

Nothing Personal

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In taking what others say and do personally, we needlessly diminish and exhaust ourselves by giving negativity a place to fester and grow. Let's look at what happens when we let the actions and words of others in, and what happens when we stop taking everything personally!

We've all been there... on the receiving end of a frustrated friend, co-worker, or family member, or cut off in traffic, ignored or overlooked while waiting to be served, judged, treated harshly or unfairly by a complete stranger or mere acquaintance.

Such encounters can impact us negatively, especially when we take them personally. An unpleasant exchange of words or a thoughtless encounter can leave us feeling diminished, less than, and disrespected. We often personalize these hurts and carry them with us. When we do, they lower our moods and energy, and leave us feeling depleted and defeated.

When we take things personally

When we take the unkind words of others personally and to heart, we are essentially agreeing with opinions that diminish us. On some level, we 'agree with' that negative comment, we feel that we deserve to be overlooked, cut off, disrespected, or made to feel insignificant. We are drawn in by the attitudes, words, responses, and actions of another person because we assume that these actions or words are about us. But the fact is that what other people do and say to us has little to do with us, and everything to do with them.

People in pain

That's right: what other people do and say to you — even the most hurtful comment or act — has everything to do with them, and nothing to do with you. Here's why. When people are in pain, they spill out onto others. When we understand this, we can take a step back from challenging interactions, free ourselves from the hurt — intentional or

unintentional — and keep ourselves from carrying the residual negativity of the aftermath of an unpleasant encounter.

For example, Roger is sitting in rush hour traffic on a major city thoroughfare. Seconds before arriving at the source of the congestion, a car appears out of nowhere and cuts him off, gesturing angrily and blowing its horn. Roger lets the driver in and hopes that this will calm his road rage. But the cars end up stopped at a red light, and the driver he let in continues to rage at him and goes so far as to stick his hand out of the car window and shout expletives.

If Roger is having a tough day, he might take this driver's actions personally, and become either enraged — which could cause him to react and the situation could escalate — or it could shake him up, upset him, or make him feel as though he must have done something to deserve the anger of another driver. The reality of this situation is, of course, that Roger had nothing to do with this driver's state of mind. Whatever caused this driver's bad day happened long before Roger crossed paths with this frantic, ill-tempered, entitled driver.

Hurting ourselves

The same goes for harsh words or treatment you receive from other people — these situations have nothing to do with you. Their pain and suffering are not yours to take on and take in. Taking on the unwanted burden of the negative moods, thoughts, opinions, or deeds of others means taking on other people's points of view in place of your own. The burden of their anger, fear, and low self-esteem are not yours to carry.

Buying into — and even defending ourselves — in the face of other people's negativity, fear, envy, and anger diminishes our self-esteem and drains us of our energies. And engaging in a right-fighting exchange of words with someone happy to put us down or act disrespectfully toward us only makes matters worse. Flipping the script by changing the way we react and interact is easier than we might think.

Flipping the script

It may be hard to believe that depersonalizing works. If you have trouble believing it, next time you're in a trying situation just try it. Next time you're feeling threatened, unfairly attacked, or diminished by the words or actions of another person, rather than engaging in or taking on their negativity, let it go. Pause and remind yourself that it's not about you and that their opinion or actions are about their mood, their bad day, or state of mind. Notice how different you feel, how much lighter and freer, and less burdened you are by the negativity of another person.

Becoming immune

You will see for yourself how powerful depersonalizing the words and actions of others is, and feel the positive effects in your interactions with others. Over time, you will find that these difficult exchanges no longer plague you. In short, you will have built up an immunity to the harsh words and treatment of

other people and may even have compassion for them.

Becoming immune to taking things personally frees us from needless pain and suffering, and prevents us from replaying unpleasant encounters. Trust yourself to know when someone is acting in pain and spilling out onto you. Trust yourself to make good choices. We are here to become the highest and best version of ourselves... and doing so requires doing and acting mindfully and with compassion and kindness, not only to others but to ourselves.

Flipping the Script

Five steps to depersonalizing the words and actions of others

Remind yourself that people in pain spill out onto others, and that you do not have to take on their pain

Realize that what other people say and how they treat you is about them, not you

Reconsider the source of negative comments or actions. Is that person revealing their envy, anger, stress, or fear, rather than showing you something painful about yourself?

Remember that you are not required to carry the burden of the unkind words and deeds of others


Respect yourself enough to trust your judgment, and let go of the negative opinions of others .

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About the author

Dr. Monica Vermani is a Clinical Psychologist specializing in treating trauma, stress and mood & anxiety disorders, and the founder of Start Living Corporate Wellness. She is a well-known speaker and author on mental health and wellness. Her upcoming book, A Deeper Wellness, is scheduled for publication in 2021.

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Dr. Vermani has recently launched an exciting online self-help program, A Deeper Wellness, delivering powerful mental-health guidance, life skills, and knowledge that employees can access anywhere, anytime. <https://www.adeeperwellness.com/>

