



# Hardening of the Attitudes

by JUDY BERANGER

“I will never forget the year I was bumped and had to go from driving ten minutes to get to school to more than a half hour. Nobody knew at the time that I was also dealing with a very sick parent along with financial worries. Now, years later I see several things I could have done to reduce my stress – the biggest one being my attitude. It was bad and I went from having a special way of bringing joy to others to feeling very sorry for myself. Makes me shudder to recall how negative I became and how much worse I made my own situation. Now my colleague thinks he might be bumped and is already stressing as if he has been. I hope I can find a way to support him.”

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It is that time of the year again. The crunch is on and to add to the “normal” stress and pressure we now have the annual school-end expectations along with the uncertainty that is created around redundancies and changes in teacher assignments for next year. As EAP Coordinators we hear teachers saying, “I feel exhausted and am hoping I can last until June!”

What can you do to best manage this stressful time? Three things that can help:

- Identify what is taking energy; make a plan to address it or ask for help if you can’t do it alone.
- Reflect on your attitude – keep facing the sun so the shadows stay behind you.
- Let go of what you have no control over.

Hardening of the attitudes happens when we succumb to stress and negativity. It can be detrimental to our health and no one is immune! In her book, *Transforming Work Pressures Into Productivity*, B. Potter reports that we can avoid the common burn-out symptoms such as strong negative emotions,

interpersonal problems, health problems, declining performance, risk of substance abuse and feelings of hopelessness if we identify and address them early enough.

Attitudes also harden when support is minimal and it seems like no one is really paying attention. Did you ever have the experience of talking to a person who you know was not listening? Studies of human neurophysiology have estimated that 60% of the information that flows to the brain comes via our video system – the eyes. Talk to the eyes! For example, consider how TV commercials are more effective than radio commercials. Researchers like Brammer and Bullmore demonstrate that if we talk to the eyes in addition to recruiting the verbal centers of the brain, we greatly increase the effect we can have on the person receiving the message. The reason for this is that more neurons are activated when a message combines both visual and verbal elements compared to the sum of the activity provoked when each of these modalities is stimulated separately. The important learning here is to be attentive visually and verbally, striving to be totally present and attentive in our conversations and especially when providing support.

Shaping our attitudes is about shifting perspectives that are not helpful and intentionally changing how we frame things. It is about caring enough to endure the immediate discomfort that is created when we move from avoidance to facing head-on the challenges in our lives. There is no question that it is tough to find something in the present to enjoy and appreciate when all else seems to be falling around you. Albert Ellis says, “The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on others. You realize that you control your own destiny.”

Developing and maintaining attitudes that reflect sensitivity, authenticity, courage, understanding based on knowledge, respect, and empathy for others is vitally important in our day to day interactions. What would it take to see each other as allies who are supportive and loyal even regardless of what is happening around us?

If you find journaling or reflection time helpful, types of questions to consider include:

- Does my mental filter only allow me to see the negative aspect of a situation(s)?
- Will I be a victim or will I actively thrive, be an “actor” or a “reactor”?
- Do I allow negative emotions to flow through me or do I allow them to set up house and create a new negative reality?
- Is there something deep down preventing me from taking necessary actions to move to higher ground?
- Are there any attitudes/beliefs I have that are blocking present relationships?
- Are there any other attitudes and beliefs that I would like to change? Do I have the supports I need to change them? (Your Employee Assistance Program can help)
- Will any of my attitudes/beliefs result in self-defeating behaviours?
- Do my attitudes encourage good personal growth, maturity, and strong mental health?
- Do my attitudes and beliefs assist in my maintaining collaborative and respectful relationships?
- Do I truly understand what forgiveness means and that true forgiveness allows the releasing of grudges?

For any teachers who find themselves having to change jobs, schools or are otherwise uncertain of what September holds, it is important to realize that there will be a cycle of grief whether the change is welcomed or not. Most people are comfortable in their jobs and the shock of change will be activated as the reality sets in for what this means to you and your family. Whether shock and denial, anger, depression or withdrawal, it will be experienced differently by each person. It is wise to seek assistance or call your employee assistance program and to focus on things that you can change and to make a list to follow in the short term for active self care. There will be bad days as one works through changing emotions and your attitude will greatly affect your grieving process.

In his book, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*, Dr. Bridges says that transition is an inner process through which people come to terms with change, as they let go of the way things used to be and reorient themselves to the way that things are now. How often have we heard “just get over it”, when in reality we all know that what we have to do is work our way through it – evolve. The transitioning process can only start when we let go of negativity including the anger and bitterness that comes with a victim stance. As long as we hold onto the way things were, we won't be able to move to what is, or what could be.

“As an administrator I felt very angry that I had to tell teachers they were redundant. I felt for the people

involved and was worried about how all of this was going to impact their lives and our staff. I felt an unrealistic sense of responsibility to fix everything and make it okay. I had difficulty sleeping and didn't feel like eating.”

We all know the steps to creating and maintaining balance and health in our lives – proper sleep, movement, exercise and nutrition, to goal setting, naming priorities, taking respites and improving time management skills. What is equally important is to surround oneself with supportive people, reducing the sense of aloneness and debriefing challenges in a trusting environment. Laughter and fun are very important in this challenging time and what that is varies for everyone. Simple things like taking time out with a precious person or a precious pet can lower stress levels and give immediate respite. If you need it, your EAP program is there to help.

Respectful attitudes assist us in letting go of what we cannot change and are critical to our well-being. To let go of self-defeating thoughts is a tremendous relief and makes room for new growth and winning attitudes filled with possibilities and promise. The choice is yours.

Adapted from the wise words of an anonymous writer...

*To Let Go ...*

*is not to stop caring. It's recognizing I can't do it for someone else.*

*is not to cut oneself off, but realizing we can't control others.*

*is not to disable but to allow learning from natural consequences.*

*is not to fight powerfulness but to accept that the outcome is not always in my hands.*

*is not to try to arrange the outcome but to allow others to effect their own destiny.*

*is not to be protective but rather to permit another to face reality.*

*is not to regulate anyone but to try to become the best we can be.*

*is not to fear less but to Love more.*

*is to make the most of myself and not meant to fix but rather to support.*

*is to forgive and to keep moving.*

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