

When systems do more harm...

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.” MLK

How can they possibly think that is an OK way to treat someone/ an animal?

Can they not see the damage they are doing?

Evidence shows their approach makes things worse, and yet they still won't listen! Are they really that uncaring...

Sound familiar? If you are invested in making this world a better place you will have had times of sheer frustration and anger; I had that recently, a severely traumatised person being punished for being traumatised, in essence. Of course the excuse was they should not get angry, as if they had any control after the abuse they suffered was re-triggered (& I fully support stopping people, just not punishing).

We see a different way forward, but how do we keep working for better when so many people won't listen to the evidence, or actively try to quieten us, and when we see people being hurt by the system that is supposed to be helping them? Most days I can – I understand that people in power have issues too and are acting from fear, and probably do genuinely believe they are right. I know that getting angry will not change people's minds – loving them & understanding their fears will. Basically - *treating everyone as if they have trauma that manifests in different ways.*

It can still feel overwhelming at times though - Gabor Mate says that *'whilst there is a system promoting 'them and us' we can't find a solution, but keep doing what you are doing in face of all that works against you, and don't take it personally. And don't think you need to take it on as a job you can finish either as you won't finish it. But do it anyway cos without your contribution it will be much worse.'*

This particular case had got to me and I struggled not to get angry – which would've got the same result as my client, I would've been punished too and changed nothing. Fortunately I had time to reflect and see what was really going on.....

It started with seeing this as part of a bigger issue, even global issue – people having very different ideas about how to make the world better, and being angry at those who think differently. We all want the same though – for everyone to be happy and healthy and we need to get smart about the best way to achieve that. Anger isn't, but it is also human and no-one is perfect. Feel it just don't act from it as then it becomes about you and not the message. It's also good to remember our view of better is dependent on our experience and what's easiest on us, ie is it easier to blame & make others change than deal with our own fears/ helplessness?

In The Tao of fully feeling Pete Walker talks about it being OK to say something is not OK, and it hurts, and still show no blame. I think we tend to either avoid our own pain by rationalising their behaviour too soon (everyone is doing their best etc), or feel our pain and lash out (they should know better). We need a middle ground. Acknowledge this hurts and is not OK, feel that and heal that – then get out and do what we can to change things from a loving place. Ghandi, Mandela, MLK etc all changed things from a peaceful place – which is an amazing example but we don't hear much

about the times they struggled to feel love for their enemies. We shouldn't act from a place of anger but we shouldn't pretend it isn't there either.

I recently watched (& read) Bryan Stevenson's True Justice – if you haven't come across him watch his TED talk; he fights for injustice on US death row and is such an amazing human being. I then looked at what he has said about keeping going and not getting consumed by anger – some of what he says is about looking at others who kept going in worse conditions, and also being told to keep his eye on the prize & hold on. Getting angry wouldn't have won him as many victories as it has, and he talks about meeting people where they are – educating people with stories they can relate to. And also telling stories others may not want to hear – when we talk about specific injustice it's harder to ignore. That made me think – sometimes I avoid talking about abuse & trauma (human and animal) because I don't want to make people feel uncomfortable, or I fear being dismissed as a militant. That's where we need to be doing it from love, and not desperation that we have to convince people right now. I learnt from him to just keep planting seeds, and as Danielle La Porte says – radiate love & state facts. No angst or desperation – it actually hinders progress. Just think of being like a lawyer!

He also says this *'Vaclav Havel had said thatthe only thing they needed was hope. Not the pie in the sky stuff, not a preference for optimism over pessimism, but rather 'an orientation of the spirit'. The kind of hope that creates a willingness to position oneself in a hopeless place and be a witness, that allows one to believe in a better future, even in the face of abusive power. That kind of hope makes one strong.'*

So here's what I learnt - feel pain, heal pain and then go back out:

- Stop & feel your pain. Rant it out and see if you have any past issues tied to it (I did – look back at childhood injustices it may remind you of). Heal that and be kind to yourself. Unless you have a legal deadline you can take time out for this before you react. I actually wasted more time rewriting my responses than if I'd taken time out to heal & then responded. I love the Byron Katie stuff where you rant about what the other person should/ n't do – some of it is always about it making us face things we don't want to face. If only they would.....my life would be easier. (see my article on 'hey human' for more on this)
- Prioritise self-care - I have a paragraph where I remind myself about how hard this work is, and how awesome we are for still showing up even when it's hard, but that we need to keep doing that. I learnt that sending love to me first when I don't feel like loving others works best – fill me up so much that it overflows to others. It's hard to feel annoyed when you are feeling love! (also check it's nothing else – Tired? Hungry?)
- Sharing love where it's sparse is the only way to heal this world. I also know my patterns and feeling a sense of urgency about protecting someone is a sign I am off balance; it's not my job to right every wrong, or prevent someone from learning for themselves, but every piece of kindness and trust someone feels helps minimise the damage others do. That's all I can do sometimes, add pieces of kindness & trust and not take on responsibility for the outcome.
- Surround yourself with likeminded people – not to bash others but to lift you & remind you you are not alone. I also keep a list of people like Bryan Stevenson as inspiration.
- I reminded myself of [the soul and the little sun](#) too – you may not believe in things like that but it just helps me let go of anger. This whole situation helped me grow.

- I also remind myself *'the world is as it is, but who am I in it'* and that the only person I should be concerned about is me being my best & most effective – which I'm not when angry or hurt. I am not responsible for changing others, just planting seeds. *It's hard staying kind when others are not but if we want to change things we need to grow our capacity to do just that.*
- Keep your eye on the prize & keep going. You don't need to be perfect, just willing to learn.
- I'm not religious but I also realised I needed to let go, so I prayed and then did the Buddhist meditation on sending love to me, and then others – I imagined sending love to me asking that it soften my heart to them, and then sent the same message to them asking it soften their heart to those suffering. Helped me let go of my anger so why not!

Then go back and deal...

- Be aware of the arrogance of assuming we know better – we don't, just looking through a different lens with different value and priorities. Don't create a them and us.
- See the other person as a person, not an object in the way, and as someone hurting too - they have to be to behave that way; they are scared and lashing out and unable to see or face their own pain. Treat them just like we do when working with trauma, this stuff is for everyone, or no-one. Their programming means they can't see any different. Yet.
- Be curious, seek to understand why they think as they do – and let go of any idea we know better; we'd want kindness & not judgement for our blind spots too. Plus when we do that they are more open to listen to us – share relatable stories, allay their fears and share yours. People are only open to change when they feel safe.
- Stick to your view, and try to find a solution that benefits both sides.
- Get out there and speak, kindly – share stories that aim to plant seeds rather than trees. One person at a time rather than everyone! Bryan Stevenson talks about how people say if they'd been around when lynching was happening they would've spoken out, but he says if you are not speaking out now about injustice you can't claim that. Just do it kindly...and if he can...

Anger and upset is understandable, on both sides, and we need to recognise that commonality – when we get angry at others for being angry at others we are being just like them, and nothing changes. We may convince ourselves we are justified, but so do they! Adam Kahane's brilliant book 'collaborating with the enemy' is a great example of how finding a way forward to benefit everyone is possible in any situation. The last thing we want is a power struggle where the most wounded get forgotten.

And if you do get angry – that's OK, it shows you are human. Not feeling their suffering is a much worse sign for you. Then learn from it and come back more effectively.

At the end of the day we are all in this together and kindness is the way to better, for all. Starting with ourselves...