

COURSE: GETTING BACK TO HAPPY

10 Things to Remember Before You Take Things Personally

WRITTEN *by* MARC CHERNOFF // 31 COMMENTS



Let me share three quick stories and some life-changing lessons with you...

- This morning at a train stop near the hospital, a man and his three young kids got on. The kids were loud and completely out of control, running from one end of the train car to the other. An annoyed passenger sitting next to me looked over at the man and asked, "Is there a reason you're letting your kids go nuts right now?" The man looked up with tears in his eyes and said, "The doc just told me their mother isn't going to make it. Sorry, I'm just trying to think before we all sit down at home to talk about this."
- Two of my ex-coworkers actually laughed at me last year when I told them I dreamed of opening my own hair salon. When I spoke with you and Angel on a coaching call that same day, Angel said something like, "We've known quite a few people who went after their dreams and succeeded. One thing they all had in common was they got laughed at in the process." That advice really pushed me forward. And I'm proud to say I opened my salon almost six months ago, and business is really taking off. But to think I almost didn't do it ... I almost took my ex-coworkers' negativity to heart!
- Today one of my regular customers, a really grumpy elderly man who has been eating in our diner every morning for the better part of five years, left me \$1,000 in cash for his \$7 breakfast. Alongside the cash he left a small note that read, "Thank you, Christine. I know I haven't been the brightest smile in your life, but your smile and hospitable service over the years gave me something to look forward to every morning after my wife passed away. I wanted to say thank you. I'm moving eight hours down the road this afternoon to live with my son and his family. May the rest of your life be magical."

These stories have been transcribed with permission from coaching sessions we've recently conducted with three of [our course students](#). And if there's one thing these students' stories

have it common, it's the importance of not taking things too personally.

The father on the train wasn't deliberately trying to annoy other passengers—he was thinking through one of the hardest realities of his life. Those ex-coworkers weren't really laughing heartlessly—they were simply acting from within the boundaries of their own limited visions. And that grumpy elderly customer was just a humble, heartbroken man. In each story, the subject's words and actions were all about THEM, not others. And while the people around them might take their annoying, naysaying, grumpy behavior personally, there's nothing personal about it. Think about it...

How often have you taken things too personally?

If you're anything like the rest of us—and that's OK—it's probably been quite often.

But why?

Why do we always take things personally?

There are quite a few viable and valid answers to the question of why we take things personally. But the one Angel and I have found to be most common through a decade of [one-on-one coaching with our course students](#) is the tendency we all have of putting ourselves at the center, and seeing everything—every event, conversation, circumstance, etc.—from the viewpoint of how it relates to us. And this can have all kinds of adverse effects, from feeling hurt when other people are rude, to feeling sorry for ourselves when things don't go as planned, to doubting ourselves when we aren't perfect.

Of course, we are not really at the center of everything. That's not how the world works. It just sometimes seems that way to us. Let's take a quick look at a few examples...

Someone storms into the room in a bad mood, huffing and puffing, and addresses us in a very rude way. Immediately we think to ourselves, "What's going on here? I don't deserve to be treated

like this. They should know better!" And we are left agitated, offended, and angry. But the truth is the other person's behavior has very little to do with us. They got mad at something outside the room, and now they're reactively venting their frustrations. We just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. This reality doesn't justify their rude behavior, but it needs to be consciously acknowledged so we don't waste all our mental energy positioning ourselves at the center of the situation and taking everything personally.

Now, let's assume for a moment that a person's actions actually do seem to relate to us directly—we inadvertently did something that annoyed someone, and now they're reacting very rudely to us. A situation like this might seem personal, but is it really? Is the magnitude of their rude reaction all about us and the one thing we did to trigger them? No, probably not. It's mostly just a statement about the other person's reactions, snap-judgments, anger issues, and expectations of the universe. Again, we're just a small piece of a much longer story.

And likewise, [when someone else rejects us](#), ignores us, doesn't call us when they said they would, doesn't show they care, etc. ... these reactions have much less to do with us than they have to do with the other person's history of personal issues.

But because we see everything through a lens of how it affects us—a lens that does a poor job of seeing the bigger picture—we tend to react to everyone else's actions and words as if they are a personal judgment or statement about us. Thus, other people's anger makes us angry. Other people's lack of respect makes us feel unworthy. Other people's unhappiness makes us unhappy. And so it goes.

If you're nodding your head to any of this, it's time to...

Remind yourself of the truth!

What other people say and do, and the attitude they carry, rarely has anything to do with you. People's reactions and behaviors are about their perspectives, wounds and experiences. Whether

people treat you like you're amazing, or act like you're the worst, again, is more about them and how they are viewing the world at a given moment in time.

Now, I'm certainly not suggesting we should completely ignore all the feedback and insight we receive from others. I'm simply saying that a significant percentage of the emotional pain, disappointment and sadness in our lives comes directly from our tendency to take things too personally.

In most cases, it's far more beneficial and healthy to let go of other people's beliefs and behaviors and to operate with your own intuition and wisdom as your guide.

And that takes practice. Lots and lots of practice.

The key is in reminding yourself to gracefully deflect the senseless negativity around you. When you sense negativity coming at you, give it a small push back with a thought like, "That remark (or gesture) is not really about me, it's about you." Remember that all people have emotional issues they're dealing with (just like you), and it makes them defiant, rude, and downright thoughtless sometimes. They are doing the best they can, or they're not even aware of their issues. In any case, you can learn not to interpret their behaviors as personal attacks, and instead see them as non-personal encounters (like a dog barking in the distance, or a bumblebee buzzing by) that **you can either respond to gracefully, or not respond to at all.**

But again, this doesn't come naturally—NOT taking things personally is a skill to be honed.

To help you practice, I recommend storing the following reminders in an easily accessible location (perhaps by bookmarking this article in your smart phone), and then reading (and re-reading) them whenever you catch yourself taking things personally.

1. Calmness is a superpower. The ability to not overreact or take things personally keeps your mind clear and your heart

at peace.

2. Even when it seems personal, rarely do people do things because of you, they do things because of them.
3. You may not be able control all the things people say and do to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.
4. There is a huge amount of freedom that comes to you when you detach from other people's beliefs and behaviors. The way people treat you is their problem, how you react is yours. *(Angel and I discuss this further in the "Self-Love" chapter of [our book](#).)*
5. Oftentimes people do things and say things because they've been conditioned to, not because they consciously want to.
6. You can't control how people receive your energy. Whatever someone interprets, or projects onto you, is at least partially an issue or problem that they themselves are dealing with.
7. Take constructive criticism seriously, but not personally. Weigh what you hear from others against what you know in your heart to be true.
8. If you're willing to view the behavior of other people as indicative of their relationship with themselves, then you will inevitably take things less personally.
9. If you truly wish to improve your self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-worth, stop allowing other people to be responsible for them. Stop allowing other people to dominate your emotions. *(Angel and I build powerful self-confidence rituals with our students in the "Love and Relationships" module of [Getting Back to Happy](#).)*
10. All the hardest, coldest people you meet were once as soft as a baby. And that's the tragedy of living. So when people are rude, be kind, be mindful, be your best. Give those around you the "break" that you hope the world will give you on your own "bad day" and you will never, ever regret it.

Your turn...

Before you go, let me ask you a quick question:

- Which point above resonates the most with you right now?

And how might reminding yourself of it, daily, stop you from taking things personally?

Leave a comment below and share your thoughts.

Also, our next annual [Think Better, Live Better conference](#) is taking place February 10-11, 2018 in San Diego. [Discounted early bird tickets are available today](#) (while they last).

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Comments

Stephanie says

[November 5, 2017 at 2:12 pm](#)

Thanks for this excellent read, M&A. I just wanted to quickly say that the story about the grumpy customer in the diner really made me think. I own a restaurant and I sometimes deal with grumpy customers, and it's hard in the moment see these folks as nice people who are struggling or hurting in some way. But you're

so right, most of the time the “bad” people we deal with are just good people having a bad day.

Also, my daughter and I bought tickets to your Think Better, Live Better 2018 conference in San Diego. Can't wait! See you in February. 😊

[Reply](#)

Seth Hansen says

[November 5, 2017 at 2:21 pm](#)

Another one of your blog posts dropped into my email inbox right when I needed to read it. I really relate to the short stories and the first bullet point of how calmness is a super power. I agree, when we keep a calm mind, we tend to respond more effectively to the uncontrollable negativity and circumstances around us.

Keep up the great work, you two!

[Reply](#)

Gwen says

[November 5, 2017 at 2:33 pm](#)

As usual, Marc & Angel, you have shared some incredibly useful insights in this post/email! All the mantras connect together seamlessly and I truly appreciate the explanation of why we take things personally. I never really thought about my tendency to place myself at the center of things...that really struck a chord.

Anyway, I definitely am someone who taken things personally far too often.

1. I used get into pretty heated arguments with family when I disagreed with them, instead of communicating peacefully and lowering my unnecessary expectations.

2. I used to focused on people's negative qualities and actions and then take them to heart.

And although I'm still learning and growing in this area, your course, coaching and online teachings have guided me and allowed me to make gradual progress. I'm definitely less hot-headed and a lot more mindful than I used to be. Mindset really is everything, and with your guidance I'm mastering it more and more every day.

Thank you.

[Reply](#)

KLo says

[November 5, 2017 at 6:39 pm](#)

I couldn't have asked for a better read. Talk about perfect timing. Thank you for your insight. I am very emotional sometimes (all the time) and although I have tried countless times to adopt a Stoic mentality. It is great to understand or rather read it in a different context. Your point about giving people a break when they needed most made me tear. Can't wait to practice this again and again. Also, to read more of M&A. Keep it up 😊

[Reply](#)

Wayne says

[November 6, 2017 at 1:09 am](#)

This is "bang-on" advice!
I've being taken down the garden path by a significant other in this regard. It may have pulled me back from calling it quits altogether. This is the right message at the right time!!

[Reply](#)

Perla milner says

[November 6, 2017 at 8:45 am](#)

Thank u M&A for always reminding so many of us of realities around us and MAKING a diiference 😊 Will never give up in participating in your seminars some day! Perla Milner

[Reply](#)

Debbie says

[November 6, 2017 at 8:51 am](#)

I read your articles every day so many touch my heart. I'm so very sensitive and I let people into my life that I shouldn't.. I take things personally because I would never treat people the way I get treated. I know we are all different. Your article on sensitive people awhile back helped me feel better about how different I am.

I will put these 10 reminders in my phone and hope I can let go of how some friends react to me nice one day and distant the next.

You never know what your going to get. It's about them not me Right.

Thank you for all your helpful articles, I wish I could meet you some day.

Very helpful

[Reply](#)

Renée Jolley says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:00 am](#)

Love it! I usually take things personally. I end up hurting myself in the process...usually over something so small. I WILL copy these & read & reread them. I'm so glad I opened this email first this morning.

Thanks,
Renée

[Reply](#)

RoseMary Baty-Willcox says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:05 am](#)

Would love to print this, but there is no print button.

[Reply](#)

Mary says

[November 6, 2017 at 1:22 pm](#)

Copy and paste onto Word then print.

[Reply](#)

Adrienne says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:11 am](#)

You guys! Thanks for what you do. I really needed to read this now, and I certainly want to teach my children to remember this in their lives as they grow up.

[Reply](#)

Stephanie Pancha says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:11 am](#)

Awesome readings!! Thanks for the life reminder, it is completely relevant with my office life btw 😊 what a perfect timing to find your article..

Look forward to your next article Marc & Angle. Again, thanks for this meaningful booster!

[Reply](#)

Lydia Moloto says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:28 am](#)

This really helped me a lot. I was always thinking that people do not care about me. I thank God for you. You are a great blessing

[Reply](#)

Betti Ann says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:47 am](#)

Calmness is a superpower. The ability to not overreact or take things personally keeps your mind clear and your heart at peace.

Needed to remind myself of this today, thank you!!!

[Reply](#)

LL says

[November 6, 2017 at 11:53 am](#)

So why can't we look at bullying this way? I feel like we are barking up the wrong tree. People who bully- especially kids- are most likely passing along how they are treated at home. I believe we need to add some focus to deflecting the negative comments and building up strength of those bullied; this, in conjunction with teaching kindness and acceptance of course. You may not agree, but just think about it. It seems bullying is as rampant as ever, even with all the campaigns to stop it. If we also teach kids

that there may be more to the story for the one who is bullying, we can come at things with compassion as well. Just a thought...

[Reply](#)

Jane Ward says

[November 6, 2017 at 11:57 am](#)

This is exactly what I needed today because this is the most difficult advice to remember. Peace at last. Thank you. Thank you!

[Reply](#)

Andrea says

[November 6, 2017 at 12:53 pm](#)

I am chronically ill, and pine for a childhood when everyone I knew took the time to if not be helpful, at least think before they spoke. We live in such a "sound bite" era with people having little time or patience for others. I read your emails all the time and they are a godsend! Because I do not feel well, it is extra hurtful to me when people are callous or insensitive. Your postings today were a great reminder that I need more faith in myself, and not to be so burdened by the words of others. Mark and Angel, you do a great service, and I hope someday to be one of your course students.

[Reply](#)

Roger says

[November 6, 2017 at 1:20 pm](#)

Thank you for your excellent article and the many before this one. Per your request, #8 If you're willing to view the behavior of

other people as indicative of their relationship with themselves, then you will inevitably take things less personally makes the most sense to me. I also 'try' to stay conscious of my immediate thoughts and focus so I can be calm and less reactive to difficult situations. Sometimes easier said than done.

[Reply](#)

Jack jackson says

[November 6, 2017 at 1:38 pm](#)

Thanks for the 10 thoughts. Number 8 hit me hard, because of a friend of mine. What he does is a repetitive thingy and it affect me personally. Will strive to remember #8.

[Reply](#)

[Kathy](#) says

[November 6, 2017 at 2:00 pm](#)

1 & 3 I find it difficult not to internalize the behavior of others. I'm President of our HOA and many people are so ungrateful and actually mean and have stopped speaking to me. Because of my position I've the target, or at least I feel that I am. One of my sisters has turned on me while we worked at clearing out our mother's home after her death this past summer. Here I am at 65, and I have to work each day to put that "stop" sign up in my mind. I'm much more at peace with myself and practice gratitude each day, yet these reminders are very helpful. Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Anthony Larry says

[November 6, 2017 at 4:24 pm](#)

Really look forward to reading your perspective on life issues and how I gain the insight that makes me smile and be a better person for it.

[Reply](#)

Preetam says

[November 6, 2017 at 4:43 pm](#)

M&A, thanks a million for sharing your precious article. It came to me at just the right time...you know, it's as if God is conversing with me thru your articles...i am working on mastering the art of calmness and i wholeheartedly believe that nothing in the world is more powerful than remaining centred and calm esp in adverse situations...i am completely sold on your mind opening articles... every word is so true and I can make my life blissful by working hard on incorporating your teachings in my actions, speech and thoughts. 😊

[Reply](#)

Adam says

[November 6, 2017 at 6:38 pm](#)

Great article. Point #10 was especially poignant.

[Reply](#)

Vivian says

[November 6, 2017 at 7:01 pm](#)

#8 resonates with me personally. A former relationship with someone I totally admired once claimed I was "not nice" (ouch!!!). After the initial shock and sting wore off, I tried to think through

her words and my actions.

I knew in reality that helping people is one of my strong points and I knew this person had a very tumultuous childhood. I calmed myself and tried to look at the world through her lens. While it still hurt, it helped me not take the words too personally. Thank you for this list. It promises to come in handy as the need arises!

[Reply](#)

kata Leshay says

[November 6, 2017 at 7:45 pm](#)

I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you.

[Reply](#)

AnnC says

[November 6, 2017 at 9:49 pm](#)

Ditto what Seth said.

I recently had a friend challenge my position on another friend. We have a very non combative relationship so it took me by surprise. But I stood my ground calmly. Another friend laughed and said you two are going to have to agree to disagree on this one. We all laughed and went on with our visit. It might have been different if I hadn't stayed calm or felt as strongly as I did. Thank you over and over again.

[Reply](#)

christine says

[November 6, 2017 at 10:13 pm](#)

Your insights always remind me of what's really important and that everyone has their own story, and not to judge too quickly!
Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Jesus Enrique says

[November 6, 2017 at 11:14 pm](#)

That gesture is about you not about me. Powerful

Thank you for this!!

[Reply](#)

Veronica says

[November 7, 2017 at 1:44 am](#)

1. Calmness is a superpower. Not control. I need to remember this!

[Reply](#)

Linda says

[November 7, 2017 at 6:17 am](#)

Perfect.

I'm dealing with negativity and criticism from a family member and I was going to send an em pointing everything out. I read this article just in time ... I see that the em would only make the problem worse because they're acting out of love and care for me, but not able to be kinder about doing it. It's simply their problem – lack of insight, sensitivity and empathy.

I shall copy and paste this into Word as suggested above, and re-read every time I'm about to meet them.

You have an amazing ability to get to the hub of an issue. Thank you.

[Reply](#)

Linda Dubois says

[November 7, 2017 at 2:51 pm](#)

Several of these things ring true for me. I rely on others for my own happiness. When my girlfriends go out and don't think to invite me, even though it's just thoughtlessness, it hurts my feelings.

[Reply](#)

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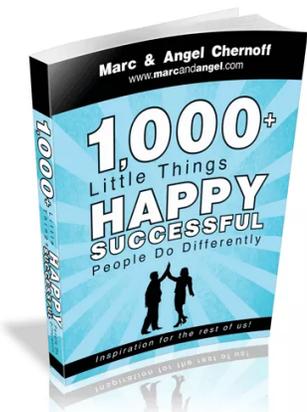
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