



Purposeful Wanderings

A Monthly Newsletter for Clients and Friends of **The Road Not Taken**

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No One Can Make You Angry, Part 2

“You don’t have to attend every argument you’re invited to.”

When it comes to dealing more constructively with anger, it’s one thing to “get it” as an idea, but it’s another thing to actually “do it,” putting ideas into *practice*. This past month has put this distinction to a test, both in my own life and in helping clients in their lives, too. So I’m keenly aware of offering practical steps for your own journey to peace.

I have noticed one common thread in every conversation I’ve had about anger (including ones I’ve had with myself). Wherever anger persists, the question “who am I being?” has gone unanswered. Without clarity on what matters most to you, you give your power to those who “made you angry,” which actually *encourages* them to *keep doing* whatever bothered you in the first place. Why does this happen? Experience suggests that we’re often afraid of further upsetting the person whose behavior upsets *us*, so we fail to take a stand for our own well-being, perhaps hoping that if *we* avoid conflict, *they* will change. Yet conflict persists because we never tell them we find their behavior unacceptable. Two steps can free you, as noted last month: (1) get very clear with yourself on behavior you *would* find acceptable, and (2) declare your truth to the other person, and give them the opportunity to honor the request you make of them.

Assuming you now know what you want ([Part 1, June 2014](#)), how do you ask the other person to hear and honor it? Here’s where worry about reprisal comes in. For times like this, it’s helpful to plan out a script of how you’d *like* to handle yourself in times of conflict. Practicing your script in quiet times helps embed the felt experience of it inside you, so it’s accessible when you need it. Here is a simple, straightforward, non-confrontive entrée into *any* conflict, from someone who stole your favorite pen, to one who treated you badly, to starting a request for a divorce. “*This is not working for me.*” These six words work in almost any conflict. There’s no accusation or blame here. It’s not even *about* the other person. The words describe *your experience* of the situation, not why the other person is an idiot.

With this as a start, you can follow-up with how their behavior *impacts you*. Example: “I feel disrespected when you yell at me,” or words that fit your situation. Describe facts, not accusation. “When you yell at me” is fact; “when you’re an idiot” is accusation. Next, calmly ask for what you need to have things “work” again. “What I need is for you to not yell at me in the future.” As of now, you’ve declared your truth *and* made a request – both are about *you*.

What comes next depends on how they respond. (1) Further blowup actually *supports* your claim that it’s not working. Repeat what you’ve said before, *calmly*; (going violent puts you in their world). Their reaction belongs to them; you don’t own it. What you do own is willingness to let the relationship go if there’s no concern for your well-being. (2) On the other hand, if they’re open to hearing you, explain why your request matters *to you*. No attacks. Making someone wrong does not lead to peace. Ask them to help you by committing to work on their behavior. If they mean it, it will still take joint practice. If they refuse, or if they say *yes* and mean *no*, then again, you need to be willing to let things go. What you’re working toward here is not a screaming match, but a “constructive conversation,” one that seeks joint effort to change. Their part is to work on their behavior. Your part is to stay calm, to remind as needed, and know it may not be done tomorrow. Note: After reading this, you may conclude that tolerating anger is a better choice for you than the consequences of taking a stand. If so, then that’s the right path – for you. My only agenda is to open the possibility that you *can* have peace, and you do *not* need agreement from the other person to get there.

Exercise: Toward clear boundaries. It takes clarity, perseverance and practice to declare and uphold strong personal boundaries. It takes even more practice to do it consistently, while remaining calm. To begin, use your regular quiet time to think about, then *name*, the behaviors you’d like to see from those who trouble you today. Then create *statements* that embody what you want for yourself, and what you’d ask of them so as to restore your personal power. The first one is a *declaration* (your truth); the second is a *request* (what you want from them). You may choose to practice these with yourself first, as a way to gain courage and/or strength. You might view this whole process as practice, knowing you’ll “misstep” more than once working to rid your life of unacceptable behavior. Change won’t happen overnight, but committing to self-care can. If you want personal freedom, the price is personal responsibility.

A River Runs Through It [Life lessons offered by nature]

For 10 days this past month, I had the privilege of visiting a client in Alaska. Despite common perception of those who know I've led Arctic nature tours for 20 years, I'd never been to Alaska (all my trips have been in Canada.) This trip was one of those "life events," the kind that shift forever the way you perceive the world. I've been home for two weeks, and still cannot point to any "one thing" that evoked such a shift. Perhaps it was the fabric woven out of many "one things" – new experiences in a new land, an artfully planned agenda that encompassed so very much, unending kindness and generosity, sensory feasts offered by this "last frontier," deep and meaningful conversation, the staggering vastness and grandeur of Alaska's interior, the inner knowing of how crucial the soul's connection with wilderness. I may never "know" the answer, but I don't have to. I *feel* the answer. For this, and more, I am deeply grateful.

Perhaps this is why I make space each day for silent reflective time in nature. Perhaps this is why I suggest the same in so many of the exercises and practices I offer you in these newsletters. For even in a short snippet of daily time alone in the woods, I seem to offer a gift to my soul (or maybe I receive a gift back from my soul) – as it reunites with its source. Although conscious awareness may not identify the experience as such, we nevertheless know (or feel) something is happening. The sense of peace we experience in nature may well be the shadow cast by the soul reuniting with itself. Alaska got inside me. The world is a far bigger place than it was a month ago.



"There's no wi-fi in the forest, but you'll have a better connection." So noted a quote sent me some time back by another client. As if to prove what I already knew, I went camping in the woods for the past week. I'm a rather Spartan camper, as I believe the more "stuff" I have with me, the more I constrain myself in terms of direct connection with nature. I choose not to give up a cup coffee in the morning, or a glass of wine in the evening, however, so I do make provision to honor those things, but beyond that, life is simple in the forest. During what I estimate to be about 30+ hours in front of my campfire over the course of the week, I sat, reflected, wrote, read, and "did nothing." Yet all the while, there was so much more going on than "nothing." Shunning the choice to leave the campground and "do" things, I remained deeply in tune with the pulse of life. This time in solitude with nature is amazingly regenerative and creative time for me. "Doing nothing" may be the assessment of an outside observer, but the story underneath the story is far different indeed. Most of this newsletter "happened" there, as did probably 2 or 3 more newsletters, a few articles and some "big ideas" for other pursuits. Again, I am grateful.

Openings to New Possibility

Available for you:

- *The Road Not Taken Community*, a no-cost subscription that offers you connection, interaction, challenge, and learning. See articles, newsletters and blogs; you'll find "new stuff" [here](#) regularly. I welcome comments and conversation; this kind of dialogue is an example of how we may all learn together.
- "In Nature's Image." A [gallery](#) of 100 of my images from nature, each offering a simple idea for adding meaning to your life. If we're connected on [Facebook](#), you'll also find each post there.
- *The Road Not Taken* newsletters (12 years, 144 issues of *Purposeful Wanderings*) available [here](#) as a pdf file.
- Photo images from my travels available [here](#) on fun products – note cards, coffee mugs – great gift ideas.

An invitation to possibility: If you have the courage and determination to step apart from the crowd and *challenge conventional thinking* ... so you can live instead with *authenticity and freedom*, contact me for a conversation that can energize your dream. I will help you reach a level of *clarity and perspective* – about yourself, others, your life, your work and the world – that allows you to live your truth, every day. Trade the *way it is* for the *way it could be*.

Book of the month – *The Dance of Anger*, by Harriet Lerner. I recommended this book last month for Part 1 on this topic. I've heard from a few people (men *and* women) that "men won't read this book." I noted last month that the subtitle appears sales-limiting, for that very reason. Yet to not read it is *self-limiting*, hurting more than her sales. Come on guys, that's part of why we need it!! All of us relate with others; all of us get angry; most of us are ineffective at dealing with either constructively. Lerner's exploration offers insight, examples and practical advice about relating with others, and yourself, too. ... And if you're on Cape Cod, you'll find this book at the Market Street Bookshop in Mashpee Commons – 508-539-6985.