

## Unconditional Positive Regard

A pain in the neck. We all know someone around us who fits that description. He could be someone whose behaviour constantly annoys us – such as the colleague who has the annoying habit of disappearing when work piles up or the relative who complains non-stop. At our best, we ignore or put up with them. Pushed to our limits, our built-up frustrations explode. If this is someone we can lash out at, we give it to them. If not, we simply have nothing to do with them.

It has not always been that way. He or she did not start out being perceived by us as a 'pain in the neck'. Quite often, we start out *making good judgement* of the behaviour of the person. However when the behaviour persists and our patience runs out, we cross the fine line into being emotionally charged and we become *judgemental*.

*Making good judgement* of others' behaviour is the ability to make observations, to discern, to be able to tell what is right and wrong, in an objective way. For instance:

- 1) "She complains non-stop each time she visits us. She must be living a very unhappy life. This will cause her bitterness and her health."
- 2) "He is always disappearing

whenever the work piles up. What exactly is he running away from? How is he going to improve in his skills if he does not have enough practice?"

*Being judgemental*, however, is a perversion of that. This 'perversion' creeps in when we begin to form personal opinions or biased conclusions of the person. Subconsciously, we compare the person with ourselves. We use the standard we presume we live up to, to judge him or her by. We feel justified to make judgements such as,

- 1) "She is so useless. Why is she complaining and not taking action? If I were her, I would have just walked out on the family".
- 2) "He is such a good-for-nothing lazy bum. He is taking advantage of the weak management here. He should be sacked."

At this point, our judgement is influenced by our emotions. They may be disgust, impatience, sense of injustice or frustration. We have begun making emotionally-loaded judgements.

The points that a judgemental person makes of what he or she judges is usually valid. It is the attitude that the points are made in that is unpalatable. Unknowing to ourselves, we have assumed the attitude of a superior judge. We have condescendingly rated that person using our subjective standard, which to us is the



absolute objective one. We assume that he/she thinks, analyses and perceives like us and therefore expects him/her to make decisions we would have made or act like us although we do not have the complete picture he/she has.

All of us are guilty of being judgemental. It is a human tendency. In his book 'Mere Christianity', CS Lewis wrote an enlightening chapter which sheds light on the subject of judging others. He wrote about why we have no basis to judge others. Here is a paraphrase of his views: Within every person, is a whole lot of 'raw materials' from which we work with. These 'raw materials' are in our subconscious and unconscious mind. These are thoughts, feelings and beliefs etc. which have been formed in our growing up years. CS Lewis called the sum of it 'our psychological outfit'. This drives our behaviour. It influences our perceptions of and responses to situations and people. It affects the way we process information, and the decisions we make.

In some of us, the raw materials we have will include things that have gone wrong, maybe a trauma, for eg., relating to a cat which causes that person to have an unnatural, irrational fear of cats.

The person with the unnatural fear of cats would have been judged for his weird response to the harmless, furry creature. "But if this person with the fear of cat forces himself to pick up a cat for some good reason, it is possible, that in God's eyes, this person has made a moral choice and has shown more

courage than a healthy man who gets knighted for some courageous act."

"God who knows what 'raw materials' each person has to work with does not judge us based on our external actions." While people judge us by our behaviour, God looks at the moral choices we ultimately make with the raw materials we have to work with.

CS Lewis went on to suggest that "some of us who seem quite nice people may in fact have made so

little use of our good heredity and good upbringing" that we are really worse off than those whom we judge as obnoxious.

He confronted his readers with this sobering question- "Can we be quite certain how we would have behaved if we had been saddled with the psychological outfit of the people we make judgement of?"

That is certainly something to think about.

## Connect-Point

If we agree with CS Lewis, we will be convicted that there is really no basis for us to judge another person since we neither have the whole picture about the person nor their situation. Yet maintaining an objective stance is a great challenge when the person persists in the behaviour and we are emotionally affected.

We want to move away from tipping towards becoming judgemental and to minimise the chance of a relationship breakdown with the person. What can we do instead?

One suggestion is to maintain an attitude of 'Unconditional Positive Regard' for the person. This is a concept developed by a psychologist, Carl Rogers. It suggests a practice of basic acceptance and support of a person regardless of what the person says or does. It advocates separating the person's behaviour from the person. This is a shift from our usual attitude towards others. We usually offer positive regard only to people whose behaviour we agree with. Practising unconditional positive regard means to accept the person even when we do not condone his behaviour. We can judge the person's incessant complaining or running away from work as wrong but we do not condemn or judge the person by labelling him as good-for-nothing or useless. We continue to offer the person our positive regard despite his behaviour.

Carl Rogers believed that if a person with what CS Lewis terms as having bad 'raw materials' to work with is given a conducive, non-judgemental environment to process his/her issues, he or she has resources within him/her to make constructive personal changes.

There is optimism in this concept. It believes that people can shift from being judgemental to offering unconditional positive regard. It also believes that things can change for the better for those who have issues to work on if they take up the responsibility for themselves to resolve them and not be in denial or use the 'bad raw materials' as an excuse for their behaviour. It promises improved relationships and offers hope for personal breakthroughs. Would you let 'Unconditional Positive Regard' guide your perceptions and judgements?



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