“I’m getting to be too old for this nonsense!” How many times have you heard people complain about dealing with problems in their lives and the difficult people who bring them about? While the vast majority of your clients will view the daily challenges that life throws across their paths as inconvenient at best and a real nuisance that they should attempt to avoid at nearly all costs at worst, there is another possible perspective you can encourage them to adopt to maximize their personal power. Rather than avoid these unpleasant and disruptive challenges, they can instead embrace them as an opportunity to learn something about themselves and their ability to deal effectively with the trials they pose.

When things do not go your clients’ way, rather than have them blame someone or become resigned to seeing the circumstances as yet more evidence demonstrating their bad luck or deficiency in character, you can suggest that they instead look for ways that they can learn and grow from the experience. If they take on the perspective that each challenge is sent their way with a gift of wisdom attached to it, they can transform how they see and respond to each episode. How they react to difficult situations will depend upon how they see their role in having brought them about. They can decide to be a victim, at the mercy of each difficulty or they can look for what part they may have played to contribute to it in some way.

Now, I am not suggesting that they blame themselves or find fault with their performance as those lacking high self-esteem might be prone to do. Instead, I am proposing that they might look at the stressful situation to see if they might have handled it differently had they realized some insight that they now were able to glean by studying the event. By looking for possible contributory factors that resulted in having the situation turn out as it did, they can learn from their inquiry and act differently in the future.

This possibility to impact their experience is particularly rich when it comes to interacting with difficult people. Your clients can shun the people they hold as having little or nothing of value to teach them, or they can hold them as a precious resource being sent their way to support their personal development. The more difficult the personalities, the more effective they will need to become in dealing powerfully with them and the more they will have the potential to learn about themselves and their ability to impact a result.

The key to interacting effectively with those your clients consider to be challenging people is to create the space for them to be the unique, imperfect individuals that they are. This means accepting their quirky behavior, at times difficult interpretations, irritating habits, and less than effective communication skills. Rather than hoping to change them, reprimand them, or try to fix them, it is more productive for your clients to accept what they might consider to be their faults and allow them the ability to be who they are. When your clients cease to oppose who others are, they will, in turn, no longer have to defend themselves or try to avoid being dominated by them. Others will be less likely to find fault with your clients and less likely to need to exert control over them.
With the generous allowance they’ve created for their humanity, they can now look at how they might be most effective in influencing them so that life works for all parties involved.

As we’ve discussed before, the secret to supporting your clients to effectively interact with people who would normally present them with a challenge is to manage their emotional state. Rather than react to what others say and do and thereby give away your clients’ personal power, they have the ability to monitor what would have been their typical emotional responses and act intentionally instead, without the driving emotion of anger, sadness, fear, or any other negative force that breeds upset and makes effectual communication unlikely.

When your clients give up their need to dominate a situation, control the other person, or be right about something, they gain the ability to interact powerfully and without a damaging reaction fuelled by negative emotions.

**Here are some exercises that will support your clients in Allowing Difficult People and Challenging Situations to Be their Teachers**

1. As your clients go about their day, encourage them to identify each challenging event they experience to reflect upon how they might deal with the situation most effectively.
2. Suggest that they practice allowing others to have the space to be who they are, complete with all their faults and shortcomings, and without the need to change or fix them. Have your clients consider how doing so influences their relationship with someone they would consider to be a difficult person?
3. For each problematic situation your client finds him or herself in, have them record in their journal how they may have contributed to the difficulty by their action or inaction. Ask them what they could do differently next time to produce a more desirable result.