

Week 25: One Sentence That Can Change Your Love and Life

The people who sit on a therapist's couch are abnormal, right?

They've made bad choices and lived incorrectly and are broken in some strange way, right? Wrong. In my clinical practice, I have discovered two things. First, my therapy clients are ordinary people who have the *extraordinary* courage to admit life is messy and the determination to redeem it. And second, the majority were not the "bad kids" on the playground. They were honor roll students, and the quiet kids who got things done, and the glue in their splintered families, and the caretakers, and the sacrificers, and the forgivers, and the *obedient* ones. And they are simply confused about how doing all the right things can land them in the middle of so much suffering and confusion.

I've done a lot of work with these folks. The work can be complicated and hard and painful. But over the years, I've made it simpler by distilling the purpose of the work into a single sentence. If we can tenderly (not aggressively) and authentically (not defensively, with bluster and bravado) utter this sentence, it can change the way we love and live. This is it:

"I'm not going to worry very much about offending people anymore, which means I need you to tell me when I do, so I can think about it and decide if I need to apologize."

It's a key to loving well and living freely, but we can only embrace it if we understand the radical, transformational love at its core. So, let's take it apart, piece by piece.

I'm not going to worry very much about offending people anymore...I'm *sick* of living in fear of what others will think of me—if I make a mistake, or say a wrong word, or accidentally make them feel uncomfortable, or don't respond to them in the way they wish. It has *drained* me, and I can't recall who I truly am, let alone *reveal* who I truly am. So, I'm *done* with feeling responsible for everyone else's feelings. Except I'm not. Not completely. Because I'm human and all healing takes time and there will be moments when I'm ambushed by my old shameful worry and I'll wonder if what I did and said is good enough for anyone. And I *do* love people and care about them—there will be many moments when it's perfectly appropriate for me to be concerned about their feelings—and I don't want to lose *that* part of me. So, I probably will continue to worry. A little.

...which means I need you to tell me when I do...Because, as my terror of error is diminished I will, ironically, make even *more* mistakes than before. I'm not perfect and I will mess up. I don't want to hurt you, but realistically, it is probably going to happen. So, when I have hurt you, I will need your authentic, vulnerable, and kind feedback. And because I'm not confusing my mistakes and indiscretions

for *who I am*, my identity will not be at stake and I will be able to receive that feedback without defensiveness. And because I know my value and worth even in my fallibility, I will not do violence to *myself* with your feedback, either.

...so I can think about it...I will no longer respond compulsively. I will no longer feel responsible for taking away all of your hurt and discomfort. So, I may take my time to respond to you. I promise you I'm not brushing it under the rug. I simply want my response to be guided by wisdom, rather than fear of rejection or abandonment or condemnation. And I know wisdom takes time and discernment—maybe even space for mindfulness and prayer and meditation and consultation with a trusted confidant.

...and decide if I need to apologize. I know I'm broken and make mistakes. But I also know we're *all* broken, which means your *hurt* may not be my *fault*. And you may need to face it, rather than be rescued from it by my apology. And I am beginning to believe that I get to decide when I need to apologize. My fears and your demands will no longer dictate apologies and compensation. At the same time, please know that I value you—whether you are a friend or family member or a pedestrian on the street or a customer service representative—you *matter to me*, and I will take you and your hurt seriously. Even when I don't bear the burden of responsibility, I will feel the weight of compassion. And because all of this is true, when I do apologize, you will be able to trust the depth and sincerity of my remorse.

That's it.

One sentence to freedom.

One sentence to radical self-acceptance.

One sentence to healthy self-revelation.

One sentence to authentic vulnerability, connection, and belonging.

Once sentence to a very messy—but very real—love.