

Reach Within to Forgive

Many times colleagues reach out to the Ombuds because they are in pain or angry mostly due to a feeling of unfair treatment directed at them. They may feel resentment and when the pain is severe enough, they may even wish the perceived perpetrator punishment. The hurt is heightened when the offender's action is personal, unforeseen and unwarranted.

After validating the feeling of anger and disappointment, and when appropriate, I ask the person to share previous experiences with the offender that were positive in improving their relationship. To my pleasant surprise, they share notable examples.

I also ask whether there could be a reason the offender acted that way. Focusing on a past positive may decrease, but will rarely eliminate, the pain. Therefore, one of the most challenging aspects of my job is attempting to lessen the pain in order to motivate and empower the individual to forgive.

Forgiveness is defined as a conscious decision by an individual to let go of feelings of anger toward a person who has harmed them, independent of whether the person deserves forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, nor condoning hurtful behavior.

I am writing this *Reach Within Initiative* because I have too often felt the pain and anger of individuals who have been hurt and felt that they have been treated unfairly. The pain can last for weeks, months and even years.

Regrettably, some individuals will neither apologize nor express regret for the pain they have caused, and may even attempt to justify their actions. The realization that people are imperfect and that we all make mistakes may help us gain the capacity to forgive. Can we perhaps recall being forgiven by others? Can such experiences teach us to be more understanding and accepting of our own and others' imperfections?

I encourage all of us to consider letting go of the anger and forgive. Holding on to anger and hurt only does more harm to oneself. Expecting others to apologize or change their behavior makes us "prisoners" of the very pain caused by others. We can only control how we react to painful situations. Being able to forgive can prove to be a valuable gift to the offender but mostly to oneself, freeing us of the some of the anger.

If you see the value in forgiving someone, I am happy to help. Also, below are a few steps you may consider taking:

- Express your anger and do not deny it;
- Speak with someone you trust who will validate your anger and show you compassion;
- Give yourself a timeline. How long do you want to stay angry? At what point will your anger be destructive to you instead of constructive?
- Write down exactly what you would want to say to the offender in a constructive manner if you have the opportunity to do so; Read it out loud and envision the offender hearing it. Consider letting the offender know that the behavior was not acceptable and how it affected you. There is a chance you will be pleasantly surprised by the response. Perhaps the intention was to be helpful and not hurtful;
- Do more of the things that you enjoy whether it is taking a walk, watching a comedy, reading a book or playing a game.

This *Reach Within Initiative* encourages us all to give ourselves the gift to forgive.