

# **QC0071 - Facing an Unwanted Situation? Then ACT!**

We live in a world where we're told everyone should be able to have what they desire. It's even framed as a basic human right.

But in reality, that's not the way the world works And that's not the world we live in. Things go wrong, our expectations get dashed, and reality sometimes underwhelms us rather than overwhelms us. In short, to quote Mick Jagger, "You can't always get what you want."

So, let's talk about how we should act when facing an unwanted situation?

Believe it or not, facing an unwanted situation starts with acceptance. Now I'll admit, the idea of just accepting what I don't like or want is very unappealing. I don't like the sound of that at all! It sounds like giving up or getting walked on.

So let's start by defining what I mean by accepting an unwanted situation, and then we'll move on to what to do with it.

## **WHAT DO I MEAN BY ACCEPTANCE?**

Acceptance does NOT mean being a doormat and being OK with any hurtful abusive thing that comes your way. And this is especially true when being emotionally or physically abused.

But our inability to accept things the way they are, while we continue to hope or insist that things should be the way we think they should be, keeps us from making choices and taking actions that could make the most of the way things are.

You may not like things the way they are, but when you fail to accept things the way they are, you increase your unhappiness and make matters worse. How?

- You fixate on the things you don't like, magnifying them in your mind.
- Your fixation on what you don't have makes it more difficult to see and enjoy what you do have.
- Your self-talk becomes increasingly negative, which increases your dissatisfaction.
- You increase your attempts to change people, which increases the relational friction.

- Your focus on what you wish you could change interferes with your ability to see all of the ways in which you can make a positive change.

Let me give you an example of several of these reactions in play.

Suppose your spouse is overly pessimistic. It drives you crazy and you don't see how you can accept it. So you try to coerce and convince them into being more positive, but that aggravates them. You begin to notice their pessimism even more, and consequently their pessimism begins to over-shadow their good qualities. Then, you begin to tell yourself that they're doing it on purpose, just to get to you. This makes it seem personal, and you get more disgruntled and discontented.

But what if you could accept that their pessimism is just part of their personality? What if you could accept that their pessimism is really more about them than it is about you? Think of how such acceptance could take a lot of sting and frustration out of the situation. Think of how this might free you up to consider the variety of responses and choices at your disposal.

## **SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?**

So, let's get back to how you can approach unwanted situations. And it starts with acceptance.

First, let me say again that I'm not suggesting you just tolerate things like emotional and physical abuse. Those are always wrong and should never be tolerated.

But accepting things as they are frees you up to see what can be done...rather than just hoping or complaining.

There is a whole therapy approach that addresses this. It's called A-C-T or ACT. The letters stand for the three steps a person must take in order to better deal with an unwanted situation. And the first is to...

### **A - Accept.**

Nothing can change if you don't first accept the current situation and your thoughts and feelings regarding the situation. This may sound elementary and overly simplistic, but most of us spend our efforts and energies trying to avoid and unwanted situation and make it go away.

Yet to avoid and ignore an unwanted situation tends to have the opposite effect. The situation will stay front and center in our thoughts, it will get worse due to our avoidance, and it will take up so much energy and perspective that we won't be able to truly engage in life and find better options.

You don't have to like the situation, but to avoid and ignore is more of a delusion than a solution. You can only effectively deal with things you're willing to face.

And that's the power of acceptance. Because it opens the door for the next two steps...

### **C - Choose.**

After having accepted the unwanted situation for what it is, you then can choose the thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors that are under your control and can take you in the direction you want to go. It is a waste of time and energy to focus on the people and things you can't control. But that doesn't mean there's nothing you can do.

You may think that you're where you are now because of a series of things that have happened to you. But where you are is as much a product of the choices you've made as it is what has happened to you. And that's good news! Because that means you can begin to change the trajectory of your future life via the choices you make now.

Even the smallest of choices accumulate and begin to move you in a certain direction. Despite the situation you find yourself, begin to make the small choices that will cumulatively lead you to a better place.

### **T - Take Action.**

Accepting your current situation, rather than ignoring or avoiding it is important. Choosing to focus on what you can control and making choices that will lead to different outcomes is important. BUT...none of that will matter if you never take action on it.

Einstein said, "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results"

Things begin to change, because we change something. Situations are not changed by wishful thinking or ardent complaining. Things change by taking changed action.

This is how you change an unwanted situation. And even if it doesn't change the external situation, it will change your internal reaction to it.

## **A FINAL WORD...**

If you want to ACT on an unwanted situation, it begins not with defiance or resistance. It begins with acceptance.

When faced with an unwanted situation, your first step is to accept the situation for what it is, rather than ignore it, deny it, or resist it. Then you will be free to choose the things you have control over and take the appropriate action.

In the beginning of this post, I quoted the Mick Jagger's lyric... "You can't always get what you want." But listen to the whole lyric... "You can't always get what you want. But if you try, sometimes you just might find you get what you need."

And as counterintuitive as it may sound, If you want to face an unwanted decision, you have to ACT. Accept - Choose - and then Take Action.