How to REALLY Let Go of a Resentment
by Jessica Ruane

Ask yourself honestly, “When was the last time I truly felt overwhelmed with happiness, freedom, and gratitude?” If you can’t remember, then you may be holding on to resentments.

When it comes to dealing with other people, many of us find ourselves helplessly oscillating between anger and fear. We constantly try to find quick fixes to soothe moments of blind rage and alleviate anxious thoughts. However, these “solutions” are usually nothing more than temporary fixes, which allow us to white knuckle it through one more day. Meanwhile, the root of the problem continues to fester and get worse until we can’t even bear to look at it anymore.

But what if you found out that there is a permanent, lasting way to feel less angry and fearful and finally regain control of your emotions?

It’s called letting go of resentment.

Here’s how it works: resentment, anger, and fear are all connected. We become trapped in a self-obsessed cycle of being afraid of the future, angry in the present, and filled with resentment over our past. The antidote to fear is faith, the remedy for anger is love, and the solution to resentment is acceptance. If you’re part of a 12-step program, this may sound familiar, but it can be applied to anyone’s life.

What is Resentment?

“Resentments are like swallowing poison and expecting the other people to die.”

*In psychology, resentment is when a person has ongoing upset feelings towards another person or place because of a real or imagined injustice.*

One of the reasons resentments are so hard to get rid of is because there is so much bad advice floating around out there on how to deal with them. Exasperated friends may tell you to “Just get over it already.” Therapists might tell us to “let it go.” Other people may say “forget about it” or the even more unhelpful, “the past is the past.” Excuse me, what does any of that generic advice even mean?

I can tell you for sure that you shouldn’t do the following with resentments:

Ignore them; Fight through them; “Lock them in a closet”; Pretend you don’t feel them; Try and forget them.

Instead, you should do these things:

Face them; Feel them; Deal with them; Heal from them.

“Fake it till you make it” doesn’t work when it comes to deep-seated feelings we have about certain people or situations. But dealing with them is certainly easier said than done.
How Do You Accept What Happened in the Past?

Before you begin to overcome resentments, you should know the following things:

1. It’s a process
2. It may get worse before it gets better
3. It requires a great deal of willingness and an open mind

Resentments are negative feelings that you may have been carrying around for years. During this time, they may have done significant damage to your ability to interact with the world. I know it sounds dramatic, but these are often big, deep-seated issues. Don’t expect to be able to say a chant and—poof! They’re gone. You should know that you are embarking on a long and probably painful journey, but the destination is completely worth it.

Follow These 4 Steps to Let Go of Resentments

Step One— Make a list of all the people you have resentments towards. If you do this honestly, then the list should be pretty long. Include ANYTHING that gives you an automatic negative feeling. You can also include places and institutions (a school you attended, an airport you had a bad experience in) nothing is too trivial or too small.

Step Two— Next to the person’s name; write what they did to cause you to resent them. Again, nothing is too small. If you resent your boss, it may be because that person gives you unreasonable deadlines, or could simply be because you don’t like their hair. The reason for the resentment doesn’t have to “make sense”—it just has to be honest. This is where it will get hard, and you will feel worse than you did before starting. Try to have faith that the end result will be worth it—because it will be!

Step Three— Now you write what part of your life each resentment affects. If you resent an old teacher who made you feel inferior, you might say that it affects your self-esteem or confidence. The point is to become acutely aware of the specific ways that the resentment is impacting your identity, and your ability to feel safe, secure, and loved.

Step Four— Next to the reason, or cause for resentment, you are going to write down your part. This is how YOU have contributed to the problem. Back to our boss example, at this point you’ve established that you resent your boss, that you resent your boss because of unreasonable deadlines. Your part in this problem could be that you never spoke up and asked for less work.

This is where honesty and willingness come in. You must be honest about your part, and willing to admit it. Otherwise, you may get stuck.

Taking It All in

Now, read from left to right. You should be able to develop a clear picture of who you resent, why you resent them, the negative ways that it affects your life, and the part you played in all of it. Understanding your resentments by breaking them down will hopefully start the process of evolving from a person who constantly lives in a generalized cycle of resentment, fear, and anger, and help you transition into someone who can identify the source of their feelings and target specific areas they want to work on.
The purpose of this writing assignment is to experience freedom by letting go of secrets, fears, and lies which we have been holding onto, and getting these issues out of our heads, and onto paper. What is done with the paper afterwards is up to you. Some people choose to share it with a trusted friend; others burn it as a symbolic gesture of surrendering those feelings.

This is a tried and true method adapted from the 12-step program model, which literally ANYONE can do. Unlike expensive therapy, this will cost you nothing, other than the price of a pen and paper. What do you have to lose?

http://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/how-to-let-go-of-a-resentment.html