

*I don't like that man.
I must get to
know him better.*
— Abraham Lincoln

*The major block to
compassion is the
judgment in our minds.
Judgment is the mind's
primary tool of separation.*
— Diane Berke

*The important thing is
not to stop questioning.
Curiosity has its
own reason for existing.
One cannot help
but be in awe when he
contemplates the mysteries
of eternity, of life,
of the marvelous structure
of reality.
It is enough if one tries
merely to comprehend
a little of this mystery
every day.
Never lose a holy curiosity.*
— Albert Einstein

Transforming Judgmental Thinking

Dealing with difficult people can evoke and sustain judgmental thinking, which leads to increasing levels of alienation. Judgmental thinking is based on several important skills that help a person make judgments about what to do. If we simply got people to give up being judgmental, they would lose access to these skills. We want people to be able to make judgements between options that may be safe or unsafe, helpful or unhelpful. What we don't want or need is someone making these determinations and then alienating others who make decisions or act in ways contrary to that person's judgments.

Here is the pattern of judgmental thinking that leads to alienation:



When people make judgments, they pay attention to and observe events or actions in their environment. They then evaluate the data they have gathered with respect to their value system. This leads to the person acting in a certain way. While this process is presented in a linear fashion, in fact it is likely to be iterative, with multiple feedback loops.

The problem in this scenario is the addition of contempt for anyone who does not agree with the evaluation. This leads to what we, in our society, call "judgmental thinking," which results in alienating attitudes and behaviors. Feeling contemptuous of others who do not act in accordance with our values inspires, and in some situations appears to entitle, us to reject, alienate and punish them.

To transform judgmental thinking we need to replace contempt with curiosity to create an alternate pattern:



In this pattern the observation and evaluation is maintained, and in situations where people are acting contrary to the values, the person doing the evaluation becomes curious about what led the other to act this way. This curiosity can be used to explore several things:

- What happened before the event that led to the behaviors that elicited the resentment.
- The other person's positive intentions behind the behavior.
- How and where the other person learned this behavior.

- When the judgment is focused on the client's own behavior that led them to violate their own values, they can be curious about what they will do differently in the future when confronted with similar situations.
- When the judgment is focused on another person's actions, the client can be curious about alternative responses they might make when people act in a similar manner in the future.
- Is there anything to be learned from the person we are judging? Judgments create a walls between people that restrict the sharing of any wisdom. In addition to being curious about how the other person came to be the way they are, you can be curious about any wisdom they may be able to share with you.

Becoming curious about the origins of how someone learned a behavior is not to excuse or blame someone else for that person's behavior, nor is it used to deny the hurt that one person may have inflicted on another. The goal of adding curiosity is to help provide some emotional distance between the initiating experience and the current reality to create a "space" of understanding that will allow the client to decide on a more resourceful response in the future. We want the client's final response to be one that sets both the client and the other person free to create a better future for both.

On the following page is an exercise to transform judgmental attitudes and actions.

*I have never met a man
so ignorant
that I couldn't learn
something from him.*
— Galileo Galilei

*Curiosity is
the very basis of education
and if you tell me that
curiosity killed the cat,
I say only
the cat died nobly.*
— Arnold Edinborough

Instructions: The purpose of this exercise is to help you achieve an open, curious stance that can support a compassionate response toward people who have hurt or offended you. In this process we will begin by transforming your judgmental thinking toward yourself and then apply that strategy to a person who has offended you.

Being curious is not meant as a way to excuse or blame ourselves or others for what we have done. Being curious is a way to put emotional distance between ourselves and the painful event and create a “space” of understanding that allows us to accept responsibility for what we have done and what we will do in the future.

As you lead someone through the process you do not need to know the content of the client’s self-judgment. You are providing a guide to help them make the transformation, rather than analyzing or rationalizing what they did.

1. Recall an Experience of Self-Judgment.

Take a moment and remember doing something that violated your values and hurt someone. I don’t want you to tell me what you did, I just want you to remember what you did ... Play it through as a movie in your mind ... Notice what you feel as you remember what you did ...

2. Adding Curiosity to Discover the Positive Intent.

Now “step back” in your mind so that you can see what came before that. What led up to you doing this thing? ... Allow yourself to become curious about what led up to this action ...

With the same spirit of curiosity think about what you were trying to accomplish by doing what you did ...

What was the positive intention behind what you did? ...

(This may take several iterations, to mine into the intentions to find a positive intention, such as protection, or to teach the person not to do something again.)

Take some time to be curious about how and where you learned to behave in this way to achieve that intention ... Where did you learn to act like this? ...

Notice that what you did was the best you knew how to do at that moment to achieve your intention ... and you can learn other ways to be more effective in achieving that intention ...

3. Create and Check the Ecology of an Alternative Strategy to Achieve the Positive Intention.

Think of other ways you could act to achieve that same intention ...

Does any part of you object to doing that in the future? ...

Is there any situation where that would not be wise or helpful? ...

If there are situations where it wouldn’t be wise, what will you do instead? ...

Step into your present moment so you can look back on what you did and have learned, and now turn and look forward into the future ...

Imagine yourself doing what you would prefer to do if you find yourself in a similar situation ...

4. Check the Outcome.

Now recall the initial thing you did. What is the feeling you are now having as you remember what you did? ... How has your feeling toward yourself changed? ...

Instructions: In this part of the exercise we will use the same process to help a client become curious about the actions of a person who has injured or offended them.

Being curious is not meant as a way to excuse or blame others for their actions, nor to minimize or deny the pain that someone has caused. Being curious is a way to put emotional distance between you and the painful event and create a "space" of understanding that allows you to adopt a compassionate attitude toward the person who has injured you.

1. Recall an Experience of Being Judgmental of Others.

Take a moment and remember what someone did that hurt or offended you ...

I don't need to know what happened, I just want you to remember what they did ...

Play it through as a movie in your mind ...

Notice what you feel as you remember what they did ...

And what you want to do as a result of that feeling? ...

We are now going to add curiosity, which we used to transform self-judgment.

2. Adding Curiosity to Discover the Positive Intent.

"Step back" in your mind so that you can see what came before that. What led to them doing this thing that hurt you? ...

Allow yourself to become curious about what led up to this action ...

With the same spirit of curiosity, think about what they were trying to accomplish by doing what they did ...

I know you are not a mind reader, so it may not be accurate, but can you see a positive intention behind what they did? ...

(This may take several iterations, to mine into the other person's intentions to find a presumed positive intention.)

Be curious about how and where they learned to behave in this way to achieve that intention ...

Where did they learn to act like this? ...

Who do you think taught them to act like this? ...

You may need to "step back" from the incident to see the entirety of their life to come to some conclusion ...

Note: this conclusion is an opportunity to exercise your curiosity and may not be true ...

3. They are Doing the Best They Can.

Can you see the person doing the best they know how to achieve their goal? ...

This is not to excuse or agree with their behavior, just to create a space to understand them ...

4. What Can You Learn From the Person.

Take some time to consider whether you can learn anything from the person ...

5. Check the Outcome.

Step into your present moment so you can look back on what they did and be aware of what you are feeling now that you have gone through this exercise ...

How have your feelings toward them changed? ...

Is this an awareness you want to keep? ...

If yes, take some time to imagine relating to this person in the future with this new awareness ...

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God. Your 'playing small' does not suit the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people don't feel insecure around you.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us. It is in everyone.

As you let your light shine, you unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As you are liberated from your own fears, your presence automatically liberates others.

— From 'A Return to Love' by Marianne Williamson

Forgiving Yourself

The forgiveness process, with some modification, can also be used to help you forgive yourself. To develop a healing process we need to distinguish between guilt and shame – they are often equated, yet they are based on different internal processes and experiences.

Distinguishing Guilt and Shame

Guilt is the experience we have when we damage the social fabric by violating cultural norms that we also affirm, and we are motivated to repair the damage. When a person experiences guilt, they are saying:

"I have done a bad thing and I want to make it better."

"I hate what I have done and I want to make it up to you."

When we feel guilt, we are evaluating our behavior with respect to our values and standards. Guilt is an appropriate and helpful response to wrongdoing, as it helps rebuild and restore the community.

Shame, on the other hand, is rarely helpful. When someone feels shame they are saying:

"I hate myself for what I did."

"I am a bad person because I have done a bad thing."

"I am a bad person." (The shame has been generalized)

When we feel shame, we are evaluating ourselves and not our behavior. Because the emotional pain of shame is self-alienation rather than alienation between two people, the emotional pain is deep within the person at their core sense of self. This is typically more severe and crippling than guilt. The shamed person is often emotionally overwhelmed to the point that they are self-absorbed with little psychic energy to reach out to the injured person to repair the injury. They may further condemn themselves for being self-absorbed.

Upon examination, the "bad thing" the person did is often a violation of someone else's values rather than their own values. Beneath this feeling of shame is often an admonition: "You should feel ashamed of yourself." In many cases, shame can arise in response to very trivial social improprieties that have little to do with social moral codes of right and wrong.

Research on shame shows that when people feel ashamed they often feel small, vulnerable, naked, or exposed, and have a desire to hide from others⁸. These experiences of size distortion are apparent in the internal representations the person will have of themselves.