

CHOOSING YOUR BATTLES

Written by Kirsty O'Callaghan

I often see people, including myself at times, battle or struggle with a lot of things that really have little impact or importance but yet are very draining and take a lot of energy. The energy we could be using on more fulfilling and satisfying activities and tasks, like keeping our focus on goals, deadlines, commitments and enjoying each day.

These 'battles' can include our children, partners, work colleagues, family, friends and even people we don't personally know. The concept of choosing your battles is often brought up in discussion on positive parenting, but I believe it includes all areas of our lives.

Dr Richard Carlson, author of a series of bestselling books Don't Sweat the Small Stuff and It's All Small Stuff says "life is filled with opportunities to choose between making a big deal out of something or simply letting it go, realising that it doesn't matter....you'll be far more effective in winning those battles that are truly important if you choose your battles wisely".

He also points out that life is rarely exactly the way we want it to be, and often other people don't act the way we would like. There will always be people who don't agree with you, people who do things differently. If you always fight for your perfect world, you'll spend most of your life fighting battles.

Dr Carlson suggests that a peaceful way to live is to decide consciously which battles are worth fighting and which are better left alone. Ideally, each of us would like to live a positive, tranquil, relatively stress-free life. To do this, we need to let go of matters that are not worthy of arguing over, those that are not our business, and those that we cannot do anything about.

So, how can we become consciously aware of which battles are worth fighting for? This takes some self reflection to decide why we feel we need to enter the 'battle field' on certain issues and what 'presses our buttons' and why. I find a very effective way to look at this is using the seven steps for overcoming ego's hold on you, by Dr Wayne W Dyer in his book The Power of Intention. I use these steps to check myself as to why I feel the need to go into 'battle'. If the reason falls into one of the seven categories I re-evaluate my plan of action.

The Seven Steps are as follows, as described in Dr Dyer's book:-

- **Stop being offended.** It is explained that which offends only weakens you.
- **Let go of your need to win.** Winning is impossible all of the time. Someone out there will be faster, luckier, younger, stronger and smarter – and back you'll go to feeling worthless insignificant. You're not your winnings or your victories.
- **Let go of your need to be right.** In this situation a good question to ask yourself is "Do I want to be happy or right?" When you have to be right, it is meaning that you have to make somebody else wrong.
- **Let go of your need to be superior.** True nobility isn't about being better than someone else. It's about being better than you used to be.
- **Let go of your need to have more.** When you constantly want more, you never feel satisfied. No matter how much you achieve or acquire, your ego will insist that it isn't enough.
- **Let go of identifying yourself on the basis of your achievements.** Be grateful for the abilities you've been given, the motivation to achieve, and the stuff you've accumulated. The less you need to take credit for your achievements the more peace and gratitude you will feel.
- **Let go of your reputation.** Your reputation is not located in you. It resides in the minds of others. Therefore, you have no control over it. If you're overly concerned with how you're going to be perceived by everyone, then you've allowed the opinions of others to guide you and your actions.

With these steps in mind, we can ask ourselves if we are going into battle to meet or defend one of these. If so, it may not be a battle worth the wounds, or worthy of our energy.

Exercises for further consideration:

- On a notepad or in a journal write down now the most recent confrontations or battles you have found yourself in. Look at the seven steps for overcoming ego's hold on you and see if one of these was the reason you choose to partake in this battle. If so, think how you could have approached this differently and what would have been the outcome compared to the less than desirable outcome you may have experienced. Would you have chosen this battle at all?

- If you have found, after reading the above, that you attract situations and battles that fit in one or more of the categories, ask yourself how can you overcome this? What do you need to change that could facilitate a more positive experience for you?

For example you attract situations that require you to often defend yourself because you are feeling unappreciated after all you have done and achieved with very little help from others. You may find it helpful to congratulate and reward yourself for your achievements, be grateful to you and all that has come into your world due to these achievements and goals being realised and honour yourself for the strengths in you that allowed you this progress.

Then see how you could best use these strengths in the future and other situations that bring you closer to other goals you have set yourself. In doing this you may find that you no longer have to defend yourself or be heard or appreciated by others, because you are not looking for recognition from others, you carry this within yourself.

- Take time to be aware of your assumptions. Do you assume nobody understands you or listens to you? Do you feel less than others or better than others? Do you think others are talking behind your back? Do you feel you are always right or never right? When you are aware of your inner dialogue you can change it to more positive thinking, which will promote a better awareness of what battles are worth fighting and what battles are actually a reflection of how you think it is or 'should' be, that may not be the truth or any of your business.
- Be specific with what you say and do. In this way you will not leave yourself open to misunderstandings which may lead to 'battles'. Be sure of what you want out of the situation and communicate this clearly and calmly.
- Look at the relationships you have within your family and with your children. What battles do you find you are engaging in and how could you create positive outcomes vs. the possible negative or draining outcomes.

In closing a word from Dr Phil McGraw – from the television series Dr Phil:

“Some battles are none of your business. Some battles you can never win so why try? We all need to adopt a spirit of acceptance to get along. Even though the decision may not be what you want, your acceptance of that decision is a way to have peace. You can pull someone toward your own ideals, but eventually they will pull back to their own instincts. Therefore, have a spirit of acceptance when people’s ideals are different from yours.”



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