



Accept What Is, Lead To Improve, by Marc Lesser

“Accepting what is” and trusting the Universe is an essential approach to life. But so is “fighting for change.” And if you want to be effective in business and in relationships, too, for that matter then you also need tenacity, focus, urgency, often combined with strategic planning and a drive towards achievement.

“Accepting what is” is also an important and core practice. By definition, it creates the baseline for our understanding of reality and for our decisions about what needs to change. If we can’t see what is, and can’t accept what we see, then it’s difficult to act effectively. Accepting “whatever the universe brings” can also be an important way to avoid wasting time and energy trying to change what cannot be changed. All by itself, though, “accepting what is” is usually not enough. The imbalanced, shadow side of acceptance is passivity, laziness, and avoidance. It is not mindful leadership. If we see a window of opportunity and fail to jump through it, no one benefits.

On the other hand, the shadow side of “fighting for change” is becoming controlling and rigid in our concepts. In truth, our everyday lives are largely centered around coping with change: managing it, responding to it, and sometimes driving or creating it. To be effective requires knowing when to practice acceptance and when to drive change. This is more difficult than it sounds. Balance doesn’t mean finding the middle ground between acceptance and drive. It means having the freedom, insight, and skill to embody both at once in order to act effectively in each situation. It can be maddeningly challenging, yet simple, and forms the core of effectiveness.

Real change is at the heart of what it means to be human. With each change we learn and we re-create ourselves. We are able to see in a way that was not previously possible. We can act and achieve in a way that we could not before. With each change the world is different, our relationships are transformed. With each change we are continually expanding our ability to respond, to create, to envision, and to build our relationships and organizations. To clarify my terminology, the phrase “fight for change” could also be expressed as “lead to improve” or to “transform.” That is, even as we accept that all things change, we recognize that many things can be improved, and so we take personal responsibility to actively pursue improvement. Thus, in work and relationships, we don’t simply wait for problems to arise and then try to solve them; we take the initiative to understand our current situation and envision a better future, a better now. We develop a vision, know where we mean to go, and start walking.

This is mindful leadership, and it is as vital to our personal lives
as our work lives.Â

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