

Love Empathy and Compassion

Criticism and Character Assassination

By Rick R.

Hanging on to resentments and criticizing the behavior of others is often a noticeable characteristic of some members of the program that never seem to find the serenity and peace that is mentioned in the promises. For some people it seems impossible to let their guard down. I think that most of us can understand this, simply because we have all had to face this issue and deal with it as we went through the Twelve Step process. One of the things that I learned when I was faced with this matter was that I had a *self-esteem issue* and I overcorrected, by pointing the faults of others, to somehow make myself seem normal. This never worked for me as I could not fool my *conscience*. Things only got worse. I still worked through the steps and did what I could at the time. No one gets it perfect the first time, but we can make a second effort at it when we have established a record of living by principles. A.A. meetings are a training ground for how we treat others and if we cannot accept the people there, it is a cinch we will not do it outside of the rooms.

Everyone that comes to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) brings with them their own assortment of mental, emotional, spiritual, and material problems, and none of us are without these concerns. If we did not have them, we wouldn't need this program. We all feel somewhat vulnerable and establish our own firewalls, with the help of our EGO'S, to protect ourselves from our perception of what those other people are doing, saying, and thinking. We each might establish hard and fast protective reactions, mentally and verbally to protect our own turf. With so many different personalities brought together in one group, it's very hard to let down our guards, after all, we all feel somewhat justified when pointing out the faults of others. This is what the alcoholic personality does.

With the understanding that *most forms of criticism and character assassination stem from low self esteem*, it occurred to me that I was just as guilty of the very things that I was accusing them of. I likened it to two old men in a convalescent home hitting each other with their canes because one wasn't walking fast enough for the other. I had to step up to the plate and become strong enough to *look deeper into their motives and understand what caused them to behave the way they did, and not be threatened by their outside behavior*. I cannot express in words the mental freedom that this principle has produced in me. When I see someone acting out, my first thought is *not judgmental in nature but of empathy and compassion*. My next thought is "what I can do to help him or her". In time, I have come to terms with all the people that I inner act with on a day-to-day basis and I am in conflict with no one. To me, *they are all like kids just learning how to do life*. They all have problems, and I am not going to be one of their problems. I need to be strong enough to replace words like *resentment, judgment, and criticism* with *empathy, understanding and compassion*. Today I have no adversaries that I can think of, and *peace of mind is the natural result of this approach*.

I find no exceptions to this principle, and I cannot be selective about who I apply it to. Everyone gets amnesty in my book. All those mental gymnastics about "those other people" is a distant memory and I can't think of a single time that practicing this principle didn't serve me well. The only one that is sorry for this profound and life changing transition is my EGO, but about that; who am I to criticize?