

Act with Devotion & Intention; Letting Go of Attachment to Outcome

You're starting a project or a new exercise plan, and it's in shaky new territory for you. You feel doubt about whether you can do it, and so you're tensely doing everything you can to make sure it will turn out the way you hope.

The stress, fear, doubt and tension here all come from an attachment to the outcome, to how things will turn out. We want to lose weight and get fit (the results of the exercise) or be brilliant at our new project and have everyone think we're wonderful.

But perhaps we could acknowledge that:

- **The outcome isn't always fully in our control.** Sometimes other people get in the way or unintentionally sabotage a project, sometimes things happen that we didn't expect, sometimes despite our best efforts things just turn out differently than we pictured in our heads. On a training plan, the weather could get worse than we thought, we might come down with a flu for a week, we might get injured or things come up to throw our schedule off.
- **There are multiple outcomes that will be OK, if not great.** For example, maybe we won't get six-pack abs if we do our best with this plan, or maybe we won't finish the marathon we're training for ... but maybe we'll get healthier despite not meeting the goal? Maybe we'll enjoy the exercise, maybe we can meet other people trying to get healthier, and maybe we'll experience beautiful outdoors that we wouldn't otherwise get to experience? On our new project, maybe it won't turn out as well as we hope, but we could still enjoy the process, learn a lot, form good relationships with our team or client, get better at the process itself. The outcome we hope for isn't the only one we can be happy with, and sometimes the actual outcome will be better than we hoped for, if we're open to it.
- **Focusing on the outcome is detrimental.** It causes us to stress out, to enjoy the process less, sometimes to not even start something because we don't think we have a chance of getting the desired outcome. We don't ever write that novel because we think we can't write a good one. But how do you ever get good at writing a novel if you never attempt it? It also causes us to be disappointed with the outcome when it's not what we want, to be disappointed in ourselves when we don't live up to our own expectations, to feel that we're not enough (or others are not enough).

But what if the outcome matters? You are supposed to hit an objective of X for your work ... don't you need to focus on the outcome? Well, you should do the actions that are most likely going to get you that outcome ... plan out the steps, then do the steps ... but as

you're doing each of the steps themselves, you don't have to be attached to the outcome.

Let's explore that a bit, see how to do it and why it might be helpful.

Letting Go of Attachment to Outcome

Letting go of our attachment to the outcome is freeing. It helps us to be more present with the doing, the being, the act itself, rather than what might come in the future. It can help us have better relationships, because we're more focused on the people than the goal. It can help us have a better relationship to ourselves, as we focus on our own well-being and contentment, rather than some external source of possible happiness (spoiler: happiness doesn't come from external things).

What can you focus on instead of outcome? A few good ideas:

- **The intention.** I've found my intention in doing a task to be much more important than the outcome. It's what I hope to *bring to the task* rather than what I hope to get out of it. It's how I want to show up right now, rather than what I want things to be in the future. Examples: I have an intention to be helpful and loving as I write this post; I intend to be mindful and appreciative of nature as I go out for a walk or run; I intend to be fully present with the person I'm talking to, compassionate and open-hearted with them. I bring this intention and try to let it inform how I work, how I do anything in the world.
- **The effort.** Instead of worrying about how things will turn out, pay attention instead to how focused you are on it, how much effort you're putting into it, how mindful you are as you do it. How much of your heart are you putting into it? How much love and care are you giving it?
- **The process.** The outcome is a result of the process — if you're not getting the outcome you want, focus on improving the process. How much care are you taking as you do it? How can you step up your game? Don't worry about the outcome as much as you pay attention to *how* you're doing things.
- **The moment.** What is beautiful about this particular moment, as you do the action? What can you notice? Can you be curious as you do the act, instead of having a fixed mindset? What is there to appreciate about yourself, about the other person, about everything around you, right now?
- **Relationships.** Much more important than the outcome is the relationship you have with the people you're serving and working with, or your relationship with your loved ones. When you're focused on the outcome, you often disregard the feelings of the people you're working with, snapping at them when they're not doing things the way you'd like. Instead, you can focus on your connection with them, on finding ways to make them enjoy the process more, on being loving or compassionate.

Think about how this might change things for you. If you're working on a shaky new project, you can let go of how you might want things to turn out, and instead focus on how you want to show up, what is beautiful about the moment, having fun with the effort, playing and being curious, being more loving to yourself and others. This transforms every act, every habit, every project, every moment with others.

Do every act out of devotion and love, with letting go of attachment to the outcome.