
Living in Compassion: Tools for Peace

(December 05) How many times have we become frustrated, angry, short, curt or simply impatient with someone... At times this may be at a co-worker, a boss, an employee, a waitress or bus boy, a cab driver. And yes, at times these feelings arise in us and are directed toward those people whom we care about the most...our husband or wife, our children... those whom we love yet at times may treat as we don't. What if we took the position that these people, these very important people were doing the very best they could, given the choices they had. There are two NLP presuppositions regarding "positive intentions" that address this. These are:

People always make the best choices they can make from among available options.
&
Any behavior/experience is useful in some context.

At the end of this article I offer "proper" definitions of these, for now, let me offer some more 'practical' information.

Recently while reading some books on Buddhism and working with anger I was able to take this presupposition just a little further...

Well imagine this, that we assume the belief that what they are doing, their actions, their words are the best choice possible for them at the time... at the same time, not only is it the best choice for them given their options, but they actually have a positive intent. Sure, you may have a voice that may seem automatic in your head that says otherwise, but just for a moment, act as if... act as if the other person is simply seeking happiness in their life, that they are trying and doing the very best they can..

Here is another step, what about having compassion and love for that other person? That's right! Now for those of you that have some kind of satisfaction from your anger, you can go ahead and skip the rest of this article. If you get some enjoyment from getting frustrated, impatient, etc.. then continue to enjoy... but I do beg of you to be nice despite yourself. If you'd like to learn more, to begin to practice a way of thinking and acting that will change your life, then read on. I have adapted the below in several ways. I include the exercise below in its entirety for your use:

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The Compassion Exercise

Honesty with one's self leads to compassion for others.

Objective: To Increase the amount of compassion in the world.

Expected Results: Increase in understanding and a personal sense of peace.

Instructions: This exercise can be done anywhere that people congregate (airports, events, beaches, etc.). It should be done on strangers, unobtrusively and from some distance. Try to do all five steps on the same person.

Steps:

1. With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:
"Just like me, this person is seeking some happiness for (his or her) life."
2. With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:
"Just like me, this person is trying to avoid suffering in (his or her) life."
3. With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:
"Just like me, this person has known sadness, loneliness and despair."
4. With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:
"Just like me, this person is seeking to fill (his or her) needs."
5. With your attention on the person, repeat to yourself:
"Just like me, this person is learning about life."

Variations of The Compassion Exercise:
To be done by couples and family members to increase understanding of each other.
To be done on old enemies and antagonists still present in your memories.
To be done on other life forms.

My Adaptations, which I have includes as part of my morning affirmations are:

Just like me, others are seeking happiness in their lives.

Just like me, others are trying to avoid suffering in their lives.

Just like me, others have known sadness, loneliness and despair.

Just like me, others are seeking to fill their needs.

Just like me, others are learning about life 😊

Enjoy using this exercise, email me and let me know how it has or has not worked for you!

Now, as promised, here are the definitions of those NLP presuppositions. May I suggest, that you 'act as if' one or both of these presuppositions are true, and then notice the shifts in your internal perspectives in dealing with others in the world.

Positive intention: There is a positive intention motivating every behavior; and a context in which every behavior has value. People make choices based on the information they have and what they have learned in their life. NLP presupposes that people will make the best choice available to them at a given time, given the information they have. NLP also presupposes that there may be other options available that the person is either not aware of or has not considered yet.

All Behavior is Useful: All behavior is, or was, adaptive, given the context in which it was learned. All behavior was useful for the person in the context that it was learned. In our world, sometimes continue to use historical behaviors, whether from our families of origin or other places that are not working in our lives in situations where they are no longer useful. NLP assumes that the behavior was useful and is likely useful in other areas as well avoiding judgment of the what is "right/wrong/good/bad"...