Letting Go of Grievances: Forgiving without Forgetting

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Learn-at-Lunch
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My Approach Today

- Purpose is to introduce you to the concept of forgiveness
- Goals are to
  - Increase familiarity
  - Increase the possibility
- Method
  - Words
  - Images
  - Stories
  - Song (!)
Human Resources

The ability to manage our perceptions.
Human Resources

The ability to control our attention.
Human Resources

Diet Coke

The ability to manage our thoughts and feelings.
Human Resources

Tobacco Spit

The ability to manage our thoughts and feelings.
The Human Condition

- Yearn for love
- Yearn for understanding
- Yearn for compassion
- Yearn for freedom
- Yearn for healing
- Get caught in traps
- Gravitate towards hope
All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives.

Dalai Lama

Without forgiveness, there's no future.

Desmond Tutu

For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: How do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?

bell hooks
What is Forgiveness?
(Luskin, 2002, p. vii)

 Forgiveness is
• The peace you learn to feel when you let go of a grievance
• For you and not the offender
• Taking back your power
• Taking responsibility for how you feel
• About your healing & not about the people who hurt you
Forgiveness is...

“Forgiveness is defined as the willful giving up of resentment in the face of another’s (or others’) considerable injustice and responding with beneficence to the offender even though the offender has no right to the moral goodness” (Baskin & Enright, 2004, P. 80)

“Forgiveness is sought, not as an act of mercy for towards the perpetrator, but to allow the client to move past the emotional betrayal as a mean to a healthier self-image, improved emotional functioning, and enhanced interpersonal relationships (Wade & Worthington, 2005)” (Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008, p. 465).
What is Forgiveness?
(Luskin, 2002, p. vii)

 Forgiveness is

- A trainable skill
- Helps you get control of your feelings
- Can improve your physical and mental health
- Becoming a hero instead of a victim
- A choice
- Attainable by everyone
What Forgiveness is Not

(Luskin, 2002, p. viii)

Forgiveness is not

- Condoning unkindness
- Forgetting that something painful happened
- Excusing poor behavior
- Necessarily other-worldly or grounded in religion
- Denying or minimizing hurt
- Reconciling with the offender
- Giving up having feelings
Forgiving is Not Forgetting

- You want to remember
  - What you learned
  - Sources of resilience, healing, and empowerment
  - To help others
Benefits of Forgiveness
(Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Luskin, 2002; 2007)

- Fewer health problems
- Less stress
- Reduced risk for illnesses like heart disease or cancer
- Healthier cardiovascular, muscular, and nervous systems
- Feel better psychologically and emotionally
Types of Forgiveness Interventions:

1 session groups can produce negative outcomes; Seek longer term programs or 1:1 forgiveness therapy

- **Enright, 2001**
  - 20 separate units
  - 4 phases
    - Uncovering
    - Decision
    - Work
    - Outcome

- **REACH** (Wade & Worthington, 2005)
  - Recalling the offense
  - Empathy for offender
  - Altruistic gift of empathy
  - Commitment to forgive
  - Holding onto it

(Lundahl, et al., 2008)
Benefits of Forgiveness Therapy
(Lundahl, Taylor, Stevenson, & Roberts, 2008; Luskin, 2002; 2007)

- Statistically-Significant Benefits to Forgiveness Therapy

- Participants:
  - Forgive the offender
  - Decrease in negative affect (depression)
  - Increase in positive emotions (e.g., hope)
  - Increase in self-esteem
  - Outcomes durable (lasted longer than 4 months)
  - Got better over time

- Meta-analysis of 3-16 outcome studies
Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health & Happiness

Dr. Fred Luskin
Ingredients of Grievances

(Luskin, 2002, p. 4)

- Unexpected event (e.g., injured, harmed)
  - Got something we didn’t want
- Failed hope (e.g., no expected gain)
  - Didn’t get something we did want
- We THINK about it a lot
- We perseverate
- We “rent it too much space in our mind”
- We dwell on our bad fortune more readily and more often than our good fortune
Do you have a grievance?

(Luskin, 2002, p. 10)

1. Do you think about this painful situation more than other things in your life that are good?
2. When you think about this situation, do you become physically or emotionally upset?
3. When about this situation do you have the same repetitive thoughts?
4. Do you find yourself repeating this story over and over in your mind?
Three Ingredients for an Ever-Lasting Grievance
(Luskin, 2002)

Part of the human condition:

- The exaggerated taking of personal offense
- Blaming the offender for how you feel
- Creation of a grievance story that gets told repeatedly
Taking an Offense Personally

- Grievances common, but holding onto one perpetuates suffering

- Anger is an important and informative feeling state in the short-run
  - Likely to lead to bitterness & isolation in the long-run
Taking an Offense Personally
(Luskin, 2002)

To shift your perspective from a personal offense to the broader view, acknowledge the pain and then look for the impersonal elements; each event contains both:

- Find out how common the experience is
- Most offenses not intentional (some are)
- Locus of responsibility is with the offender, but locus of change/recovery is in you
- Hurt came from without, but the solution/healing comes from within
“Blame is one of the hypotheses we make about why we feel bad” (Luskin, 2002, p. 22).

Blame hypotheses keep us stuck in the past and dependent on others for relief.

“When we blame another person for how we feel we grant them the power to regulate our emotions” (Luskin, 2002, p. 29).
Injury/Loss

- **Body (somatic response)**
  - Fight
  - Flight
  - Freeze

- **Mind (cognition/thoughts)**
  - We make attributions
  - We build causal connections

- We assume our feelings are caused by the other person’s actions
- This type of automatic thinking limits our choices
  - Lets offender control the future
Example: Betrayal of trust

- What an %###*^%$!
  - Blame Other
- What an %###*^%$!
  - Blame Self
- I will never fall for that mistake again (-)
  - I will stop feeling, talking, taking risks
- I will get revenge (-)

- Whoa, I that nearly did me in (but it didn’t)! (+)
- What an %###*^%$!
  - He/she must be desperate, mentally ill, deranged, lost. (+)
- What have I learned here?
  - What might I do differently next time? (+)
- What did I do to survive this situation?
  - What strengths were revealed? (+)
- Carl Rogers to Gloria, “It’s an awfully risky thing to live.” (+)
The Painted Veil
Do you have a grievance story?
Grievance stories always have unenforceable rules

(Luskin, 2002)

- Trying to enforce something over which you have no control
- An expectation for which you have no direct control
- Unenforceable rules lead to feeling helpless, hopeless, and deficient.
- First step towards empowerment is becoming aware of them
Serenity Prayer from AA:

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

~Reinhold Niebuhr
Are you ready to forgive?

Three Conditions  (Luskin, 2002, p. 65)

- Know that your feelings are about what happened
- Be clear about the action that wronged you
- Share your experience with at least one or two trusted people
Components of Forgiveness
(Luskin, 2002, p. 111-122)

- The story we tell
  - Goal of forgiveness to feel peaceful

- Take responsibility for our feelings
  - Goal of forgiveness is empowerment
  - Taking responsibility for how you feel does not mean that you what happened is your fault or that you wanted it to happen
Forgiveness means giving up all hope for a better past.

Lily Tomlin

Life is an adventure in forgiveness.

Norman Cousins
How to Reclaim Responsibility

(Luskin, 2002)

- Finding the positive in your life
- Change the channel from grievance to:
  - Forgiveness
  - Gratitude
  - Beauty
  - Love
- Breath of Thanks
- Heart Focus
- Positive Emotional Refocusing Technique (PERT)
Challenging Unenforceable Rules

(Luskin, pp. 128-136)

1. **Recognize when you are upset and notice that it is occurring in the present**
2. **Notice that your upset is not only because of the situation but because you have an unenforceable rule**
3. **Assert your willingness to challenge the unenforceable rule, focus on changing your thoughts, not the other person’s!**
4. **Uncover the unenforceable rule; goal is to “return to the desire and get rid of the demand”**.
5. **Change the rule by substituting “hope” or “wish” for the demand.**
6. **Notice the rewards of changing your thinking!**
Additional Strategies:

Recognizing Cognitive Distortions


Unenforceable rules can be accompanied by or amplified by cognitive distortions

- Blaming
- Catastrophizing/Magnifying
- Inflammatory Global Labeling
- Misattributions
- Overgeneralization
- Demanding/Commanding

Correct the Cognitive Distortions
If there are dreams about a beautiful South Africa, there are also roads that lead to their goal. Two of these roads could be named Goodness and Forgiveness.

Nelson Mandela
The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

Mohandas Gandhi
How might you rewrite your story?

- **You might include:**
  - Heroism
  - Resilience
  - Strength
  - Grace
  - Humility
  - Power
  - Integrity
  - Pride
  - Forgiveness

- **You might feel:**
  - Hope
  - Peace
  - Gratitude
  - Love
  - Compassion
  - Freedom
  - Relief
  - Ready
We win by tenderness. We conquer by forgiveness.
Frederick William Robertson

There is no revenge so complete as forgiveness.
Josh Billings

The practice of forgiveness is our most important contribution to the healing of the world.
Marianne Williamson

The first step in forgiveness is the willingness to forgive.
Marianne Williamson
In the evening of life we shall be judged on love, and not one of us is going to come off very well, and were it not for my absolute faith in the loving forgiveness of my Lord I could not call on him to come.

Madeleine L'Engle

Inner peace can be reached only when we practice forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the past, and is therefore the means for correcting our misperceptions.

Gerald Jampolsky
Holding on to anger, resentment and hurt only gives you tense muscles, a headache and a sore jaw from clenching your teeth. Forgiveness gives you back the laughter and the lightness in your life.

Joan Lunden

Genuine forgiveness does not deny anger but faces it head-on.

Alice Duer Miller

Forgiveness is not always easy. At times, it feels more painful than the wound we suffered, to forgive the one that inflicted it. And yet, there is no peace without forgiveness.

Marianne Williamson
Forgiveness is a virtue of the brave.
Indira Gandhi

Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.
Suzanne Somers