5. Most of us moan a lot about how stressed we are. And that is usually as far as we deal with it. It is possible to treat stress in our lives as a challenge and use the factors causing us stress to improve our creative problem-solving

skills. You are worried about money? Then think creatively how to get more, save more, or manage better what you currently have. If you have too much work to do then get thinking creatively about how you can better share the load, find ways to do things faster and smarter, or perhaps manage your time better.

Challenges abound. And they are not always terrible. Sometimes we need challenges otherwise we would not grow and realise our potential. We would remain quite limited in our thinking, feeling, and doing.

As we get older, we come to realise that difficult times often come with gifts. Increased knowledge, improved skills, compassion, empathy, and understanding do not happen automatically. We need challenges and difficult times to develop them. With everything that happens to us in life we can get bitter or better. There is a choice. And the choice is ours.