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Great Relationship Problem Solving Technique

Sonia Devine
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This is one of my all time favourite problem solving techniques, and I use it on a regular basis with clients who find it hard to get along other people. If you're going around in circles with a relationship problem, it can really help to step back and break the problem down into groups. Here's how to do it:

First, think of a small problem you are having in your life right now. Don't try to tackle anything too big just yet, just get used to using this technique and then when you get more skilled at it you can try it with some larger problems.

The idea is to separate your problem into three groups.

GROUP ONE: Parts of the Problem That Come From Other People

Write down all the parts of this particular problem that are brought to it by other people. Now, I know it's tempting to lump all of the parts into this group, because it's so easy to blame others for what is not working in our lives; but try to resist this temptation! And let's face it - other people are not responsible for EVERY part of your problem. So be honest with yourself.

GROUP TWO: The Facts about Your problem

In this group, you are going to write down the facts. For example, let's say your partner won't spend enough time with you and the family. In this group, one of the facts you could write would be "We need ___ to spend more time at home".

GROUP THREE: YOU

Now you are going to list all the parts of the problem that YOU bring to it. Many of the things you write down here will be related to your reaction to the situation. For instance, do you sulk or berate your partner when he/she chooses to spend time away from home? How does this contribute to your problem? What reaction do you get? Be sure to write down any of your own personal triggers from past circumstances or relationships which may be contributing to this problem.

OK: Time to Start Culling...

When you have created the three categories for your problem, pick up the list for Group #1. (Other People). Now, screw up this piece of paper and throw it in the bin. Why? Because.....

*** You cannot change OTHER PEOPLE ***

But how great would it be if we could? We'd live blissfully in a world full of people who were just like us....or would we?? Now, I'm not saying that people will not change of their own accord. It just means that if they do change, it will be because they choose to, not because you tell them that they should. Don't waste your time and energy on those parts of the problem that you cannot control!

Okay, now do the same with the group 2 list; screw it up and throw it away! Because....

*** You cannot change the facts ***

So now, all that is left is the list you have made for group 3. Your problem has just gotten a whole lot smaller because you've thrown away 2 of the lists! Have a good look at this third list. Are there any things in the list you have made that you feel you truly cannot change? If so, remove these items from the list – you must only use your energy on the things you do have the ability to influence.

Now, looking at the remaining things on the list, are there any things that you do not want to change? This is really important! If you don't want to change something about yourself, then you will not; it's that simple! But keep this in mind; writing this list is all about taking personal responsibility for what is not working in your life.

This technique will help you to focus on the parts of your problem that you CAN do something about. By now, you should have in your hot little hand a practical, do-able list that you can turn into an action plan. So the message is clear....

Find out what you can do about it and then take action!

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