

Family Ties, Trials, and Traditions
By
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“They say that blood is thicker than water. Maybe that’s why we battle our own with more energy and gusto than we would ever expend on strangers.”
-David Assael

Family gatherings can mean so many different things to people within the same family. Some may be very excited about an event you are dreading and others may be dreading the event that brings you pleasure. It’s all about personal goals, comfort zones, expectations, and communication. All happy families look pretty much the same. Each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. In thinking about your family – and your role in that family- it may be wise to emotionally detach and see things from another point of view.

If you consistently have conflict, examine what is really going on. Pinpoint the problem by noting when, where and why it happens and how you feel about it. Think about the needs of everyone concerned, including you. Notice what could improve the situation and who can help alleviate the problem. When you look at a situation from the perspective of how others see it, you get a different picture and fresh insight into different possibilities for resolution. Don’t dig in your heels and insist on having your way or feel that you must be the martyr and continue the status quo. Look for areas of agreement to reduce defensiveness and open up communication.

People resist what is forced upon them and support what they have helped to create. When flexibility is an option, offer two choices that honor the desires and needs of all of you and take you out of the battle. Make both options something you can live with. When others are involved in the decision-making process, they become responsible for the outcomes they experience. If they are unhappy with the result, they made the choice and are responsible for the consequences. When you respect other opinions, they are more likely to respect your requests.

We have the power to choose what we do when situations are difficult. Throughout our life we will mix and mingle with plenty of people who push our buttons. Basically, we have three choices for handling situations with difficult people:

- (1) Accept it if there is nothing that you can say or do that will change it. Remember what is possible to change and what is not. You cannot change a person’s perspective even though you may have presented a convincing case. Your perspectives and rationalizations may be obvious to you, but some will never see it that way. You cannot change a person’s behavior. You can request a change, but you cannot make a person act differently. People will only change when they believe a new behavior is in their own best interest. You cannot change another person’s feelings. It does no good to tell others how they should feel. What they are feeling is their truth though you may not understand their reasons.
- (2) Change your behavior. If you are not happy with how people treat you and the outcomes that result, change what you do and say to transform the negative energy. Taking responsibility for your responses dramatically increases your interpersonal dynamics. You claim more personal power when you give up trying to change things that are out of your control.
- (3) Get out of situations that are so destructive that leaving is your best option. Be clear when the time is right and evaluate your true motives and intentions. If you are in any physical danger, leaving now for your safety is the number one priority.

As Theodore Rubin best summarizes: “The problem is not that there are problems. The problem is expecting otherwise and thinking that having problems is a problem.”

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