

The Four Agreements

#2 Don't Take Anything Personally

Ruiz, author of the 4 Agreements, tells us that there is a **huge amount of freedom to be gained when we don't take anything personally**, and we know from our work together that taking things personally is a particularly pernicious form of monkey mind. But how do we do that? How do we not take things personally?

Here are some helpful tips, techniques and practices to help us NOT take things personally:

1 – SWSWSWSW

This stands for “Some will. Some won't. So what? Someone's waiting!” It means that some people are going to love what you do. Then, there will be those who visit your blog, look at your paintings, listen to your songs, read your poems, review your resume – and they'll shrug and say, “Yea, not so much.” So what? **Somewhere out there someone is waiting for your gift.** And if you have to keep working on your craft, or wait a little while, that's okay. It's called NORMAL.

2 – Remember that people are busy

People are busy. They may not have time for you. Young musicians complain because they try to book a venue, but their emails weren't answered. They give up. And they get resentful. I tell them the same thing: People are busy. It's not personal. They just don't have time to answer every email. (Revisit #1.)

3 – Email is instant. Use accordingly.

Email creates fabulous opportunities to take things personally. (Blog comments, too.) The quickness of our culture has removed much of the etiquette that some of us would normally expect. Most people just “fire it off.” If you get an email that hurts or feels personal, take an hour or so to chill out. Then re-read the email in a kind narrator's voice. Be careful with the temptation to over-dramatize someone else being in a hurry with his email or comment. For some people, email is quick and easy. It is simply a tool – not a way to make you feel okay about yourself!

4 – Begin each day with presence and proactive-ness

How you begin your day often sets the tone for the day. If you start the day by opening your email and launching your browser, you are opening yourself up to external stuff – some of which may trigger you. Start instead with creative and proactive activities. Some possibilities: meditation, yoga, going to the gym, writing a blog, writing a song/poem, doing morning pages, writing down goals and intents, creating your day in advance. Start with a strong foundation of honoring yourself each day.

5 – Create a “Good Mojo” file

Create a “Good Mojo” folder in your email. Create a file called “Good Mojo” in your file cabinet. Fill these files with kind emails and loving cards from friends or co-workers or fans. If you’re taking things personally, you may as well rummage through these files to find the good messages, the words and cards from people who love what you do. Start keeping this folder and use it when you need it.

6 – Be willing to look like an idiot: Communicate

If something feels strange or out of balance, check in with the other person. Take the responsibility. Say, “This may sound strange, but...” Or “I’m afraid I may have said something out of line. Is that possible?” Most people – not all – will be grateful that you cared enough to clear the air.

7 – Beware of collusion

Collusion is sharing what we’ve taken personally with another person and enrolling them in our story. Colluding is the best way to perpetuate the pattern of taking things personally. It takes a deep and committed discipline to shift out of this pattern. That’s because much of what we call friendship in our culture is little more than disliking the same people and staying stuck in our own versions of the truth and requiring that our friends agree with us. Collusion is rounding up people who believe your own illusions. Stop it.

8 – Make a list and move to the next thing

Many of us strategize for the one big thing that will be our “saving grace.” This is a veritable petri dish for taking things personally. You apply for a scholarship to one MFA program. You send your article off to one magazine. You ask only one producer to make your CD. There’s a better way here. Before you send yourself out into the world – be it resume, scholarship, grant, producer, publication – make a list of many options. List all of the publications, grants, employers, options, etc. Move down the list if someone says no. Find that someone who’s waiting.

9 – Shut up and listen

When you listen and quietly observe, you often find that you had it all wrong. You may actually see humor in how you can take everything so personally. Sit down on the floor, lean against a wall and quietly listen to your own breathing. Or, when you’re in a conversation with someone else, stop and listen. Really deeply listen. Try practicing this in every day conversations that aren’t emotional. This will prepare you for moments when you are taking something personally.

10 – Use unemotional language when you communicate

Phrases like “Well, *you’re* the one who...” and “You took that all wrong!” are inflammatory and do little to help a situation. Try to use language that’s not about the emotions and not about pointing fingers. “I think I didn’t communicate this well so let me try again.” Or, “I’m not sure I understand you. Can we discuss this on the phone?” The challenge is to communicate with unemotional language. Kind of a “here’s the facts

ma'am" approach. Write out your desired outcome for the conversation. Get clear inside yourself, and then talk with the other person.

11 – Eat enough. Sleep enough.

Being tired or hungry will always make you more sensitive or irritable. Don't try to function well if you're hungry or if you haven't slept well. Low blood sugar causes poor decisions.

What am I making this mean?

Note: If I react, it's about me.

12 – Let the deeper goal be what motivates you

Who you become on your journey is far more meaningful than what happens to you. If you learn how to get beyond taking things personally by witnessing and then choosing a different response, you will eventually become unshakable. You can lose all your money; you can get rotten reviews of your recent work after being lauded for the last one; you can get fired tomorrow – but you can't lose who you are. You can't lose your essence. When you become someone who is clear and centered, you will have the tools to move through life no matter what happens externally.

From *The Four Agreements*: "When you make it a strong habit not to take anything personally, **you avoid many upsets in your life.** Your anger, jealousy, and envy will disappear and even your sadness will simply disappear if you don't take things personally. If you can make this second agreement a habit, you will find that nothing can put you back into hell. There is a huge amount of freedom that comes to you when you take nothing personally."