

It is good to be home. I was out of town much of this past week, but am now home with my family and friends and couldn't be happier.

Though it's been awhile, you might remember we've been talking about a book called *The Four Agreements*, written by a man named Don Miguel Ruiz. These are four insights or instructions Ruiz believes will lead to happy, fulfilled relationships. We've spoken about two of them: *Be impeccable with your word* and *Don't make assumptions*. Today, I invite you to think about his third insight, *Take nothing personally*.

I was in a restaurant this past week and overheard this man moaning about the weather. He said, "I work hard all year, have two weeks off for vacation, and the weather is lousy the whole time. This happens to me every year." I glanced at him. His wife was with him and she looked absolutely worn down.

I was tempted to say, "Yeah, that's right, buddy. The weather fronts get together and conspire to make your life miserable."

Have you ever known anyone like that? Someone who took everything personally? They interpret everything that happens as a personal affront?

I once had an acquaintance who, if I failed to contact him each day, assumed I was mad at him. He would phone and ask why I was angry.

“I’m not angry. I’m just busy. I had to work today.”

His tendency to take everything personally was such a burden. I found myself phoning him each day so he wouldn’t be upset. I didn’t know how to get out of it. I finally had Joan call him to tell him I’d died.

Take nothing personally.

Has anyone else had a hard time with this one? I struggled with this for years, and sometimes still do. If someone stopped coming to meeting, I assumed it was because they didn’t like me. If a group of friends went out to dinner and didn’t invite me, I assumed I had upset them. If something was important to me, but not important to others, I would take it personally, becoming angered by their perceived indifference. It was exhausting.

And not only exhausting, but also egotistical. For I assumed that every decision, every action was a direct consequence of something I had done or had failed to do. Can you imagine anything more narcissistic than someone believing they are the inspiration of every action or emotion? (Is it narcissistic to use yourself as an example of narcissism?)

Take nothing personally. Not just because it is exhausting and egotistical, but because it causes us to constantly question and judge the motives of others. He must not like me. She must be mad at me. They don't care for me. Then what happens? The moment we suspect others think poorly of us, we begin to resent them and before long there is animosity and ill-will where none were ever intended.

Bad feelings build upon bad feelings, friendships are frayed, and sometimes even ended, because we took something personally when it was not intended to be.

I knew a woman who was dying of cancer. Several months of treatment had left her bald and shrunken, her body devastated and depleted. She loved her friends and didn't want them to see her in that condition, wanting to spare them the pain of her suffering, wanting them to remember her when she was happy and whole. It isn't that she was vain. She simply didn't want to put her friends through that pain. I worried that her intention, though gracious, might be misunderstood. But it was her decision to make, not mine, so I didn't argue with her. Her friends were devastated, taking it personally, thinking they meant nothing to her. In fact, her decision had been motivated by her love for them, but in taking it personally they had assumed the worst motive. They had assumed bad feelings where none were intended.

Take nothing personally. How others act is a reflection of who they are, not who you are. It is a reflection of the pain, struggle, disappointment, and rejection they've experienced in life. It is also a reflection of the joy, love, peace, and acceptance they've known. How others act and react was probably determined long before they even knew you. It is the consequence of things you likely had nothing to do with. So take nothing personally.

If someone offends you or hurts you, remind yourself, "If I had lived their life and known their difficulties, I might act like that, too. I will forgive them and work for their growth in love."

If someone blesses you or encourages you, remind yourself, "That person has known great goodness. I will treat others with that same goodness, so love will increase."

Take nothing personally. Except in every situation seek to personally understand, seek to personally forgive, seek to personally love.