



Start the New Year Well

6 January 2020

Welcome to the New Year – 2020.

It is very easy in the new year to get caught up with new ideas and resolutions and so on. And then to be disappointed later on in the year as resolutions are not kept. And this disappointment is because change does not come easily. If you plan to do things very differently during 2020 then you need to be different – that is you need to think, feel and act differently. And while its easy to say it, its not easy to do it. Our brains are hardwired to think, feel and act as we are used to. If you want to change, it will take work. And practice. And being very conscious about how you think, feel and act. I personally am not a fan of resolutions. I prefer that people focus on changing habits – changing from those that are self-sabotaging to better ones that are more self-empowering. And change one habit at a time. Just focus on changing one habit each quarter. That is still four new habits each year which ultimately will make a huge difference in your life.

If there was one lesson only that I could teach people I think it would be this one. This is what I want you to remember throughout this year. We all think that situations or events give rise to feelings. So, if we are feeling sad, we believe it is because of an event or situation that happened that made us feel sad. Or, if we are feeling excited, we believe it is because of an event or situation that made us feel excited. The diagram below depicts what we think occurs: The situation/event gives rise to our feelings about the situation/event.

Situation / Event -----> Feelings

And we end up feeling powerless about how we feel. After all, we cannot control all situations and events, so therefore we can't control our feelings.

Now consider the following. Suppose you have broken up with a significant other – you could be feeling either sad or happy (or a lot of other feelings in between too). It is the same event or situation. People though, will have different feelings about the situation or event. And those different feelings occur because they are thinking different thoughts about the situation or event. If you are thinking to yourself, “I will never find someone else”, or “No one will ever love me”, you could be feeling miserable. If you are thinking to yourself, “Thank goodness that ended, I dodged a bullet there”, or even, “He/she was wrong for me and it would never have worked out, but now I am free to find someone else”, you will be feeling fairly good. Same situation or event that leads to different feelings. Why? Because different people interpret the same situation/event differently. And it is not events or situations that lead to how we feel, it is our interpretation of those situations or events that leads to our feelings.

Situation/Event X Interpretation -----> Feelings

A situation or event is not always in your control. To pretend that it is, is to set yourself up for unnecessary misery. However, your interpretation of the situation or event is in your control. To take control of your interpretation of a situation is to own your power. It is to stop being a victim and allow yourself to work the situation as best you can.

Now not all situations are wonderful. So don't be silly in how you interpret an event. If you are locked up in jail it probably is not the best thing to ever happen to you. If you are taken a prisoner of war, no amount of interpretation is going to make that a fantastic event. However, for most things we can think about how we think about the situation. We can decide on a different interpretation. One that is still realistic, but results in us feeling better about ourselves and more empowered. And why does it matter how we feel? Because our feelings influence our actions. When you feel bad you tend to close off options and restrict your problem solving ability. Or else you just don't take any action at all. When you feel more positive, you are better able to problem solve and see options open to you. And so you can take action to create an outcome that works for you.

One thing I always try to teach my clients is to notice when you don't feel good. And learn to ask yourself at that point, "Is there another way in which I can interpret/see this situation?" There usually always is. And it usually makes you feel better.

I wish you all a year filled with purpose, passion, commitment, authenticity and joy.