

Don't Expect Applause Buddhist Slogans for Recovery

My last blog post shared the Buddhist lojong slogan, Don't bring things to a painful point. Today I want to share another slogan written about in the Shambhala Sun article that I feel also really applies to recovery.

As a reminder, this article focused on using these slogans in our work life. However, we can apply them with a wide brush. The author discusses doing our work without expectation of praise or ego stroking. If we do our work just for this, we are bound to be disappointed.

In reading this, I am reminded of the conversations that happen in my therapy room about sharing feelings and healthy communication. “What's the point of being open with my wife if she is going to freak out?” “Why bother sharing how I feel with my husband if he doesn't know how to respond?” “I'm doing all this work in recovery and he/she doesn't even notice!”

I hear these types of statements from clients all the time. In these moments, the Don't Expect Applause slogan fits like a glove. It all comes down to motivation. Why are we doing things? Am I sharing how I feel with my partner because I want him to change his behavior or react in a certain way? Or, am I sharing how I feel with my partner because it is what I have to do in order to be healthy in my own recovery?

A larger, more fundamental question is who am I doing recovery for, me or someone else? If I am in recovery simply to please someone else, I am apt to feel resentments at some point in the process. If I am doing recovery to please my partner, there are going to be times when my partner is giving me the feedback, warm fuzzies or praise I need to continue recovery. This is where we are prone to build resentments and resentments can fuel relapse. Don't get me wrong, many a person enters recovery for someone else initially but finds their own way to recovery for themselves. If we are engaging in recovery and expecting applause, we are setting ourselves up for disappointment.

I often talk to clients about motivation. What is the motivation behind what we do. What is my motivation to share my feelings openly and honestly with a partner, family member or friend? When I hear a response such as “so she will.....” or “so he will” I know that my client is still in a place of expectation. Perhaps they are not expecting applause but they are engaging in a behavior with an expectation of the outcome. If that expectation is not met, it decreases the chances of engaging in the healthy behavior or communication in the future.

Part of long term recovery work is letting go of expectations. I try to encourage clients to embrace the goal of engaging in behaviors, such as healthy communication with a partner, for the sake of self. I am going to learn how to communicate in a healthy way with my spouse or child or boss, not because I think I can control or influence the outcome, but because it is what I need to do in order to become a healthier more emotionally competent person.

Work to let go of expectations.