

CLEANING IT UP

In thinking about this month's dirt issue, I was brought back to one of my favorite childhood memories of making mud pies at my grandparent's house. What a lovely remembrance of my sister and I getting our hands dirty and making beautiful creations with the ingredients of nature. We spent hours playing outside knowing it was okay to get soiled and be messy. It did not matter how filthy our hands, faces, clothes and work areas would get as long as we understood that we had to clean it all up before dinner and our parent's pick up time. Although my grandmother, Mema, would work her magic in freshening us up (she always had a hot bath waiting for us), we still had to be responsible for our carefree afternoon of messiness by cleaning up as much as we could on our own.

What I love about this story is the importance of having fun in life, and realizing there can be much playfulness, fun and creativity in getting down in the dirt of all that life has to offer. Those timeless afternoons instilled a great sense of aliveness, playfulness and risk-taking that adults can sometimes forget. It is also a great reminder that although being grubby and carefree instills creative playtime and rich experiences, it is still necessary to clean up the disarray before you can go on to what is next. For instance, it is important not to take the hurt or disappoint into the next relationship, or create false expectations in the next job just because you had a bad boss in this one. And if you make a mistake or hurt another person, learn to ask for forgiveness.

In my coaching practice, I witness people who have a difficult time clearing up their life situations and they have become either disenchanted or disempowered. Their unhappiness has been created from misunderstandings; a lack of clear communication; made-up assumptions and stories; fear of hurt, disappointment or disapproval; victimization; self-imposed shame, guilt or anger; and, in the process, they have sacrificed their own self-worth by trying to keep peace. And, without having the right tools or support to fix it, they avoid confronting the disorder, and situations can become irreparable.

Life is messy, and what often starts off as a good intention or connected relationship can sometimes turn bad. I am glad there is the freedom to risk participating in new endeavors; to exercise free will; to try something new and fail; and to immerse into chaos and confusion with people, places and situations. Enormous personal growth and passionate ventures have resulted. Yet, I also believe that there needs to be personal integrity, a relinquishing of the ego and a willingness to be accountable for one's role in any given situation. You cannot let things get messy without being willing to clean up your part, big or small.

I believe most people are good at heart, and they are doing the best they can under the stresses and challenges of the world today. People are not perfect, mistakes are made. Yet, many people can do a better job of "keeping their side of the street clean" by learning to take responsibility for their decisions, feelings, actions, words and the impact they have with other each other. Here are some tips on tidying up.

TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR SIDE OF THE STREET CLEAN:

1. Admit when you are wrong and learn to apologize gracefully
2. Be honest with yourself and others
3. Have integrity by doing what you say you are going to do
4. Take responsibility for your own emotions
5. Consider all perspectives
6. Treat others as you want to be treated
7. Tell the truth and tell it quickly
8. Be kind
9. Set boundaries and learn to say no
10. Don't try to control, fix or change others
11. Choose happiness over being right
12. Speak up, ask for what you want, and don't be a doormat
13. Don't take shortcuts or be passive aggressive
14. Cause no harm to yourself or others, don't gossip
15. Don't keep repeating the same mistakes
16. Forgive and ask for forgiveness often

Learn to be comfortable with making messes. Choose happiness and joy; forgiveness and compassion; openness and discernment. Say yes to you and no to the bad behavior of others. Try new things and risk failing. And, when you unintentionally cause harm to another person or make a mess of a situation, admit your shortcomings, ask for forgiveness and learn to clean up after yourself along the way.

COACHING QUESTIONS TO CLEAN IT UP:

1. Is there a current mess in your life you have been unwilling to look at or take action to clear it up? If so, what bold step can you take to move through the fear?
2. Who is making you mad, and what are you willing to do to make those relationships different? What are you tolerating? Where do you need to look at your behavior, or perhaps let go? Do you need to admit you are wrong or say you are sorry?
3. From the list above, choose one new helpful tool each week and practice integrating it into your life.

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