

# DO YOU NEED TO PRUNE YOUR LIFE?

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ENDINGS ARE HARD! THEY ARE FRAUGHT WITH MESSY, INTENSE EMOTIONS. AND WE AVOID THEM WHENEVER POSSIBLE, JUST TO ESCAPE THE MESS. I FIND, IN GENERAL, PEOPLE ARE NOT TAUGHT HOW TO ACCURATELY ASSESS IF SOMETHING SHOULD BE TERMINATED, WHEN TO END, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, HOW TO CREATE THE ENDING.

CONSIDER THIS: YOU'RE IN A STABLE JOB, ONE THAT PAYS THE BILLS, HAS GOOD BENEFITS, AND YOU ENJOY THE PEOPLE YOU WORK WITH; YET ... YOU'RE NOT HAPPY. YOU FEEL UNDERUTILIZED AND BORED. SHOULD YOU STAY AND TRY TO CHANGE THINGS OR RESIGN AND SEARCH FOR SOMETHING NEW? OR PERHAPS YOU'RE IN A RELATIONSHIP THAT YOU VALUE, BUT ALSO IS EXTREMELY FRUSTRATING TO YOU. DO YOU WORK ON IT OR LET IT GO? IT'S TOUGH, ISN'T IT? WHEN THE POSITIVES OFFSET THE NEGATIVES, KEEPING THE LEDGER BALANCE AT ZERO, IT IS DIFFICULT TO KNOW HOW TO PROCEED. HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN TO END SOMETHING, AND WHEN TO PUSH THROUGH IT?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS WRITING IS TO PUSH INTO THE "IF" SPACE A LITTLE - TO GIVE YOU OPPORTUNITY TO SEE IF YOU FEEL YOU HAVE SOME SITUATIONS IN YOUR LIFE THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED. AS A THERAPIST, I SEE MANY PEOPLE MAKE THEIR DECISIONS REACTIVELY, RATHER THAN WITH INSIGHT AND INTENTIONALITY. GENERALLY, PEOPLE OPT OUT OR REFUSE TO END SOMETHING BECAUSE LEAVING THE SITUATION FEELS TOO SCARY. IT CREATES HIGH ANXIETY,

SOMETHING HUMAN BEINGS STRUGGLE TO MANAGE. THEY (MYSELF INCLUDED) WOULD MOSTLY LIKE TO AVOID IT.

WHEN CONSIDERING IF AN ENDING SHOULD OCCUR, ONE OF THE TOOLS THAT HAS HELPED ME IMMENSELY IS HENRY CLOUD'S, NECESSARY ENDINGS. CLOUD USES THE METAPHOR OF PRUNING (A LA ROSE BUSH) TO DESCRIBE THE CONDITIONS THAT NECESSITATE THE ENDINGS. WHAT IN OUR BUSINESSES, RELATIONSHIPS, JOBS NEED TO BE CLIPPED? THE DEAD, THE DISEASED AND THE THINGS THAT ARE PRODUCING, BUT NOT AT THE DESIRED CAPACITY - THESE REQUIRE OUR ATTENTION.

HOW DOES THIS WORK? WHEN A RELATIONSHIP HAS NO LIFE AND CANNOT BE RESURRECTED, IT NEEDS TO GO - IT'S SO MUCH DEAD WOOD, PER SE. WHEN YOU ARE IN A JOB THAT HAS NO HOPE FOR ADVANCEMENT (AND YOU ARE UNHAPPY), IT IS TIME TO END IT. WHEN A PATTERN OF RELATING IS UNHEALTHY, IT NEEDS TO BE "NIPPED IN THE BUD" (OH, YES, PUN INTENDED). WHEN YOUR COMPANY HAS PEOPLE IN IT THAT ARE SABOTAGING THE VALUES OF THE BUSINESS, THEY SHOULD BE CONFRONTED AND GIVEN A CHANCE TO ALIGN WITH YOUR DISTINCTIVES; IF THEY ARE UNABLE TO DO SO, THEY NEED TO LEAVE THE ORGANIZATION. IT WILL SAVE YOU SO MUCH GRIEF AND FRUSTRATION!

FOR ME, IT IS MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO ASCERTAIN THE GOOD VERSUS GREAT RELATIONSHIP / BUSINESS / JOB. IT IS

EASY FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE OPTIMISTIC (ME!) TO STAY IN A POOR SITUATION THINKING IT WILL CHANGE, WHEN REALLY, IF WE ARE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, THE SIGNS ARE THERE. WE JUST DON'T WANT TO SEE THEM OR ACT ON THEM BECAUSE CHANGE IS SCARY AND A LOT OF WORK. WE ALL HAVE A TENDENCY TO PUT OUR FINGERS IN OUR EARS AND CHANT: LA LA LA LA LA LA LA LA (AS IN, "I CAN'T HEAR YOU, I DON'T WANT TO KNOW.").

I KNOW OF A STUDENT (SHALL WE CALL HER ME? YES!) WHO WAS GIVEN A ONE YEAR INTERNSHIP WORKING AT A RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITY. OVER THE COURSE OF THAT YEAR, I DID A GREAT JOB WITH THE CLIENTS, WHO EXPRESSED ATTACHMENT TO ME AND I WAS COMMITTED TO THEM. HOWEVER, THE ADMINISTRATION AND I DID NOT HAVE A WARM WORKING RELATIONSHIP. THERE WAS NO OVERT CONFLICT, BUT OFTEN THERE WAS STRAIN, DUE TO A DISAGREEMENT OF PROCEDURE AND THE TENSION BETWEEN BEST TREATMENT AND EFFICIENCY. I RARELY FELT VALUED AND ACTUALLY DREADED GOING EACH DAY, THOUGH ONCE I ARRIVED, I ENJOYED MY TIME WITH THE INDIVIDUAL CLIENTS. AS THE YEAR DREW TO A CLOSE, I CONSIDERED APPLYING FOR A PAYING JOB, DESPITE THE FACT THAT I REALLY DIDN'T ENJOY WORKING FOR THEM - BECAUSE I DID NOT WANT TO "ABANDON" MY CLIENTS. AND IT WAS SCARY TO PURSUE SOMETHING ELSEWHERE. THIS IS A SITUATION WHERE I BELIEVE THE BRANCH WAS "UNHEALTHY" AND IT JUST NEEDED TO BE CUT. IN THE END, I DECIDED NOT TO STAY; I

WENT ON TO A JOB WHERE I WAS WELCOMED AND VALUED. WITHIN TWO DAYS OF ENDING THE RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT FACILITY, I KNEW I HAD MADE THE RIGHT DECISION, MOSTLY FROM THE OVERWHELMING RELIEF.

YEARS AGO, I MET A THERAPIST WHO HAD OPPORTUNITY FOR A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENDING. SHE LIKED HER CO-WORKERS, BUT HAD NO VOICE IN THE POLICIES OR PROCEDURES. AFTER A WHILE, IT OCCURRED TO HER THAT SHE COULD DO BETTER IN A PRIVATE PRACTICE. THERE WAS MORE FREEDOM AS WELL AS MORE RESPONSIBILITY. THE FINANCIAL COMPENSATION WAS SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER, BUT SHE WOULD HAVE TO DO ALL THE SCHEDULING AND BILLING AND INSURANCE FILING AS WELL. THESE VARIABLES KEPT HER FROM MAKING THE DECISION FOR ABOUT TWO YEARS. THIS IS AN EXAMPLE OF A PRUNING WHERE IT IS HEALTHY, BUT NOT AS PRODUCTIVE AS IT COULD BE. THERE WAS NOTHING WRONG WITH STAYING, BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE FOR HER TO REACH HER GOALS IN HER CURRENT SITUATION. SOMETIMES, BECAUSE THE SITUATION DOESN'T APPEAR HARMFUL, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE THAT AN ENDING NEEDS TO HAPPEN. WHEN I SPOKE WITH HER YEARS LATER, SHE TOLD ME THAT ONCE THE CHOICE WAS MADE AND ENACTED, HER RELIEF WAS PALPABLE AND SHE REALIZED THAT THE DECISION SHOULD HAVE BEEN MADE ABOUT 18 MONTHS EARLIER.

DELAYED ENDINGS ARE UBIQUITOUS IN RELATIONSHIPS. A YOUNG WOMAN I KNOW STAYED WITH A MAN WHO TREATED

HER TERRIBLY FOR YEARS. DESPITE THE ABUSE IN THE RELATIONSHIP, SHE COULD NOT BRING HERSELF TO LEAVE. EVENTUALLY, HE LEFT HER. THIS HAS SET HER EMOTIONAL LIFE BACK A DECADE AT LEAST. HER HEART WOULD HAVE DONE SO MUCH BETTER HAD SHE BEEN ABLE TO SEE REALITY AND END THE RELATIONSHIP AS SOON AS SHE REALIZED THAT IT WAS UNHEALTHY.

ANOTHER MAN I KNOW CAN NOT END HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS GIRLFRIEND, EVEN THOUGH SHE HAS CLEARLY COMMUNICATED THAT THEY ARE FINISHED. THE RELATIONSHIP IS DEAD. SHE LIVES IN ANOTHER COUNTRY. YET, HE PERSISTS IN STAYING ATTACHED TO HER, THUS PREVENTING HIS LIFE FROM MOVING ON. WHEN WE WERE TALKING, I SPOKE TO HIM DIRECTLY IN AN EFFORT TO GET HIM TO SEE THE TRUTH OF HIS SITUATION. HE NEEDED TO LET HER GO. HE DECLINED. I AM BETTING A FULL YEAR LATER, HE IS STILL HANGING ON TO HER MEMORY AND IS JUST AS STUCK AS HE WAS WHEN I SPOKE WITH HIM LAST.

PEOPLE AND THEIR INTERACTIONS CAN NEVER BE PERFECT AND WE SHOULDN'T EXPECT THEM TO BE. YET WE SHOULD HAVE SOME SORT OF STANDARD OF BEHAVIOR. WE ALL KNOW OF RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE NOT TERRIBLE, BUT THEY ALSO ARE A PALER VERSION OF WHAT THEY COULD BE. IN THESE INSTANCES, WE NEED TO GIVE ONE ANOTHER FEEDBACK AS TO WHAT COULD HELP THE RELATIONSHIP BLOSSOM. CAN THE PERSON HEAR THAT INFORMATION?

THESE SITUATIONS ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT TO DECIDE TO PRUNE OR NOT. IT IS MUCH EASIER TO SEE IF SOMETHING IS DEAD OR DISEASED THAN IT IS TO ASSESS SOMETHING THAT IS MEDIOCRE. CAN IT GROW? SO MUCH DEPENDS ON OPENNESS TOWARD PERSONAL GROWTH, ACCEPTANCE OF FEEDBACK, AND APPLICATION OF CHANGE.

WHEN YOU ARE CONSIDERING IF SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE ENDED, ASK YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS:

1. IS THIS THING (RELATIONSHIP, JOB, SITUATION) DEAD? IF IT CAN'T BE RESURRECTED, AN ENDING NEEDS TO OCCUR. TRUST ME, YOU'LL FEEL SO MUCH LIGHTER AFTER YOU DO IT.

2. IS IT DISEASED? (UNHEALTHY AND HEADED TOWARD DYING). AN ENDING WILL LET YOU MOVE FORWARD.

3. IS IT OKAY, BUT THERE ARE ACTUALLY MUCH BETTER JOBS, RELATIONSHIPS, EMPLOYEES OUT THERE? ARE YOU SETTling FOR LESS THAN YOU SHOULD? AN ENDING SHOULD BE CONSIDERED. A CONVERSATION AND SOME PARAMETERS FOR GROWTH SHOULD BE ENACTED AND THEN MONITORED TO SEE IF CHANGE IS POSSIBLE. I'LL BE STRAIGHT FORWARD HERE - I HAVE YET TO SEE ANYONE DO THIS THAT REGRETS IT. I KNOW IN MY LIFE, THIS HAS MADE ALL THE DIFFERENCE. TRY IT!

