

The Need to Be

“Acceptance is such an important commodity that some have called it the first law of personal growth.”

– Peter McWilliams, Life 101

Back in the 1960s few country roads in Northern Alberta had gravel. Many, in fact, still resembled wagon trails: rough, narrow and when wet, nearly impassable. The swelling clay, common to the part of Alberta where I grew up, clung to our boots and wrapped around car and truck tires. Often on a horribly rainy day our family would venture onto these roads for groceries and such. My father’s philosophy was, “Why waste a good day on such endeavours?”

One spring morning, with ruts hub cap-deep with water, we set off for town. Father was skilled at driving through the mud but a flat tire soon caused us to become stuck tight. He slammed his hand down painfully on the steering wheel and yelled something unquotable. We all jumped. Everyone was quiet as he stepped out of the car and into the quagmire.

When he saw the flat, he let out a long, blue streak of profanity that hung over us like dark storm cloud. He cursed the mud, the car, the tire then threw up his arms in exasperation. After what seemed like an eternity, Mother sighed, mumbled something under her breath and then yelled out the window, “Standing there cursing is not going to help get the tire changed!”

I like the muddy road story because it aptly demonstrates what happens when we enter a state of resistance – when our “need to be” is something other than what reality presents us with. We become stuck just as assuredly as if we were hub cap-deep in an actual mud hole.

When I say, “need to be” I’m speaking of our need for things to be the way we want or expect them to be, rather than how they are in reality. As with the tire story and my father’s “need” for the tire to be anything but flat, we sometimes find ourselves faced with what we don’t want or expect. My father could have raged all day and all night and still found himself standing in the rain come morning. When we rage against “what is” we no longer focus on possibilities but rather the impossibility or perceived unfairness of the current situation.

Until we are able to look at the tire and see and accept it as flat, we will be unable to change it or the situation in an appropriate manner. We must move into a state of acceptance before

we can do anything constructive. Now don't confuse acceptance with liking or enjoying the situation. Acceptance does not mean that we resign ourselves to a condition and choose to do nothing about it. Acceptance is always our first step toward a successful outcome. It simply means, "I accept it as being precisely what it is. Until I do, I will find the situation difficult if not impossible to change." Next is an action step that frightens many people: self-responsibility and developing a plan. Remember, if you don't fully accept the situation, you won't know if the situation can or should be changed and whether or not you'll need help to do it.

It has taken a great deal of practice and I am by no means perfect at it, but each time I now feel myself entering a state of resistance I try to say to myself, "Just let it go. Just let it go."

The late self-esteem author and motivator Peter McWilliams put it succinctly when he wrote, "I am not saying you can't change the world, right wrongs, or replace evil with good. Acceptance is, in fact, the first step to successful action."

I think there are people out there who look for reasons to enter resistance, who actually look for someone or something to oppose their "need to be." How sad for them. Think of what you consider your own shortcomings. Would you be better served "needing" them to be different or would you be more successful and enjoy an enhanced level of self-esteem by first accepting them honestly and then setting a plan in place to transcend them?