The Self-Inflicted Misery of Taking Offense

Air Date: June 16, 2024

Guest: Don Drew, David Lowry

Resources: Peacemaking101.com

David Lowry: 0:29

Welcome to Peaceful Life Radio, your place on the internet for cultivating a peaceful life. We're here to help you enjoy life more by eliminating interpersonal drama and conflict and developing peaceful habits. I'm David Lowry and with me is Don Drew. Don, what's our show about today?

Don Drew: 0:47

David, today we're going to be examining the concept of taking offense. We are going to be discussing how choosing to be offended by others creates unnecessary negativity and unhappiness for ourselves and others. Taking offense is a form of self-inflicted misery, which hinders our growth, damages relationships, and fuels unnecessary drama. We'll give you some alternative strategies for navigating conflict that will help you respond with love and kindness and prioritize the well-being of your relationships.

David Lowry: 1:18

We definitely encourage everybody to stay tuned because this is going to be a great show, and it's going to help you in your relationships. But before we do, Don and I want to encourage you to like, subscribe, download our podcast. It only takes a minute and please, it helps us a lot. And visit our Peaceful Life Radio website. Leave your comments with us about the program and how you handle conflict. We'd love to hear from you.

Don Drew: 1:45

Let's start with the definition of what it means to take offense. To take offense means to feel upset, hurt, or insulted by something someone said or did. It implies that you believe the other person's words or actions were disrespectful or intended to harm you in some way. David, give us a breakdown of the concept.

David Lowry: 2:04

Three things go into taking offense. One is your feelings. When you take offense, you experience negative emotions like anger, hurt, frustration, and annoyance. And you also believe that somebody said something directly to you that you interpreted as being rude, or you think you have a cause for your anger. And finally, you're tied up in interpretation. This is the key element to taking offense. You've decided how you're going to interpret the situation, and you perceive the other person's action as a slight or attack on you.

Don Drew: 2:42

Taking offense can be a natural reaction, but it's important to be aware of it and choose how you respond. We want to emphasize that dwelling on offense can be damaging and

suggest alternative ways to communicate and build stronger relationships. We all experience emotions and sometimes what others say or do can make us feel upset. It's important to understand that others aren't directly causing your feelings. Our emotions are often triggered by past experiences that resurface when something similar happens in the present. These past experiences can be like old wounds. When something touches them, it can trigger negative feelings. In the heat of the moment, we might blame the other person for how we feel, but ultimately, our feelings are our own responsibility. The good news is, we have a choice in how we react once those negative feelings arise. By choosing to act in a way that benefits us, the other person, and our relationship, we can choose a more reasoned and peaceful approach instead.

David Lowry: 3:41

Many people believe others are responsible for how we feel because after all, didn't they say something mean or hateful? But stop for a moment and consider that taking offense is more of a temptation on your part to be angry and respond with high reactivity. It's not a requirement that you do It i s perfectl within the realm of possibility for you to totally ignore somebody's statements or things that they've done and refuse to take them personally. We don't have to take offense at every difference of opinion. Instead, when someone says or does something different, we have a choice, and we can react with judgment or negativity, or we can choose simply to witness the situation by offering a kind and corrective thought or we can express our view without attacking the other person. We're advocating what we would call loving assertiveness. This is where you say what you have to say with respect, and you're trying to contribute to a more positive world and relationship. Each time we choose love over offense, we're helping to heal and advance the universe, or in simpler terms, you're making your world a better place. Here's an analogy. Don, suppose we throw a rotten tomato at you?

Don Drew: 5:01

I'll throw it back.

David Lowry: 5:02

Yeah, most of us would, right? But really, all that does is start a food fight, or worse. And that's the thing in the real world, Don, when people get offended, they begin to escalate the situation. One person says one thing, another person starts shoving, and another person pulls out a gun or a knife, and then we have a situation on our hands, right? There's no end to the amount of escalation that can happen when one takes offense and continues to"go there" with the other person.

Don Drew: 5:34

David, we are all tempted daily to give in and react negatively to things that offend us. We can argue that choosing offense is damaging because of several different reasons. Number one, it creates self-inflicted misery. Dwelling on grievances is like living in a personal hell. We trap ourselves negatively by holding on to anger and resentment.

David Lowry: 5:55

Absolutely. I wish we could convince everybody. Of that statement. It's your choice to live in a personal hell every time you decide to take offense. When you decide to take

their offense you're falling right into their hands, right? But ultimately, who lives in hell? It's you because you've decided that you're going to take that offense. And there's more. It blocks the opportunity for connection. And of course, sometimes the people who offend us are the ones that we really love the most if we really get right down to it.

Don Drew: 6:28

When we block opportunity, we ultimately are hindering growth and by being constantly offended by things that we may not agree with or that hurt us in some way, we miss out on learning and expanding our own worldview.

David Lowry: 6:40

I'd like to give a little example. Okay. So, I've created a fictional example of Sarah and Michael. As the Day Turns. Okay. So, they planned this getaway. And they want to go to the mountains, and Sarah has meticulously planned the itinerary. She's booking activities, restaurants, she's got everything planned. Then there's Michael. He likes to be spontaneous and go with the flow. So, the first thing that's going to happen is, pain. Okay. During the trip, Michael suggests that they go to something happening in town, a local music festival, and Sarah's getting frustrated because she's on a schedule and she worries that they're going to miss their reservations. And then that rises to suffering.

Don Drew: 7:31

Sarah starts replaying the scenario in her mind, focusing on how Michael didn't consider her efforts or didn't appreciate them. She feels hurt, disrespected, and she starts to build a narrative that Michael doesn't care about her feelings. Ever heard this before, gang?

David Lowry: 7:45

I've heard of that! And then this leads to misery. See, if you let this negativity take root, it will spiral into some self-inflicted misery. Sarah might convince herself that Michael is a bad friend, and that he's ruining the trip. She might shut down and withdraw, or maybe close the door to the room and not speak for a day or two, and talk about how he never considers my feelings, or he's not respecting her. Can you see this development.

Don Drew: 8:15

Right. The outcome is that taking offense and being miserable is a self-inflicted wound. self-inflicted misery refers to unhappiness or suffering that we bring on ourselves through our thoughts, choices, and behaviors. It's the idea that we hold the key to unlock our own emotional well-being, but sometimes the way we react to situations creates unnecessary negativity. Let's break this out some.

David Lowry: 8:39

Okay. self-inflicted, we all know what that means. You cause it, right? Shooting ourself in the foot, as the old saying goes. It's circumstances beyond our control and we decide to process them and interpret them in such a way that it brings us pain and conflict. Maybe somebody says something to you, and they think they're saying one thing that's funny, but you take it very personally, and it's not funny at all, and you become angry and mad. You are self-inflicting yourself.

Don Drew: 9:09

So, that self-inflicted pain and conflict turn into misery. And this is a state of extreme unhappiness and suffering. It's a strong word, I'll give you that. But it emphasizes the emotional toll that these choices can take.

David Lowry: 9:23

When you go to misery, it's hard to get out of it, right? That's right. Because you hold on to your grievances, and you replay those negative experiences in our minds and dwell on anger and resentment, and you keep yourself feeling bad. And Don, I want to tell you an old story of mine, but I realized one time that I was talking 40 years after the event had happened about something I still remembered, you know, as clearly as the day it had happened. Something that really angered me, bothered me, I took offense at. And I thought to myself, who really did the most damage here? The person who did the thoughtless thing in the moment, or David Lowry, who kept talking about it for the next 40 years, bringing it up from time to time, telling the old war story, reliving the wound, and the attention seeking and all of that. One day I realized it's time to drop stuff like that. I don't know how long a statute of limitations that ought to have, but maybe three minutes is about all we really need, right?

Don Drew: 10:24

That's right. And I don't sense this in you, David, but sometimes we get trapped into taking offense and feel that every attack is constant, that we're pummeled by different opinions. And the world can seem like a hostile place in which our ideas, our values get violated. When we make a habit of that, it's like any other habit, we're building this muscle to take offense easily, and it leaves us more vulnerable.

David Lowry: 10:50

I know, and sometimes when we've worked really hard on something, and we've really thought it through, or maybe you're the only one who's been willing to work on something, and then somebody, starts putting in their opinion. You want to say what right do you have to talk to me about all this? Where were you when we were doing all this planning and everything? That's what I mean by offense. It seems so justifiable to us, when really we don't have to go there. We don't have to hold onto the grievance. It feels right to do it, but it's not because it creates a victim mentality where we blame others for setting us off or blame others for anger or the differing opinions can seem like a hostile place to us. We say we were disrespected because somebody had a different point of view in public and so forth. We've got to watch that, don't we?

Don Drew: 11:38

Yes, we do. And the drama that we feel from this is going to continue to Feed on the conflict. The last three things we talked about, holding on to grievances, taking offense easily, and having a victim mentality, all contribute to this concept of drama in which the conflict becomes an engine that drives the story. If characters are constantly stuck in this self-inflicted misery, replaying grievances, and refusing to see things from another's perspective, it becomes difficult to find common ground and resolve the conflict. The drama then becomes repetitive and one sided.

David Lowry: 12:12

Going back to our story with Sarah and Michael, you can imagine that if they're not careful, one or both can start telling these negative stories about the other, and really believing them, and then they get other people to believe in them too. And this is what we call drama. You had a difference of opinion, you continue to feed the story, it gets bigger and bigger, and way out of proportion to what it should have been. And it becomes a generally negative situation.

Don Drew: 12:40

When we focus on negativity, we become consumed by self-inflicted misery. Our focus shifts towards negativity. We become hyper aware of slights and offenses, real or perceived. This makes it difficult for us to have healthy, open communication where both parties can be heard.

David Lowry: 12:57

So, what we're really talking about here is learning how to let go of the drama and the interpersonal conflicts that arise from all that drama by refusing to take offense so easily. In fact, refusing to take it at all, if you can. That requires you to be mindful because it keeps you in a negative cycle. It uses up your emotional energy. And it keeps you from seeing anything positive in your life. It strains your relationships with others, and it hinders your growth and development. Don, let's look at a few ways that we might break this cycle of the temptation to take offense.

Don Drew: 13:35

David, I think it's important to understand that we grow through challenge. It's the challenge itself that gives us the muscle to be able to stand up for ourselves and to not be so easily offended. When we are constantly offended by different viewpoints, we shut ourselves off to new ideas and perspectives. This hinders our personal worldview. So, the starting point is to recognize that the challenge is actually a good thing.

David Lowry: 14:05

It is a good thing. And when you feel challenged, if you can, in your mind, have that moment to say, okay, this is okay. It's okay that I'm being challenged here. Let's create something even better. Remember this, and this is a hard one, we control our reactions. We don't have to be prisoners to our emotions. We don't have to have an angry rage. We don't have to go off and stomp our feet. We don't have to slam a door. We don't have to do any of that. We can be very calm, cool, collected, we can watch our reactions, we can be very measured in what we say next. We don't have to take offense.

Don Drew: 14:45

Dwelling on these kinds of grievances that we have is like living in a self-made prison. It hurts us more than it does anyone else.

David Lowry: 14:52

It really does. It's living in our own self constructed hell. Here's the thing, when you hear something that really torks you a little bit or tweaks you a little bit, take a pause. Take a

pause. I'll take a deep breath. And remember, there's a moment between feeling offended and reacting. And this is the pause where we slow down for a moment and use this time to choose what we're going to say. And the words that I always use, I use these words a lot even when I'm not offended, but I use it a lot especially when I am offended, is to say, hmm, tell me more, or what are you thinking? And That gives me time to think.

Don Drew: 15:35

Some of the best advice I've ever been given is slow down and cool down. Slow down, cool down. Slow down and cool down. Because when we do that, then we buy ourselves some time so that we can respond with love and not opposition. Instead of attacking the person back, offering a different perspective or loving correction can help with the relationship, communication, and the relationship.

David Lowry: 15:57

We're always looking to say what we need to say in an assertive way, but a non-aggressive way. You can stand up for what you believe, and you can believe whatever it is you believe, but you can do it with kindness and respect. You don't have to yell. You don't have to show your contempt. You don't have to roll your eyes. You don't have to show any of this reactivity. You can take a deep breath and say, I see this differently than you, it looks like. Here's what I'm thinking.

Don Drew: 16:26

Yes, and by choosing love and understanding, we can help create a more positive and healing environment as well.

David Lowry: 16:31

The other thing is we have to take responsibility for our part in a conflict. It's true. We all have to acknowledge our role in a conflict. Even though somebody may be speaking rather heatedly to you. You've contributed to it in some way. People don't do that usually. They usually do it when they feel disrespected too. Maybe you didn't intend to cause that kind of defensive reaction in another person, but maybe you have. And it's important for you to realize, oops, maybe I've been a little too firm in the way that I've gone about and said something.

Don Drew: 17:04

Yeah, and we can find empathy with each other in this process by seeing things from another person's viewpoint. It allows for forgiveness growth and ultimately a resolution to the conflict. David, take us back to Michael and Sarah and let's talk a little about how they might break this cycle.

David Lowry: 17:19

Okay, if I were Michael or Sarah, I would want to end this suffering and misery that I've brought upon myself. The first thing we have to do is, acknowledge the pain. Now look if you're Sarah and you've created this beautiful itinerary and you're planning on a beautiful day, you've bought tickets for this ride and this museum and things like that. You're going to feel frustrated if that gets messed with. And it's okay for you to

acknowledge your pain. You can acknowledge that you feel frustrated when the schedule changes and you haven't been consulted or respected on it. So, there are ways of talking about what you're feeling and acknowledging how you're feeling without blaming the other person for it and trying to start a dialogue so that it could be better.

Don Drew: 18:05

Dialogue is absolutely critical here. Communicate, don't ruminate. Instead of dwelling on the hurt, she can talk to Michael about her feelings and concerns.

David Lowry: 18:14

And don't go to other people. For heaven's sake, keep it local. Keep it between yourselves. Don't expand your un happiness with other people. Seek to solve it. Don't go to other people. Start communicating.

Don Drew: 18:26

Right, it's really critical to collaborate, not compromise, but to collaborate and see if it's possible for both parties to get what they want from the experience. And then finally, remembering the positive, you know, focusing on the fact that they're on the trip together and they can always adjust the plan for a more enjoyable experience for both.

David Lowry: 18:44

The important thing is, be willing to communicate openly and focus on solutions. Stay solutions focused instead of dwelling on negativity. Sarah can avoid being miserable and she can strengthen her friendship with Michael if she will allow it to be. She can respond with love and kindness. Which can be a very powerful tool of breaking that cycle of pain and suffering like the one they are experiencing right now.

Don Drew: 19:11

Instead of assuming that Michael didn't care about her feelings, Sarah can approach him with kindness and try to understand his perspective. Perhaps he didn't realize how important the schedule was to her or simply got excited about the festival. Another area would be open and honest communication. David, what are some things that might be said here that could help the situation?

David Lowry: 19:31

There's two things that really contribute to open and honest communication. The first one is to use what we call I statements. So, Sarah could say, I felt a bit frustrated when we weren't able to go to the museum that I had planned for, or when I saw that our time was getting too close to make the appointment that we had set. She's using I statements and saying, this is how, it affected me. And the second one is, listen. Listen carefully. When Michael explains his reasons, Sarah can listen and see if she can really understand where Michael is coming from.

Don Drew: 20:06

So, it's important here that they try to find common ground. And one way to do that is recognizing that they have shared goals. They can remind themselves of the shared goal of having a fun week, which was really what this was all about to begin with. Then

there's the issue of compromise and collaboration. They might brainstorm ways to incorporate the festivals while still making it to their reservations.

David Lowry: 20:29

And they build a stronger bond with each other. You know, there's three things that go into making a strong bond, and this is what I think Sarah and Michael really want. We call it the three pillars.

Don Drew: 20:42

The three pillars to consider when deciding how to react. First, I matter. Your own feelings and needs are important, but they're not the only ones.

David Lowry: 20:52

Yes, and then you matter, acknowledging the other person's feelings. And showing them respect is very important, and that helps build a connection.

Don Drew: 21:01

Third, our relationship really matters most. When both parties prioritize the relationship, they're more likely to find solutions and maintain a healthy connection.

David Lowry: 21:11

Here's where a lot of assertiveness programs fall short, in my opinion, Don. One person says you need to assert what you want to do. And you do need to speak up for yourself. But we're not talking about having a competition to see who gets their way. We're talking about how can we build this relationship, strengthen our bond with each other so that everybody's happy?

Don Drew: 21:32

Yes, by prioritizing the well-being of the relationship, we're more likely to choose understanding and kindness over offense, and of course then we always have to consider the impact. So, if we apply this scenario again to Michael and Sarah and remembering the importance of their friendship, then that can guide the actions that we take.

David Lowry: 21:50

And they'll minimize their misery. They'll avoid the self-inflicted misery of resentment and anger, and it's going to do wonderful things for them. It's going to strengthen their bond, and their friendship.

Don Drew: 22:04

Lastly, it's going to create a pattern for the future. By prioritizing the relationship and communicating effectively, they establish a positive pattern for future conflicts. Remember, this doesn't mean ignoring your own feelings or becoming a doormat. It's about finding a balance between self-respect and respect for the other person, all within the context of maintaining a healthy relationship. So, today we've talked to you about taking offense. And we hope that we've persuaded you that's not something you need to do anymore. And you're going to find that your life is way more peaceful if you don't.