

Letting go

'Letting go' is a sequel to my July post '[Never good enough](#)', in which I explored the pros and cons of being a perfectionist. 'Letting go' is a way to avoid the downsides of perfectionism. While it's hard to do, its liberating power is a skill every executive can learn to be better at, and from which you too can benefit.

In our personal lives we say things like 'If you can't say goodbye to your past, then you can't say hello to your future.' These admonitions capture the essence of what letting go means: Leaving something alone, not expecting to address it immediately, not trying to force an outcome, nor feel compelled to act.



This is one of the hardest things in the world to do, probably because it runs counter to our powerful and primal need to feel safe, loved and successful. Losing control of ourselves, others and the situation can make us feel exposed, vulnerable.

You might let go in the moment, by simply pausing. Or you might let go for days or weeks, until the time is right to make a decision and act.

Think of letting go as acceptance of what is, and not resisting. As the saying goes, "It is, what it is".

Defining letting go in this way does *not* mean ignoring or denying the 'something'; nor does letting go mean discarding it or being resigned to let it affect you adversely. Letting go does *not* mean you can't or shouldn't act. And it does *not* mean giving in, or giving up, nor should you think you have failed, or others have won.

Holding on: resistance is an early warning sign

Resistance arises from a mental 'judgement', embodied in rigid expectations and demands of yourself, and others, about exactly how things should and must be. These judgements – i.e. your thought patterns, about what is right or wrong and good or bad – result in feelings of 'negativity'.

This negativity can range from mild irritation, impatience, fierce anger or sullen resentment to revengeful thoughts and actions. It is false to believe that through negativity you can manipulate reality and get what you want or take control. Often the opposite results. Resistance is largely unconscious, out of your awareness. It is reactive and becomes a habitual way of pushing against 'the flow of life'.

At a practical level, resistance reduces your available reservoir of energy and makes you less capable of doing anything well. Beyond that, pushing too hard can end up getting you what you think you want, only to discover – too late – that there was a good reason it didn't come together in the first place. This is the origin of pain and suffering

We hold on to what is known and predictable. This tendency even extends to who we think we are, our deepest sense of self. It is why past hurts and old injustices keep us stuck in our ruts. It is why a rigid, or overly ambitious, vision of the future results in missed opportunities and failure to enjoy the journey. It is why we block new ideas and stifle creativity, and why our unrealistic expectations of others damage our relationships. It is why we become stressed and fatigued. In all it is how we thwart our own happiness and compromise our effectiveness.

Surrendering to what is

Letting go, is to surrender – to accept what is – in the present, what has been in the past, and what will be in the future.

Surrender is perfectly compatible with taking action, initiating change, or achieving goals. But in a surrendered state, where a totally different energy, of a different quality flows into your doing. You see clearly what needs to be done and take action in a fully focused, mindful state. You ask yourself, 'Is there anything I can do to change the situation, improve it, or remove myself?' If there is, take appropriate action. This action comes from insight, not reactivity. If there's nothing you can do, accept it as it is, and move on.

Non-resistance doesn't mean doing nothing. All it means is that any 'doing' becomes non-reactive. Remember, the deep wisdom underlying the practice of Eastern martial arts: Don't resist the opponent's force; yield to overcome.

How to let go

Letting go is an invitation to cease clinging to something – whether it is an idea, a thing, an event, a particular time, or view or desire. To let go means giving up the need to coerce, resist, mould, and struggle against.

In its essence letting go depends on being aware of your judgements and feelings that are full of negativity. Acknowledge and accept them, without reacting to them; this will let the disturbance settle. Then you can make a conscious choice whether or not to respond. This all sounds deceptively simple, but in reality, it is a profound challenge that requires continuous reflection and practice. It is a lifelong journey in developing yourself as a person and as a leader.

Letting go is freedom

'To offer no resistance to life is to be in a state of ease and lightness.' In this state you no longer depend upon things being a certain way. There is no good or bad. There is no fear of loss or need to control any longer. There is a deep sense of peace and liberation. In letting go lies freedom.

Stillness, insight, and wisdom arise when we no longer want to hold on to, or reject anything. This is a testable proposition. See for yourself whether letting go when a part of you really wants to hold on doesn't bring a deeper satisfaction than clinging to it.

Try it.

Read more about letting go

Others' work

- ✓ [The Untethered Soul and The Surrender Experiment](#) by Michael Singer
- ✓ [Practicing the Power of Now](#) by Eckhart Tolle
- ✓ [Wherever you go, there you are](#) by Jon Kadat Zinn

My posts

- ✓ [How to make the end a grand entrance](#)
- ✓ [Replace your musts and shoulds with wants and wishes](#)