

The Eternal Dilemma: Revenge or Forgiveness?

It's easy to get upset at someone who has hurt you — but what's the best way to get them back? What kind of revenge, served cold perhaps, can you dream up?

I recently had someone write to me about this:

“Recently one of my family members hurt me badly. They believe I am an easy target since I don’t want to retaliate or cause conflicts. My question is should I take the risk of getting revenge, knowing that it is never ending (not the best solution) or should I forgive this person? The problem is I don’t want to let them walk over me anymore. How to make them stop and respect me? Or maybe there is another solution?”

There are some important issues going on here:

1. You’ve been hurt, which isn’t nice. It certainly doesn’t feel nice.
2. You want to lash out at the person for hurting you. This is a natural reaction from the anger and indignation that can result from being hurt.
3. You don’t want someone to walk all over you. This seems unfair, and seems like it’s just adding to the bad treatment.
4. You want to be respected.
5. You are worried about the bad consequences of getting back at them.

I’m obviously going to argue *against* revenge, so I should just say that now rather than acting like it’s going to surprise you. Instead, let me present my arguments against revenge, then offer up a different approach.

A Few Arguments Against Revenge

So why not just do what feels right, and lash out at them somehow?

There are some big problems with that:

1. **It doesn’t actually make you feel better.** Retaliating might feel good in the moment, but you won’t feel better about yourself. You’ll just be sinking to a lower level and feeling bad about yourself.
2. **It hurts the relationship.** You lash out because you’re hurt, but in doing so, you’re

going to hurt and anger the other person. Your relationship actually gets worse. You might argue that it's their fault, but actually, no, you're contributing to this as well. You might argue that you don't care, you don't want a relationship with a person who would hurt you, and that might be true. Just be sure you're not saying that out of anger, but you've calmed down and made that rational assessment.

3. **You're just allowing yourself to act on impulse and fear.** When we lash out at someone because they mistreated us, it's not from a rational assessment of what will be best for us, or best for the situation. It's an impulse that is borne from fear and anger. While this is a natural reaction, I've found that it's not the best idea to just follow our impulses without pausing to consider. This leads to impulse problems like eating too much junk food, distraction, procrastination, addiction to video games or TV, and more. Instead, we should get in the habit of pausing whenever we have an impulse, letting the fear subside, and instead considering what's best for the situation. We shouldn't let ourselves get caught up in a story in our heads about what this person did to us and how wrong they are. That's not helpful.
4. **It doesn't actually make people respect you more.** Lashing out in anger or fear is not a recipe for earning people's respect. In my experience, people actually respect you less if you retaliate against others. Maybe they'll want to be around you less. But that's out of fear or dislike of your behavior, not respect. I tend to respect people more who can handle things maturely and with calmness and compassion.
5. **You're not being your bigger self.** It's easy to act on our impulses, but what we really want is to become our bigger self. That means the best version of ourselves that we can be — and forgiving ourselves, of course, when we don't do that. The bigger self is one that forgives, is compassionate, doesn't act out of fear or anger, and handles things maturely. This isn't always easy to do, so we shouldn't think of it as an "ideal" to always strive for, but as a guideline for how to act when we're able to consider things with calmness.

So if retaliation and revenge aren't the best ideas, what's better?

A More Compassionate Approach

I believe a more compassionate approach is better, because:

- You're being your better self.
- It makes you feel better about yourself.
- You earn the respect of others by being more mature.
- It helps your relationships.
- It is a kind thing to do to the other person, who is obviously having difficulties.
- It makes the world a better place, one relationship at a time.

You might disagree with these reasons, but I've found them to be true.

Here's how to do it.

1. **Pause instead of acting on impulse, fear and anger.** Notice when you're about to lash out from anger and fear. Instead of acting on that impulse, pause. Breathe. Take a timeout. Consider your actions before acting.
2. **Stay with the physical feeling, instead of the story.** When you're angry or afraid, there is a story in your head that's causing it ("They're being so rude!") ... instead of dwelling on this story, bring your attention to how this feels in your body, physically. Where is the feeling located — in your chest, stomach, neck, face? What physical sensations can you notice? Stay with these feelings as long as you can, returning to them when you notice your attention going back to the story ("Why do they need to act this way?"). Stay with the feeling, and give it some compassion.
3. **Enlarge your perspective to see their difficulty.** Once you've stayed with the feeling for a few moments, see if you can get out of your you-centered story, and embiggen your perspective to include what the other person is going through. Are they having a bad day? Are they suffering through some difficulty? Feeling fear or anger? Do you know what it's like to go through that yourself? When you realize the other person is probably having a difficult time, struggling with something ... you might find some compassion in your heart for what they're going through, in addition to the offense you feel. This is the space you want to enter.
4. **Ask: What is the most compassionate thing you can do for both of you?** Is it having a gentle conversation with them? Is it ending the relationship so you don't hurt each other? Is it getting a third party involved so you can resolve the situation? Is it just listening to their complaints? There are lots of options — try to consider ones that don't originate from your anger or fear, but instead are compassionate.
5. **What do you need to do to respect yourself?** I'm not suggesting that you be a "pushover" and let other people walk all over you. Compassion isn't about not respecting yourself — in fact, it's the opposite. You often need to take steps to protect yourself, so you don't get hurt. Or at least to speak up for yourself. It's not compassionate to remain silent when you're being hurt. But at the same time, you can respect yourself if you make your concerns clear in a gentle way. Or set your boundaries with the other person firmly, but without anger.
6. **What's the most loving thing you can do for them?** This might be listening to them, giving them a hug, showing them that you care. But it also might be letting them go, because your relationship with them isn't helping them. Or creating some space, at least for a little while, so they can have time to cool down (and you can too). There are lots of options, but considering this along with how to love and respect yourself, is where you want to be.

None of this is easy. I'm not claiming there are miracle solutions. But it's not easy to hurt your relationship with escalating retaliations, and it's not easy to deal with resentment and anger in yourself. Compassion isn't easier, but it does bring greater happiness all around

The Magic of Forming New Relationships

I'd like to invite you to join me in my new course in the Sea Change Program to help others get good at making friends and dating ... it's called "The Magic of Forming New Relationships," and it has just started. Join me!

The course features a guest expert, other than myself ... my good friend Tynan, who is a blogger, author, coach and expert on topics ranging from minimalism, travel, productivity, habits, social dynamics, awesome cruise travel and much more. Tynan is a former pickup artist (he's a good person, I swear) who learned to not suck at talking to girls, not suck at storytelling, and apply what he learned to making friends. I'm honored to have him as a guest expert.

So what's this course about?

We'll talk about making new friends and also dating — both involve getting out of our comfort zone and making new connections. It can be life-changing stuff.

Here are the video lessons — the first two have just came out:

1. Overview — What Most People Do Wrong at First
2. The Approach (Or, how to get someone to want to talk to you)
3. The Art of Storytelling
4. The First Three Dates
5. The Preliminaries: Developing Your Confidence
6. Making a Great Connection
7. Building a Friendship (or Romantic Relationship)
8. Avoiding Long-Term Pitfalls

It'll be amazing. We'll also talk about telling good stories, creating a great experience for the other person, and other awesome stuff that will help anyone, no matter where you are in life.

Here's how it works:

1. Every week this month I'll publish two video lessons
2. There's a challenge to spend 5-10 minutes each day to working on one of the skills presented in the video lessons
3. There are weekly check-in threads in the forum and discussion threads for each lesson

4. I'll hold a live video webinar on with a talk and a Q&A session on Aug. 19

This is all included in my Sea Change Program, which you can sign up for today. You also get access to a huge library of other courses and content for changing your life, one step at a time.