

Thinking about our thinking “in the moment” pays big dividends

I have been thinking about “thinking” a lot lately particularly in the light of a discussion turned argument I recently had with a friend of mine. We both follow the same Spiritual teachings and our children attend Sunday School together so you would easily assume that we hold similar values (which we do) and thus are in agreement with such big subjects as a woman’s right to choose or whether to go to war or not, - not so! Much to my surprise I learned that she holds very different points of view. She is Pro-life and whole hearted supports the choice to go to war while I steadfastly support a woman’s right to choose and have never supported the choice to go to war.

Initially when I learned her stance on these two areas I was surprised and interested to know her thinking. As I listened to her point of view I gathered together my arguments as to why her thinking was wrong and why my point of view was in fact the correct one! You can image how quickly a pleasant chat turned into a heated argument. My thinking during the argument was something in the line of “How could you think like that? You must be crazy. You don’t understand the full consequences of what you are saying. I need to give you different information.” At some point during the argument I made the conscious choice to stop arguing and to really start to listen to her. My thinking that supported me in making this choice went something like this “I know this woman to be intelligent, loving, caring, respectful person. I know she follows similar values to me in terms of how she raises her children. I know these things to be true of myself also. This is an opportunity for me to learn and to possibly influence in a respectful manner.” By changing how I thought about her and about my role in the situation I was able to steer the argument into a more fruitful discussion. By the time we were done I understood better why she thought the way she did and what influenced her thinking and I believe she also went away with a better understanding of my thinking and the life experiences that have influenced my thinking.

Just to be clear, neither of us has changed our opinions on these subjects, what has changed is the depth of our friendship. We have a deeper more trusting relationship as a result of that discussion. More importantly I have a healthier respect for her and others who hold similar views to her. Both of us took the time to hang in with each other as we listened to not only what was being said but to how we thought and felt about things. It took courage to share our thinking at a very deep and intimate level and maintain respect for each other. My experience has been that when we take the time to not only listen to what is being said but to also understand the thinking behind what is being said, we not only facilitate greater acceptance of our differences, we also create opportunity for new and better ways of doing things.

To sum up, what did it take to turn the discussion turned heated argument into a fruitful learning experience? The simple but not so easy task of becoming aware of my thinking in the moment and making the conscious choice to change my thinking, so that it supported a more desired outcome.