



Affective Center for Therapy

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TO ME RULE

Not taking some things personally can be very hard to do. The closer you are to a person and the more they mean to you, the easier it is for you take their slights and putdowns personally. When you are hurt, you tend to become a reactor and fire back or withdraw.

Hurt is personalized anger and it often comes with a vindictive hook. “You hurt me you no good so and so. Now, I hope you get what is coming to you!”

I have been asked how not to take what someone says or does personally. “Besides cutting off your feelings or becoming super depressed, is there some healthy tricks to becoming immune to the hurts that seem to assail us from all sides?” Indeed there are several “tricks” that you can employ to help stay the actor and not become the reactor.

First, be aware that you choose to think and you can choose to think anything you want to think. “Men are not disturbed by things but by the view they take of them.” *Epictetus* (55 -135 AD) If you do not like what you feel, change what you think. What you think will determine what you feel.

Second, know that words have no meanings, only people have meanings. You will never find the meaning of a word in the dictionary. The dictionary will give you only the definition of a word. You are left to choose the meaning for yourself.

Third, reality is what you believe it is. If your reality is “That person put me down/hurt me,” then nothing that I or any other person can say will convince you differently and any trick that I could give you will not change your feelings. Once you decide how something or somebody is, you will look for evidence to “prove” your reality is true.

Fourth, the To Me rule is one of the most powerful tools for not getting your feelings hurt. It may sound very simplistic, but if you ever learn it and are able to incorporate it into your life, you can become free of getting your feelings hurt.

The To Me Rule states that *what I say about you says **nothing** about you; it only says something about me.*

Do you like creamy, smooth and delicious things? Sure you do. I hold in my hand a cup. In this cup is some buttermilk. This buttermilk is creamy, smooth and delicious. What have I said about the buttermilk? It’s creamy, smooth and delicious? Oh then, you like it? Let me get you a big cup of buttermilk.

“Well now, hold on a minute.” Didn’t you say you like creamy, smooth and delicious things? And now, you’re saying that you don’t want the buttermilk. Something can’t be creamy, smooth and delicious and yucky, gucky and blech at the same time! Let’s try this again. “This buttermilk is creamy, smooth and delicious.” What have I said about the buttermilk? That I like it? Yes, that is what I said about me, but what have I said about the buttermilk? That it’s creamy, smooth and delicious? Then you must like it!

Getting a little confused? Have you ever had someone say to you, “You have got to go see the movie, *The Queen of Hearts*.” You go see the movie, expecting to enjoy it, and it’s terrible. What did you learn about the *movie* from what the person told you? Did you learn that it was a *good movie*? What happened to the movie when you went to see it? Did they somehow change the movie between the time the person described it to you and when you actually saw it? What did you learn from what the person told you? *Nothing!*

The **To Me Rule** says that *what I say about you* (the buttermilk, the movie) *only tells you about me* (my likes, dislikes) it says **nothing** about you (the buttermilk, the movie). Now, if you will remember that word, “**nothing**”, you won’t miss any more of my questions.

“Women are stupid, dumb and emotional. They have periods and they ought to stay out of the way and let us men run the world.” What did I say about women? *Nothing*. What did you learn about me? That I am a male chauvinist pig with a bad attitude? That I have been hurt in a relationship and that I feel threatened by women’s emotions or that I am afraid that some woman may take my job? You can learn a lot about me, but you learn *nothing* about women.

I am sitting at a desk. This desk is solid. What have I said about the desk? That it’s solid? No. In fact there is so much space between the atoms that it would probably float. You have learned nothing about the desk from what I said. What you learned about was my engineering background.

Look at the outside cover of your phone book. Notice that it is kind of brown and gray with some orange on it? What have I told you about the colors on the phone book? What was the word? *Nothing!* What did you learn about me? That I am colorblind?

Whenever anyone describes someone or something, they are telling you how they see or perceive it, not how that person or thing *is*.

Let’s see how this applies on a more personal basis: “You are the ugliest, stupidest person I have ever seen! You are so ugly; you could scare a mud fence.” What did I say about you? (It’s getting easier to answer these questions) *Nothing!*

Ok, let me try it again. You are the most beautiful, vivacious and charming person I have ever met. Now what did I say about you? It’s still *nothing*. Shucks!

Racism fits into this same area. When someone says that all Blacks are dumb, that all Chicanos are lazy, what have they said about the person? *Nothing!* But you sure learned something about the person making the statement.

Does *agreement* make something true?

“All the neighbors on the block say that you are irresponsible and lazy.” Does *agreement* make something true? *No*. If ten million people agreed that Jews and Blacks are subhuman and should be exterminated, does that make it true?

“A foot is twelve inches.” Isn’t a foot being twelve inches just an agreement? When the King of England put down his foot (which happened to be twelve inches) and ordered it to be used as an instrument of measurement, was not that just another agreement? A foot is not twelve inches. It’s 30.58 centimeters, and the centimeter has changed over time. It used to be the circumference of the earth divided up a number of times. Now it is the measurement of blue light through a spectroscope.

When I grew up, my third grade reader said that the atom was the smallest piece of matter. We were told to put butter on a burn, never cold water. In the 1800’s, women who had rubenesque figures were considered ideal, while slender women were considered unattractive.

What is an American dollar worth when compared to the Yen or the German Mark? Was that yesterday or today? Agreement does not make things true, it makes things convenient. We certainly need agreement, but we need to be careful that we don't think that these agreements are permanent or true.

Getting sucked in. . .

"You are 5,000 pounds overweight." What have I said about you? Nothing! That was easy. "You know, you could really lose at least 5 or 10 pounds." Now, what have I said about you? Which one would you buy into? Which one would more likely hurt your feelings?

I once had a client who told me, "Nobody can blackmail you unless you first blackmail yourself!" There has got to be a part of what that person is saying to you that you believe or you would not get your feelings hurt. No matter how close or how much you are in love with a person, if they were to say to you, "You have three heads and fifteen legs," you would not take it personally or get your feelings hurt. You might be concerned about their mental stability or assume they were being silly. You would hear it about them, not about you, the To Me rule again.

If the love of your life says something that you take as them not loving you or that they want to leave you, you could get sucked into your fear of abandonment. If someone wants out of their relationship with you, the To Me rule says that it is not about you, it is about them. What kinds of things do you reject? Garbage, trash? That is not true. You reject things you can see no value in or in some cases it is things that are too valuable! What is recycling about? What stops you from running out and buying a Rolls Royce? There are a lot of reasons that someone might leave you BUT it is never because you are garbage or trash. So, what does it say about the person who leaves you? Are they too blind to see what a wonderful prize you are or maybe they see you as so valuable that they cannot afford you. The parent who gives her baby up for adoption, is that because the parent sees that baby as garbage?

Often, you will let others determine your worth as a person. Have you ever had a performance review at your job? What did that performance review say about you? Your boss comes in and says that you are doing a great job. A week later, that boss leaves. Management brings in a new boss who calls you in and tells you that you are the worst employee he has ever had. You are doing the same things you have always done. So which boss is talking about you? *Neither*. Performance reviews are about their expectations. Does that mean that you shouldn't listen to what a performance review says? Now that the first boss is gone and if you want to keep your job, do you do what the first boss said or what the current one, the one who signs your paycheck, is saying?

Just because what a person is saying about you *is not really about you*, that doesn't mean that you shouldn't listen to what he is saying. Just because your mate is saying *nothing about you* when he is yelling at you, that doesn't make what he is saying unimportant to your relationship. The question is, do you want to live up to his/her expectations?

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For your final exam on the To Me rule, let's see if you have really gotten the concept.

I want you to make a statement that is true about someone you love.

"My wife is kind," you say.

No, she's not, she is one of the most unkind people I know. Which one of us is talking about your wife?

What you said about that person, was it really about that person or about what *you believe about that person*?

Now, this time, don't tell me something about what you believe about that person, tell me something that you *know to be true* about them.

"She has brown hair," you say.

No, she doesn't. She has been fooling you and she secretly has her hair dyed. Which one of us is talking about the person? Aren't you telling me about what you *believe to be true* about that person?

"She is the mother of my children." Whoa, are you sure you want to go there?

Anything you tell me, I am going to take the other side. Any statement you make about another person will *never be about that person*. It will be what you believe about them.

Did you miss some of the questions above? Whenever I have a very important concept that I want you to remember, I will set you up to fail. When you take your DMV test, which questions do you remember, the ones that you got right or the ones that you missed? The ones that you missed, of course! Failure is just an opportunity to learn, and it is very important to me that you learn the **To Me Rule**.

What I say about you says nothing about you; it only says something about me.

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