



Allure Article – for Sunday, January 2008

Let Them Be

Is there a person in your life you think needs changing? Almost all of us would answer “Yes” to that question. This week several of my clients have been facing struggles with people whose attitudes, words and actions they believe need major adjustments. As I worked with them, I gained valuable clarity for myself.

One woman has a college-aged daughter with a life-threatening disease. This girl is continually making health-related choices. Her doctors had laid out guidelines for diet, exercise and self-care that could prevent lengthy hospital stays, yet the girl chooses to ignore their advice. As a result, her body breaks down and she ends up in the hospital hooked up to machines for weeks at a time. So begins a cycle that has been occurring for years.

Next, my client drops everything and rushes to her daughter’s bedside. Soon the mom becomes physically exhausted and emotionally overwrought as she tries to nurse her daughter back to health. She believes that if she sacrifices, her daughter will listen to her appeals and make better health choices so that the cycle stops. But it never does. So my anger, resentment and frustration build in my client.

Another client who is married with children has a brother (also married, with children). This brother lives by very strict, narrow rules. In my client’s view, his brother is over-protective of his kids. My client feels sorry for his nieces who, to him, are missing out on some of the best joys of childhood. He is also vexed by the awkward situations that arise whenever the two families interact. He has repeatedly tried to convince his brother to loosen up. These conversations serve only to heighten tensions between the brothers.

We want people to change, to act in ways that meet our standards. They seldom cooperate. So...how do we handle our relationships with those we believe are hindering themselves or others?

This is one of the main questions that comes up in my work as a life coach. Am I responsible to change my clients? As an outsider looking in to another person’s challenges, I often see what seem to be simple, powerful changes they could make. However, I have learned that I can’t know what is best for other people. If they ask for feedback or advice, I can make honest observations and share solutions that have worked for me. In the end, I have to “let them be.”

People are where they are in life. What I can do is accept them completely as they are. I can respect them by giving them space and time to gain insight into their own issues. People do make changes-- if they want to. When they are ready to. (Of course if there is criminally abusive behavior occurring, I would advise my clients to intervene at least by contacting appropriate authorities. Apart from that, each person’s life is his or her own business.)

We can’t control other people. We aren’t responsible to do so. The people around us choose whatever life journey they want. Their life decisions are between them and their Creator.

If that’s the case, then why do we continue our efforts to remake others? Do you know anyone who is on a crusade to help improve their spouse, child, co-worker or friend? Is there anyone you wish you could

reform? This desire is a recipe for suffering. When we adopt such a goal, we fret, we cry, we stomp our feet and raise our voices. And we deplete our energy trying to “fix” someone who has no intention of changing.

When we focus on bettering others, we forget that the only person we can change is ourselves. True transformation comes from the inside out. The first change we can each make is to accept others the way they are, see the best in them and offer them respect. That’s what we want, isn’t it?

Once we’ve freed ourselves from the burden of reshaping others, we can focus our attention and energy on our own challenges. I have found that when I’ve been intent on changing others, I was actually avoiding changes I needed to make. I have also learned that the people we are trying to change are actually mirrors, showing us aspects of our own lives that point us to ways we unconsciously want to grow and expand. The “moat” I see in someone else’s belief system or behavior is, more often than not, a “beam” in my own.

If you see something in another that you’d like to change, ask yourself if there might be a need to shift something in your own life.

How long does it take to get rid of dirt on your face if you try to remove it by cleaning the mirror?

Let’s take the lady whose daughter is in the hospital. As she and I discussed the choices her daughter was making, it became clear to my client that she could be taking better care of herself too! And, in fact, prioritizing her own well-being and giving her daughter some time alone in the hospital to reflect, might actually break the cycle. She recognized that she needed to begin by BEING the change she wanted to see. As she heals physically and emotionally, she can be present for her daughter--no matter what decisions the girl decides to make.

This approach holds for the man who was concerned about his brother. My client came to see that his anger with his brother for being judgmental was in itself a judgment. My client wanted to control his brother’s behavior even though he would not want his brother to control his. He wanted freedom and respect. He learned that this was what he could offer his brother as well. In doing so, he has opened the door for understanding and is already beginning to enjoy more pleasant interactions between the families.

If you find yourself complaining that you aren’t accomplishing the things you want to, take note of how much of your energy you are devoting to attempt at reforming others. Instead, turn your attention to your own personal growth.

When you find yourself working to help someone who doesn’t want to change, consider this wry definition from Albert Einstein: “Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Remember the Beatles song, “Let It Be”? I often sing that to myself in circumstances that feel difficult. After this week of learning, I’ve decided to adapt the words: “Let them be, let them be. There will be an answer, let them be. Let them be, let them be, Whisper words of wisdom, let them be.”

Your assignment this week is to sing this adapted version to yourself anytime you feel inner frustration because someone speaks or acts in a way that doesn’t meet your expectations. And then, if you have the courage, remind yourself that you are looking in the mirror.

Food For Thought

You are responsible for YOUR journey.
How often do you get so focused on other people that you lose sight of yourself?

Observe this.
Notice the impact this has on you.

Let 2009 be a year to focus on self-growth.
Trust others to their own journey.

As you love yourself and heal within, you will have more to share with others.

© Patricia G. Omoqui 2008, All Rights Reserved

Patricia Omoqui is an internationally recognized inspirational speaker, life coach and writer. Patricia's mission in life is to inspire people to move beyond fear so they can reach their full potential.

To share your thoughts about this article, please email Patricia at allure@patriciaomoqui.com or visit her at her website: www.patriciaomoqui.com .