A person with long hair

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Turning a Bad Experience Into a Gift

May 16, 2021

Well hello friends.

I hope you guys had an amazing week.

Today I want to talk about something most of us don’t like to talk about.

I want to talk about bad experiences.

Now you might be wondering WHY we’d want to talk about bad experiences.

The truth is most of us will go to any length to avoid focusing on them.

We’ll engage in all sorts of numbing behaviors like overeating, overdrinking, overspending, over-whatevering, just to avoid having to think about them.

But today I want to serve up a different perspective because if you’re going to have any sort of career – whether as a corporate employee or a business owner – you’re going to experience things that you categorize as bad.

There are so many challenging experiences our corporate career can serve up.

* Getting passed over for promotion.
* Toxic culture.
* Backstabbing co-workers.
* Bad bosses.
* Failing at a key project.
* Being laid off or fired.

Or as a business owner…

* Losing customers
* Declining revenue
* Problem employees

And even for all of us around the world this past year…

* Covid…need I say more?

The truth is bad things happen.

And we’re left to deal with those things.

But the problem is, most of us DON’T.

And that’s why today I wanted to offer you an approach that will help you flip the script on the bad experience.

It’s going to rock your world.

So, let’s dive in.

A bad experience is anything that is not what we hoped of. Something that’s undesired, unpleasant, or unwelcome.

While of course the experience can be disappointing. But at its worst, that thing can make us feel like our life is completely OUT of our control.

And so many things in our career and life ARE out of the control.

I mean, we know we can’t change a toxic work culture.

We can’t make a bad or untrustworthy boss a good one.

We can’t prevent being put on the list for a layoff.

So, that inability to control something we don’t like can make us feel like a victim.

Being a victim doesn’t feel good.

After all, the definition of victim is “a person who is cheated or fooled by someone else; someone that is harmed by an unpleasant event.”

None of us want to feel cheated or fooled or harmed.

And when we feel that way, it doesn’t tend to bring out the best in ourselves as it relates to how we handle it.

We might yell or scream at someone.

We might cry.

We might plot to do harm ourselves – gossiping, spreading untruths, blaming – to get back at the person we think caused the bad thing.

Or we retreat into ourselves, trying to soothe the pain through indulgent or false pleasures that make feel better in the moment but in actuality, cause us even greater harm.

Most of us do this because we believe that focusing on the bad thing that happened will make us feel even worse. We think that by running away from it, by soothing ourselves, we can avoid the pain of having to deal with the downside.

But I’m going to offer you a different perspective.

When something bad happens, we need to do the opposite of running away from it. We need to turn back, look directly at it, and ask ourselves how that BAD thing can be a GOOD thing.

Or more specifically, we need to look for ways to turn that bad experience into a GIFT.

Right about how, you’re probably thinking of something bad that happened your mind might be telling you this is BS. There’s no way that thing could be a gift.

But it can.

For this, I want to share the 3 Gifts Technique, which I use in my coaching practice. This is from a book called Positive Intelligence by Shirzad Chamine, a standard professor who teaches cognitive approaches based on neuroscience and psychology.

The 3 Gifts Technique is based on the premise that every circumstance can be turned into an opportunity that serves you.

To use this technique, you must engage with the bad thing that happened so that you can mine it for lessons, for growth and for transformation.

For the purposes of sharing this technique, you must set aside the belief that you are a victim or that the thing is terrible or horrible or bad.

Instead, you need to view the thing that happened with curiosity. Without judgement.

As I share the 3 gifts technique, let’s work with a specific example to help bring it to life.

Let’s say you were just laid off.

It was unexpected and, in your mind, undeserved.

You’ve previously received stellar performance reviews and you get along well with colleagues. But maybe you’ve got a new boss and you just haven’t jelled. You kept thinking it would get better, that you’d eventually build a relationship or that they’d eventually see your value.

Now, you’re out of a job.

For most people, the natural inclination would be to blame the boss. To play the victim. To be angry. To find sympathizing friends to commiserate with. To indulge in things to make you feel better.

Instead, I’d like to introduce you to the first way to turn this situation into a gift.

And that is look for **The Gift of Knowledge**.

This is about what the thing that happened can teach you.

And there is ALWAYS something it can teach you.

When you look at the layoff through the lens of curiosity, you would ask yourself key questions like:

* What could I have done differently?
* What cold I do in the future to prepare me or to prevent something similar from happening?
* What did the people or the company or the boss have to teach me about what I want and don’t want?
* Was I really into the job? Did I give it everything I had or was I just going through the motions?

The answers to these questions are going to deliver to you, knowledge, and insights far more valuable to your future than whatever the cost of the layoff is to you now.

So, number one is the Gift of Knowledge.

The second is **The Gift of Power**. You could also think of this as the Gift of Strength.

Because here, when you look at the layoff through the lens of curiously, you’d ask yourself how dealing with the aftermath of this experience is cultivating new strengths in you.

Every time we go through an adversity, if we are truly learning the lessons that the adversity is here to teach us, it sharpens our skills.

It builds depth in our character.

It helps us uncover strengths we didn’t know we had.

By looking at the thing that happened with gratitude, we get to mine for gold.

We look at the experience and ask ourselves what we have to be grateful for about that thing. And here it’s about how it can help you grow, evolve or be even stronger than you were before.

Maybe it was here to teach you to be more humble.

You’re still a high achiever, but you’re no longer pretending to be perfect.

Maybe it was here to teach you to be more empathetic.

By going through the difficulty, you’re now more sympathetic to the troubles or challenges of others.

Maybe it was here to show you that it’s time to evolve.

Maybe your career path is no longer for you. Maybe it’s time to start your own business. Maybe it’s time to add new skills to your arsenal.

The Gift of Power or Strength is like spending time in the gym.

By seeing the thing through the lens of gratitude, you get to understand the LIGHT side of the BAD experience to really appreciate what it came here to teach you.

So that’s number two.

The third gift I **The Gift of Inspiration.**

This is where you take all the things you learned – the lessons from number one and the strengths of number two – and you use all of that learning and insight to turn that BAD experience into something transformative.

This is where you move from asking yourself “why did this happen to me?” or “I didn’t deserve that.” To instead asking yourself “how can I turn this experience into a gift.”

How could this be the best thing that ever happened to me?

How can I use this to serve others?

How can this be the catalyst for living a better life?

How could this inspire me to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (stop a bad habit, make different decisions, start over)?

Questions like this, build.

This is how bad things turn into the BEST things that ever happened to us.

And it’s as easy – and challenging – as choosing to look at the thing that happened through a different lens.

To turn your back on playing the victim or blaming.

And instead to actively looking with curiosity and gratitude.

That’s where you find the lessons and the gifts that lead to actions and outcomes that changes lives.

And listen, if you’re in the middle of a really challenging thing right now – especially something like losing your job which brings up scary things about money and our self-worth and value – I know how hard this concept can be.

You might be thinking, sure…maybe I can appreciate that thing down the road but right now, I’m trying to figure out how to put food on the table.

I’m not making light of the dark side of the challenges we all experience.

I’ve been there myself and so this episode is NOT intended to say that there isn’t a very real, tangible and potentially negative impact on our life in the near term.

There frequently is.

And I know you have to deal with those things and process through all the scary emotions they can bring up.

But what I REALLY want you to see is that when you’re in the middle of that bad thing.

When your life feels the scariest, loneliest, most victimized, THAT’S when the real value of this can help you. Granted, looking back on bad experiences of the past ALWAYS has value, but when you’re in the middle of it, the impact of this approach can be profound.

Why?

Because it forces you to shift from relying on your primitive brain, that part of your brain that’s at the back of our head near our spine – the part that’s evolved over the millennia and that’s all about fight or flight, staying in the cave, false pleasures and such.

Instead, by using The 3 Gifts, by leaning into curiosity and gratitude, you force your brain to rely on the prefrontal cortex. That’s the part in the front of our brain that is helps you channel positive emotions and behaviors like peace and calm, clear-headedness, creativity, and planning.

It starts with a simple belief.

Every situation can be turned into a gift or opportunity.

And that is a perspective that will not only turn that bad thing into a gift, but it’ll also change your life.

Until next time, make it a great week my friends.