

Relationships Are Personal, but Rejection Doesn't Need to Be

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Statement 1: "You're wrong."

Statement 2: "You're not the right fit for me (or us, or this company, or this project)."

Statement #1 represents an instance in which an indictment or accusation is made.

Statements #2 represents an instance in which a breakdown or incompatibility is observed.

In statement #1, someone is being told that they are flawed in some way. In statement #2, someone is being told that their services are not needed in a particular context.

Sometimes when people utter statement #2, we hear statement #1. In other words, when people say "This arrangement between us isn't working", we often hear that as "Something is wrong with you."

This tiny little gap in communication can be the catalyst for some pretty big problems. If you go around talking about everyone as if they are evil simply because they failed to satisfy you, you'll make a lot of enemies and you'll lose a ton of trust. On the other hand, if you interpret everyone's rejection of you as evidence that you're a loser, your ability to handle honest feedback will take a nosedive and your personal growth will be stunted.

What's the solution? It's simple (at least in theory): Never take anything personally.

When people fail to satisfy you, try to understand their behavior in terms that aren't about you. Consider the possibility that they are simply acting on their own self-interests in the best way they know how. And even if they made a real mistake or committed a real vice, it probably wasn't because they were out to get you.

When you fail to satisfy others, don't fall into the trap of assuming you did something wrong. Instead of assuming anything at all, try to understand the other party's point of view. Develop an appreciation for the subjectivity of their interests and needs. Consider the possibility that maybe you're quite alright in your own unique way, but just not right for them in some other way. Sometimes one person will adore you for the same reasons that another person hates you.

Whenever a relationship of any kind fails to work out, always choose the big picture perspective over the ego-centric "woe is me" perspective.

And if that advice seems too fluffy, just take a minute to think about how much more fluffy it is to believe that everything in the world actually revolves around you. The bad news is that you're not that special. The good news is that your experiences of dissatisfaction and rejection aren't that special either. Don't overanalyze them.

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