

The Art of Not Taking Your Life Too Personally

“Nothing other people do is because of you. It is because of themselves. All people live in their own dream, in their own mind. When we take something personally, we make the assumption that they know what is in our world; and we try to impose our world on their world.”

Don Miguel Ruiz

What am I even trying to say with this? How can you not take your own life personally?

You might say, well “if I don’t take myself seriously, then who else will?” You’re certainly entitled to ask this question, but be mindful of how you answer it. As here comes the art: in how skilfully and smoothly you embrace your life and yourself; in how objectively and detached you can look at your life’s events without identifying them with yourself and creating unnecessary drama.

And what happens when you lack clarity and objectivity and your whole perception gets blurred by your untamed ego?

That’s when you become the victim of your own egocentricity, and start seeing *butterfly wings* everywhere because of what you’ve just done or said.

This being said, did it occur to you that many things that put you down throughout your life had nothing or little to do with you? Remember perhaps when you pitched your memoirs and that agent never came back to you... How different would your life be if you knew that he actually never read your piece as he was sick with measles for a month? But instead, you got depressed and stopped writing as you concluded he might not have liked it, and indeed, you must be a terrible writer.

Unfortunately, this human tendency of “assuming things” (often confused with a strong intuition), which feeds on our egos, can make our life pretty challenging. It can have quite a destructive force, it can ruin our confidence, our relationships, and ultimately our life.

Can we stop seeing ourselves as the cause and effect of the entire universe’s manifestations? We certainly can. Let’s dive deeper and see what we can change inside in order to rewire some of those dysfunctional patterns and enjoy an independent, lighthearted life.

Tame Your Ego

Not saying you need to embrace Buddhism and give up on your healthy ego. That big ego does have a protective function and a big role in your life, and it gives you a personality after all. But avoid filtering and assessing everything through your own ego. Yes, it's hard, as most of us are taught to think that the world wouldn't spin without us. But it does. It's a parent's job to make you feel very important and build your ego as a child. You now need to learn how to feel less '*urgent*' in order to be happy. Well, pretty much. Some say this is what growing up is about.

Empathy: Walk in Their Shoes

While ego is all about you, empathy is about others.

Empathy is essential for isolating facts from the products of your imagination. You can avoid unnecessary drama by putting yourself in someone else's shoes and exploring their potential narratives. For instance, before you conclude that your boss is planning to fire you as he avoided eye contact with you all day, and before you start unfolding the scenario of your new unfortunate and unemployed life and start grieving it all, perhaps you might want to consider for a second your boss's day -- maybe he had a bad day himself, perhaps he had a fight with his wife, or he learned that one of his parents is really sick.

And once you start practicing empathy, you might find out that the urgency of your passionate thoughts and emotions will start to subside. Once you start making space for everybody's life in your story, things and events might start to settle down and make sense. And most likely, you are not at the epicentre of it all.

Invite Mindfulness & Meditation into Your Life

Let's start by taking a look at the basic definition of mindfulness: "Mindfulness can be defined as paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgementally," according to the modern father of mindfulness; (Kabat-Zinn,1979);

So what makes mindfulness such a good ally in fighting attaching and ascribing unhealthy interpretations of your life's events? Its innate nature: non-judgemental, non-ascribing, not-attaching.

Let 's go back to real life examples. Let's say your colleague snapped at you for no apparent reason. What would a mindful response look like? If you can refrain from attaching your colleague's behaviour reasons related to your own being, then you're almost there. It's not

about being passive, but about learning the patience, the wisdom, and the awareness that another's behaviour is not the measure of your being. It's reminding yourself that it's mostly not about you at all.

The beauty of mindfulness in this big spiderweb of emotions, thoughts and feelings is that it teaches you to take a break in the middle of them and to refrain from attaching redundant judgments to those events.

And the more you practise it, the more you'll master the art of not taking things personally.

Welcome Humour & Self-Irony

This is probably the handiest tool out there. It's free, entertaining and therapeutic. It takes some courage to laugh at yourself, but once you start doing that on a regular basis, something inside of you will start shifting: all of a sudden you'll feel lighter, less egocentric, and more adaptable. Humour gives you the strength to look at your life with lucidity, objectivity, and detachment. Humour teaches you perspective, which is crucial when you start talking yourself too seriously. It's not about dismissing yourself, but about seeing yourself as part of the bigger picture of the universe.

Therefore, humour is a great weapon you can rely on when your ego becomes overwhelming and you start feeling unbearably important.

Explore Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

"We have a tendency to make assumptions about everything. The problem with making assumptions is that we believe they are the truth. We could swear they are real. We make assumptions about what others are thinking or doing--then we blame and react..."

Don Miguel Ruiz

When your thinking gets too foggy and you find yourself caught in a sea of assumptions and emotional biases, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) can do wonders.

As the most successful therapeutical approach of the 21st century, CBT has proven to be a breakthrough in fighting dysfunctional thinking patterns that lead to misinterpreting our lives. According to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, the way people feel is linked to the way they think about a situation, and not simply to the nature of the situation itself.

In CBT, you learn to identify, question and change the thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and assumptions and replace them with more realistic, healthier ones.

We have just one life, and of course, we want to own it. We want to decide our own narrative. And we're right to do so. But in order to live a harmonious, fulfilled life, we need to be mindful and graceful about the way we approach it and embrace it. And luckily, there are great resources out there to teach ourselves a non-attached and lighthearted way of being as opposed to mistakenly being victims of your own egocentricity.

It takes discipline, modesty, patience, and awareness. But in exchange, as Miguel Ruiz beautifully concluded:

"There's a huge amount of freedom that comes to you when you take nothing personal"