

Bum Raps

Dealing with Life's Unfairness

By Tina B. Tessina, Ph.D

If you've ever watched a parade go by, you've likely seen one of the horses relieve itself, right there, in the middle of the road. From that point on, every band or group that comes marching down the road, marches bravely onward, right through the pile of horse manure!

It should be no surprise that the parade of life is similar. You can be marching along, happily playing a tune, and suddenly be faced with a mess that is not of your own making. In the face of life's little unfair surprises, you can and should keep marching on too; but how?

Take Responsibility for Your Part

Remember, you are not responsible for what happens to you, but you are responsible for how you respond to it. You don't need to feel guilty for problems in your life, but you do need to face them, and deal with them timely and appropriately.

When there's a messy pile in your road, after you get through it, it's valuable to consider:

1. how it got there
2. what you can do about it
3. how to make sure you don't participate in the creation of new piles

The metaphor of walking through the "road apples" of life can help you keep a healthy perspective. There's no doubt about it, we're all going

to encounter unpleasant obstacles in our path from time to time. Having to walk through it doesn't mean you're responsible because it's there; but it does mean you're responsible for cleaning off your own shoes, as quickly and thoroughly as possible, and then doing whatever you can, where possible, to make sure it doesn't happen again.

Minimize Your Emotional Reaction

You can get through life's little piles a lot easier by learning to minimize your emotional reactions to them. Remember, it's only a little pile. It has an end; it's temporary, and you'll probably survive it. Blaming yourself, or someone else, will not help you get through it faster; and will only make the slogging more unpleasant. To minimize your emotional reaction to unfair events in your life, learn to let them go.

To let them go:

1. Use Perspective. Put the situation into perspective. Will it be important an hour from now; or a month from now? Many problems won't seem as overwhelming when you take a longer view.



2. *Be understanding toward yourself.* If someone or something upsets you, don't worsen the problem by getting on your own case for reacting. It's normal to have an emotional response -- it's how you act on it that counts.

3. *Rise above.* If something frightened or upset you, like a minor traffic accident, then give a little prayer of thanks that you survived, bless the other driver (who probably needs it) and you'll feel better.

4. *Give the other person the benefit of the doubt.* If someone hurt your feelings, acknowledge that your feelings are hurt, then consider that it may have been unintentional. The world is full of emotional klutzes who don't realize the impact of their words and actions, and they create more problems for themselves, than for you.

5. *Consider the source.* A neighbor or associate who is truly nasty may repeatedly hurt your feelings. Consider what must be going on inside that person's head, and be grateful that you're not hearing that. Even the meanest people are far nastier to themselves than they are to others. That person is trying to relieve his or her pain by inflicting some on you. It really has very little to do with you.

Don't Ignore It

By all means, minimize your emotional reaction, but don't ignore a problem that needs attention. Ignoring a problem is the worst way to make it go away. There is a fine balance between letting go and taking responsibility. Pretending that all is well, or that the problem is non-existent, won't work. Pretending that you don't need other people, or hoping that a difficult person will go away by themselves, is foolish. Isolating yourself to avoid hassles means you'll miss the parade. When there's a problem, it's best to move through it, then scrape the droppings off your shoes later.

Respect Yourself

Beating yourself up, and blaming yourself or others, won't get you anywhere either. Having respect for yourself, and the other person, is the key to getting others to cooperate.

Respecting, loving and accepting who you are, causes you to naturally do what is necessary to create a positive life. Understanding that you don't have to be in charge of anyone but yourself will free you to get through the messy stuff, and on to your parade.

Steps to self-respect:

1. *Ask your own opinion.* Frequently ask yourself: "What do I think about this? Do I like it? Does it make sense to me? Do I agree or disagree with the others?"

2. *Listen to the answer.* Listen to your opinions as you would to the ideas of a respected friend. Consider them, weigh them, and even discuss them with yourself from time to time.

3. *Repeat until it's a habit.* After a few weeks, you'll become comfortable with your personal opinions, which will have a profound effect on what you do, and how you act. Decision making will be faster and easier, and you'll feel much more secure in making decisions.

Like it or not, the responsibility for turning your experiences around,

belongs solely to you. Taking an objective look at your part in the event, and dealing with it appropriately, will go a long way in moving forward. GB

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Being Authentic

Who are you? If you're like most, you probably answered this question as "I'm a wife/husband, a mom/dad, a writer." That answer is not who you are authentically. That answer reflects what you do, and how you see your role in life. There is another level of existence that is the genuine substance of who you are at your very core, and it cannot be defined by a role, a job, or a title. It's the sum of your thoughts, talents, wisdom and skills. It's that which makes you, uniquely you.

Don't worry if you aren't living your life 100% authentically. Most of us aren't. Becoming authentic is a life-long pursuit. Here are a few tips to get you started down an authentic path:

Meditate. Practice clearing the mind, and observing your thoughts. Acknowledge any fears you have of just "being you," then work to discredit those fears.

Appreciate your uniqueness.

Stop struggling. There is a time for moving forward and a time to let go.

Enjoy the moment. Be with people you love and enjoy.

Take time. Slow down. Avoid the tendency to fill up the space.

Stand up for what you believe.

Simplify your life, and weed out all the extra stuff. By simplifying, it will be easier to recognize your authentic self.

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