

The Eye of the Hurricane

Everywhere I go these days, there seems to be two groups of people.

One group is rushing, racing, and frustrated with a thousand road blocks that pop up in front of them at every turn. They seem to be crossing things off their list with a vengeance, angry that more things dare to be added.

The other group seems to be at peace. Not that they haven't had difficult moments to traverse in their lives, even recently, but they seem to have an innate understanding that none of the 'stuff' really matters and that contentment can be found anywhere, anytime.

Group One seems mad. Mad at the world and everyone in it. They're miserable as they wait in line at the grocery store; irritated by slow drivers; and they groan when the boss gives them another thing to do. They are even bothered by the effervescent joy of others!

Group Two doesn't seem to carry a to-do list anymore, and whether they are standing in line at the grocery store, or stopped at a red light in heavy traffic, they appear to be somewhere else in thought, hardly noticing the hectic events spinning around them.

It's as though Group Two is safely tucked in the eye of a hurricane, protected from the wrath of destruction, and Group One is caught in the middle of the intense winds, being thrown around viciously by forces that seem beyond their control.

Or are they?

Back in my consulting days I created a Time Management training program for employees that were overwhelmed with their work load. I was brought in by clients to work with groups or individuals to help them better manage time.

I remember one particular gal I was assigned to. She had asked for an assistant because her workload was overwhelming, and the upper up's wanted to be sure the request was valid.

After assessing the situation, it was apparent the majority of her problem was with email. She complained bitterly (and I mean bitterly) that she couldn't get to half the important things on her daily to-do list because she was constantly bombarded with emails full of problems and concerns. The winds of the hurricane blew through her office by the hour.

It turned out she was addicted to responding to every email that arrived in her inbox, even ones she was only cc'd on. A time management solution for her was simple.

If the email was 'to', she could respond. If it was 'cc', it was only meant as a 'nice to know' and there was NO action for her to take. From that moment on I wouldn't allow her to respond in ANY way to an email she was only cc'd on. Instead she had to put those emails in a folder marked 'read if I have time'.

At first she was aghast. "But these require my input," she countered, "I need to respond in order for things move ahead properly! I wouldn't have received this email if my opinion wasn't required!"

I reminded her, gently, that if her opinion was being asked for, if her expertise was needed, and if the sender thought she could add value, her name would have been in the 'to' box.

Her feelings were a bit hurt at first, I admit.

This same concept applies to life, and this is the lesson for today.

If you aren't in the 'to' box, then it's not for you to deal with. In other words, if someone doesn't use the words 'I need YOUR help/advice/assistance', then assume everything they are telling you is on a 'nice to know' basis only.

This will do two things. It will free up your time so that you can finish whatever tasks are on your to-do list, AND it will guide you in knowing when your help is actually needed.

It's one thing to be kind, helpful and offer a giving hand. It's another to take on everyone else's problems and inadvertently make them your own. Sometimes we get so busy listening to stories about how Harry/mother/co-worker did/said/asked this/that/the other thing, that we lose sight of the fact it's really none of our business in the first place, and listening or getting involved is only stopping us from dealing with our own list of things to do.

I followed up with my email-addicted client a couple months after our session. I wanted to touch base to see if she was still using the new skills she had learned and if her workday had improved.

She recounted that although the first week was tough, she managed to completely change her behaviour. Not only did she greatly reduce the time she wasted putting her two cents in, she found the projects she WAS responsible for were done quicker, easier and were more enjoyable.

And, she reported, the change had an affect on her personal life as well. Letting go of the need to be involved with everyone's everything freed up enough time to help when she was really needed, as well as fit the rest of life's demands easily into her days.

She discovered that someone else's problem wasn't necessarily hers, which reduced her stress level exponentially.

Her friends found her kinder, happier and less opinionated. Her company upper up's declared she was a 'new' employee – one that was delightful, not resentful, helpful, not bitter, and most important, extremely productive.

She had found a way to stay in the eye of the hurricane, no longer affected by the crazy, damaging, unrelenting winds that blew all around her.

As you travel through this journey of life, remember that your opinion is valued, and your expertise may be required – and when that's the case, you'll be asked. For the rest of the time, stay away from problems that aren't actually yours, enjoy your favourite pursuits, take care of your 'stuff', and do your best to stay in the eye of the hurricane with the other happy members of Group Two.

Enjoy the journey,
Louise

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