

THRIVING

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Judgments of Others Can Provide Valuable Clues About Ourselves

Talking to a friend, Selina lambasted her co-worker as "arrogant, incompetent and abrasive."

Washing the dinner dishes for the fifth time that week, Patrick was nursing a resentment against his wife's "laziness" in the kitchen.

And 12-year-old Carrie fumed in her room calling her parents "mean" and "unfair" for requiring that she complete her homework before going to a friend's house.

There's one thing they all agree on: *It's the other person's fault.*

But there's something they're all missing: Every judgment we pass on other people is a revelation about ourselves, an expression of our own needs and values.

For example, Selina may need to examine where *she* exhibits arrogance in her life, or the opposite, where she devalues her own work. Patrick may need to work on his assertiveness, asking for more shared responsibility in the kitchen. And Carrie may need to understand the consequences of the choices she made regarding her homework.

In each case, the judgment itself provided a clue for what may need to be looked at or acknowledged.

"Can't I just have an opinion, though?" we are tempted to ask.

Of course. But judgment is different from the kinds of opinions that form from assessment or objective appraisals. Blame, insults, put-downs, labels, criticism, comparisons and diagnoses are all forms of judgment, all ways of saying that another person is "wrong."

Other types of judgments:

Judgments based on beliefs and expectations. "You're 11 now, and you should be able to remember to turn the lights off in your room."

Judgments based on fears. "She's cold and distant lately; I think she's getting ready to leave me."

Judgments based on prejudices and preconceived notions. "Doesn't he have any decency, flirting around with the receptionist like that?"

Judgments based on generalizations. "Believe me, all bosses are mean."

Judgments that make us feel better about ourselves. "How could you not know where Brazil is?" ["You're stupid; I'm smart."]

Judgments that distract us from taking responsibility. "She gets all the parts she wants; she's the director's daughter."

To enjoy the benefits of being non-judgmental—more effective communication, reduced misunderstandings, enhanced relationships and a sense of emotional freedom and safety—try these actions:

- **Be aware of where and when we are judging others.** This is a necessary first step.
- **Practice empathy with a soft heart.** What's it like to be the other person?
- **Listen and keep an open mind.** Learn to make objective evaluations about ideas, people, and situations.
- **Be curious.** Ask about the circumstances of someone else's life. Most of our assumptions are based on extremely little real information.
- **Accept differences.** If we can accept each others' choices, and trust others to take responsibility for the impact of each choice, then there is more freedom for all of us to be ourselves.
- **Focus on feelings and needs—your own and those of others.** This takes you out of judgment and into aliveness. ✱

10 Ways to Thrive Through Change

By its very nature, change contains a risk of the unknown, which some find exciting while others dread. Whether you welcome it or avoid it, change is nevertheless inevitable. Here are 10 ways to help you manage change.

- 1. Understand your response to change.** Do you tend to leap before you look or to imagine the worst?
- 2. Take responsibility for your reaction to change.** You may not be able to control the events, but you can control your reaction to them.
- 3. Keep other changes to a minimum.** Coming to terms with major changes is physically and emotionally taxing. Conserve your energy.
- 4. Look to others.** Those who have undergone similar changes can serve as models for how you might better cope.
- 5. Ask for help and support.** Talk to reliable friends and/or outside professionals. This isn't the time to "go it alone."
- 6. Let go of "the way things used to be."** Instead, move into "the way things are."
- 7. Choose your company carefully.** You may need to avoid or reassure those who are threatened by your change.
- 8. Be real.** Both positive and negative changes can bring mixed feelings. Don't deny them.
- 9. Take a break from the situation.** Rest, regroup and regain a sense of balance.
- 10. Create your own rite of passage.** Ceremonies and rituals help with transitions. ✱

A Letter From Meg Kaufman, MFT



While we may have little control over external events, such as hurricanes or earthquakes and the changes that accompany those types of events, we do have complete control over how we respond. We always have a choice of how to feel, how to think, how to act.

The Top 10 list in this issue suggests ways to maneuver through the upheaval and disorientation that change creates.

We also have choice in how we end relationships—even when the decision to end them isn't ours. (Answer the quiz to learn more about this.)

Ending a relationship is often accompanied by a healthy dose of judgment. But, as we explore on page 1, it doesn't need to be. If we look closely at our judgments, we often find they actually say more about us than the person we are judging. What are yours saying for you?

This issue's feature article on page 3 explores a growing concern with how computers and the Internet affect our lives, our bodies, our relationships with family, friends, colleagues, community. What can we learn about ourselves?

And finally, the back page feature reminds us that gaining insight into ourselves helps us parent better, and helps our children, too.

Enjoy this issue, and please don't hesitate to call to talk about whatever concerns you.

Can Your Divorce Be More Harmonious?

Whether there are children involved or not, ending a marriage or partnership challenges us in ways that not much else does. The term "good divorce" seems contradictory. And yet, there are things we can do, practices we can bring into our lives that will help us navigate the big waves and the roiling waters. Take this quiz to assess yourself and to gain ideas for how break-ups might go better.



True False

- 1. I may not always communicate my feelings, but I don't hesitate to express them. For example, if I'm angry, I might pound my bed or a pillow. Or journal or paint furious red canvases. By myself.
- 2. If I'm feeling hopeless or discouraged about this new phase, I seek support from a therapist, clergy member or friends.
- 3. I minimize change, keeping as much of the routine and rhythm of life as possible, for myself and for my children. I don't stop maintaining rules that have always been in force.
- 4. I build a team of people to help me make good choices and, hopefully, less adversarial choices.
- 5. I remember that a good outcome in a divorce is something both parties can live with, that it's not about winning but being able to move on independently.
- 6. I use email, fax or mail to communicate when talking isn't working. However, I remember that the goal is not to zap the other but to gain clarity.
- 7. I avoid talking negatively about my former spouse. I know it has a negative impact on my children and will polarize friends who want to remain in relationship with both my former spouse and me.
- 8. I make sure to attend to my physical and emotional needs, taking time for myself to rest and heal during this stressful period.
- 9. I don't seek to physically, financially or emotionally hurt my spouse.
- 10. I don't hesitate to involve a mediator in negotiating post-relationship arrangements, such as co-parenting or splitting belongings.
- 11. In front of children or mutual friends, I concentrate on my ex's better qualities rather than on those that precipitated the divorce.
- 12. I spend time—maybe months—taking stock of the lessons I've learned from this relationship. I do this either on my own, in my journal, or with the help of a professional.
- 13. I remember the golden rule as I go about parting ways, treating my ex in the way I want to be treated.
- 14. I formally recognize the closing of this chapter of my life with a ritual or ceremony, if possible with my former partner; if not, then by myself.

If you answered False to more than half of these statements, and you would like support in parting ways in a harmonious and powerful way, please do not hesitate to call. *

Navigating the Issues that Arise from Our Online Lives

For 20+ years, we've been steadily increasing our reliance and time on the Internet, even more so in the past 10 years with the advent of social media. It's become such an integral part of our lives.

Unfortunately, the issues that have been with us since the advent of the Internet have only become more acute—issues such as losing productivity, Internet addiction and the myriad ways we substitute online life for real, up-close-and-personal experiences with people, places and things.

Real Life vs. Web Life

George spends five to eight hours a day on the web, traveling among his pages on several social networking sites. He presents himself alternately as an assertive and confident Casanova, an opinionated law student and a successful entrepreneur.

In real life, George is none of these. Painfully shy and self-critical, George keeps to himself.

"I feel more like myself when I'm online," he says. But what he really means is, "I feel more like who I wish I was."



Virtual Infidelity

Every time Cynthia's husband heads upstairs to the office, her stomach tightens and her jaw clenches.

Cynthia confronted Victor after reading an email from a woman she had never heard of, who apparently lived in another country. Victor denied having an affair. After all, he had never actually seen the other woman, much less touched her, and he had no plans to do so. "A bunch of typed words don't amount to an affair," he maintained. To him, it was just talking and exploring fantasies.

But to Cynthia, the intimacy expressed in the email was more threatening than a purely sexual relationship. She wondered why her partner couldn't be that intimate with her.

Simulated Experience

Four-year-old Eddie spends hours behind a computer screen studying whales and porpoises; he can identify almost anything that swims. But Eddie has never seen a real fish, although he lives near the ocean and a world-class aquarium.

Like a pint-sized hermit peering out of his window, Eddie, like huge numbers of children today, is learning about nature on a computer screen, not from direct contact with the natural world. His experience is only a simulated experience, which increasing numbers of people are willing to accept as sufficient.

Time Leakage

Handling email and surfing the Web can eat hours from every day. Every hour behind the keyboard is 60 minutes not spent doing something else. There's also an impact on your productivity. If you're surfing the Web or answering personal emails at work, you're stealing from your employer. If you're self-employed you may be squandering valuable focus and energy on things that don't matter.

Repetitive Strain Injuries

Repetitive Strain Injuries are cumulative and can strike overnight. Practice good ergonomics no matter what, and if you feel any burning or numbing in your arms or hands, get off the computer and take a break. Find out about special stretches you can do and never work through pain.

How to Maintain Balance Today

The "online lifestyle" is here to stay. What can we do to avoid being swept away? Here are some things to try:

- Save your personal email for the end of the workday and set a time limit beforehand for how long you'll spend online.
- Plan activities at night and on weekends so that boredom doesn't send you to the computer.
- Take a class in something you've always wanted to learn, such as astronomy, fencing, or photography.
- Volunteer at a food bank, teach reading to adults who never learned, or join groups that pick up litter.
- Take up yoga or dancing to help your body cope with all that sitting at the computer.
- Explore a creative pursuit such as writing, painting, or cooking; try something you've always wanted to do.
- Go hiking, camping, or to sporting events; spend more time outside.
- Plan family outings to parks and local festivals. Check your local paper to learn what's going on.
- Make weekly no-screen dates with your spouse or partner. Look into each other's eyes over dinner and share about your week.

Ultimately, it's a matter of balance and awareness. The Internet gives us wonderful access to worlds we may never have known before; just don't forget to spend more time in the real one. ✧

Parenting Yourself as You Parent Your Children

Parenting is one of the—if not the—most challenging jobs on the planet.

So imagine if instead of a baby shower with typical gifts—baby clothes, strollers, toys—the new parents received a different kind of gift: self-awareness, self-love and self-growth as a person, as well as a parent.

For the best parenting requires that we not only work to nurture and care for our children but that we nurture and care for ourselves as well. Without it, we leave ourselves open to burnout and divorce.

There is the awesome responsibility of raising and guiding another human being, of course. But it's the daily interactions between children and parents that can require almost super-human amounts of flexibility, patience and awareness. All the experts and all the books aren't there when it's your toddler who won't nap, your child who stole a valued toy from his best friend, your depressed teen who is desperately searching for answers, your adult child who can't hold down a job.

Successful—even joyful—parenting is about listening to ourselves as well as

listening to our children. It's a hands-off approach that brings the focus back to what we are feeling and experiencing, so that we don't unthinkingly rain anger and fear down upon our children.

Being aware of ourselves helps us develop a strong "inner authority" or an intuitive sense of knowing what is best for us and our children in any moment. (And accepting that sometimes we really don't know yet!)

"We guide (our children) not because they have basically shabby motives, but because they lack the one strength most of us have: awareness of the world," write authors Hugh and Gayle Prather in their book, *Spiritual Parenting: A Guide to Understanding and Nurturing the Heart in Your Child*.

Their book calls parenting a spiritual path that helps us grow as people while we are helping our children grow into adults. Our children challenge us and if

we can truly listen, we can grow.

One of the first challenges is to understand that old patterns—often formed in our own childhoods—can often rule our behavior as parents right now. For example, if our own parents tried to fix everything that went wrong, we may try to do the same with our children. But our children may need us just to listen to their fears and not jump in with our own fears and try to "fix" it all.

In the process, we allow our kids to make mistakes, and that means we can, too.

And if we can forgive our kids and accept them in all their flawed glory, it can't be too big a jump to do this for ourselves.

As author Joyce Maynard writes, "It's not only children who grow. Parents do, too. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it myself." *



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