

# ***Please Try This at Home***

## ***Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life***

### **When Hope is Bad for You**

I am weirded out by Carl Rogers' observation: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." I am even further unsettled by the extension of this concept that it's when we accept other people just as they are, somehow it frees them to change, too. I don't feel like either of these should be true.

A part of me feels like the truth should be: "As long as I refuse to accept the parts of me I don't like, I can starve them out of existence until they are no longer there," followed by, "As long as I make every effort to get another person to change, so that no interaction is free of that effort, I can corral them into change by never giving up." I mean, doesn't change happen through constant, repeated effort and the refusal to accept what is just not acceptable?

Apparently not. What I keep seeing in my own life and those of my clients is that change often somehow begins once we give up or hope that we or other people could be different and instead accept that we or they are not as we'd like. Specifically, I'm talking about the kind of hope that strives to control an undesirable part of reality by refusing to allow it to be what it is. Let me give two examples, one related to relationships and the other to the self.

#### **How Acceptance Frees Us**

Let's start with two parents who have done everything they can think of to get their son to stop drinking and are now holding fast to the belief: "We can't give up hope that our son will stop drinking or he never will." Since they have already done everything they can think of to do, clinging tightly to "hope," as if the sheer act of clinging to that thought can change what nothing else has been able to change, does not give them increased power over the situation. It simply keeps them from living in the reality that they've done everything they could and if the situation ever changes, it will be due to circumstances or miracles beyond their control, not their "hope."

If refusing to live in reality wasn't bad enough, the parents' "hope" may actually be getting in the way of their son's change. Whenever he interacts with them, he's having to interact with their unreal image of him as "the boy who wants to change and could at any moment" not as the reality of who he is right now: "the boy who is stubbornly happy to be drinking thank-you-very-much." Their refusal to interact with him as he is causes distance in their relationship and makes any advice they give seem even more out of touch. If they at least acknowledged the full reality of where he is at right now, rather than clinging to what he is not, they could at least have some real conversations. He wouldn't have to put so much energy into standing up for who he knows he is in his own mind, resisting their unreality. He might even have some energy left over to consider whether he's made the best choices. Oddly, accepting him where he is at might free him up to consider whether that's where he wants to be. But that could only begin with his parents' giving up that clinging "hope" that blocks acceptance of what is.

Let's get more personal, now. What is something that really bothers you about yourself that you wish weren't there? For me, it's my knees. I'm grumpy that even though I'm only in my 30's, I can't seem to go running, cut a rug on the dance floor, or even wear heels for a few hours

without damaging my knees in some painful way that never seems to heal all the way. I do not want to accept this. I want to hold on to the “hope” that the right combo of physical therapy, rest, and steroids or something can make my knees 15 years old again and I could still be one of those “soldier through the pain” athletes who can do anything. I’ve been secretly hoping to change reality by remaining pissed off at it and holding onto the “hope” of perpetual knee youth.

As long as I hold onto this “hope,” I not only keep trying activities I know will hurt me, I stay angry at the reality of life that things decay and even more angry at myself for not being able to overcome that. What kind of wimp am I that I can’t just keep going through pain? What’s wrong with my stupid tall body? Why wasn’t it made right? And on and on. Anger at one’s self takes up a lot of emotional energy, and often slips over into depression.

Now beginning to give up that hope of knee youth, what happens? Mourning, first of all, that life does involve decay and that it will lead to death someday. Then, acceptance of the reality that there may be some things I can do about this, but I can’t turn back the clock. This gets followed by acceptance of my self, somehow, too. If it just so happens that I live in a world where I am subject to decay and that I have been given my body’s form of decay, not that of an Olympian’s body, I don’t have to keep strangling the part of myself that is reflecting that reality because I don’t like it. I can make my peace with it. Giving up that anger disguised as “hope” frees up a lot of energy and some good feelings toward my self. I’ve got some energy left over to be grateful for what I still can do. And likely, by not making myself do things that hurt me, I’ll have less knee pain overall. I might even heal enough to chase my kids around the playground. But I can’t get to the real change of increased peace with myself about my limits and increased rest that could heal my body without giving up the false, angry “hope” that refuses to accept what is.

I am pretty sure that it’s this process that allows acceptance to be a catalyst for change. I keep seeing it over and over again. I see people who have clung so tightly to the hope that a parent could really accept them after so many years of criticism finally give up that hope and accept their parents’ limitations. And suddenly the parent becomes more accepting. So weird. I see people who haven’t exercised in years, say, “Even though I hate exercise, I deeply love and accept myself.” And then—again so weird—start exercising. Even though I don’t totally get it, I think there’s something to it.

## **An Oddly Effective Acceptance Technique**

So since it seems to work, let me tell you about an acceptance technique that I’ve seen help some people change in pretty short order:

1. Identify something that is bothering you that you would rather not be feeling/thinking about/doing, e.g., being depressed, craving sweets, not feeling able to forgive your dad, not being able to accept that another person won’t change, not exercising, having pain in your back, feeling like a failure, etc.
2. On a 1 (low) - 10 (high) scale, rate how much the issue is bothering you.
3. For a week, try repeating 7 times a day, “Even though I (insert whatever is bothering you), I deeply and completely love and accept myself.” If you are a person of faith, feel free to alternate this back and forth with the phrase, “Even though I (insert whatever is bothering you), God deeply and completely loves and accepts me.”
4. As you continue to do this, you may notice specific parts of the issue that really bother you coming to mind more intensely. So feel free to change your phrase to address these specifics.

5. Check in with your 1-10 scale at the end of the week to see what has changed and continue until you get down to a 1 or to wherever feels okay to you.

If nothing's changed, you might also try a tapping sequence that goes along with it in something called Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), found here:

[http://www.jenniferdiebel.com/uploads/EFT\\_Tapping.pdf](http://www.jenniferdiebel.com/uploads/EFT_Tapping.pdf). For people who are more body-oriented learners, or who have thinking patterns that are more entrenched, this can help to connect the desired acceptance to parts of the brain that are activated by these touch points to boost the effect. And even if it doesn't work, I have found it to be quite relaxing :)

If you or someone you know would like help with accepting reality, free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email [info@jenniferdiebel.com](mailto:info@jenniferdiebel.com).*

Thanks for reading!

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