

## The Power of Radical Acceptance

Have you ever been in a situation where everything seemed hopeless and you felt powerless to do anything to improve it? I think we can all relate to these types of circumstances at some point in our lives. Often, our first reaction is to blame ourselves or someone else. We usually get angry or upset, and lash out at others only to regret it later. Sometimes, we can find ourselves in an endless cycle of self-criticism or judgment of others. Unfortunately, all of these behaviours usually continue our suffering rather than end it. In fact, most of the time these negative reactions intensify our anger and distress.

A concept from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) offers another option. Developed by Dr. Marsha Linehan, DBT is associated with acceptance and change. It is focused on changing the behaviours in your life that are creating more suffering for yourself and others, while simultaneously also accepting yourself the way you are right now. Other skills related to DBT are focused on how you can change your life, but one of the first steps toward change is to comprehend your true reality.

One way to begin to do this is by *radically accepting* your life. Radical acceptance offers a new way of looking at your life by acknowledging the present situation, no matter what it is, without judgment or self-criticism. You cease fighting with the moment or denying it, and completely accept it. Radical acceptance can help you to see a situation for what it really is, and recognize that a whole series of events led up to it. It is not necessary to agree with the present moment or even like it, but it is essential to stop trying to change the past.

In fact, accepting the present moment might even help you to identify when you need to take action, and it will keep you from wasting time on blaming others. For example, you might realize that you need to leave an abusive workplace where the conditions have become intolerable. Instead of spending time on blame, by radically accepting your life you are able to concentrate on creating a viable plan for quitting your job and finding a new one. Even if there are many steps in the action plan, accepting each moment as it happens will help you to clearly focus on what you need to do.

Radical acceptance also helps us to acknowledge that we are responsible for some upsetting situations, while some are simply unfair and do not occur as a result of our own behaviour. In our lives, there is a balance between what has been created by us and what has been created by others. Radically accepting the present moment allows you to more clearly see the role you have played in creating the current situation. It also opens up space for you to respond to that situation in a new way that is less painful for yourself and others.

Of course, accepting reality will not make your pain go away. Suffering is a part of life, but it does not have to overwhelm you. The deliberate contemplation of certain phrases, such as "It is what it is" or "I cannot change what has already happened" or "The present is the only moment I

have control over", can be useful because they are all true. Judgments are not facts, but accepting a situation allows you to work from the solid standpoint of reality. Strengthening this skill over time will help you to deal with any life circumstances, especially if they are distressing, because your emotions will no longer be dictating your response to them.

Practicing radical acceptance will allow you to have more energy to confront any problem, consider and evaluate possible solutions, and carry them out. You will create more opportunities for intellectual reflection, and utilizing your interpersonal skills and intuition, in challenging life situations which will help you to handle them more effectively. Non-judgmentally and fully accepting one's present circumstances is difficult, but it will get easier with practice. Overall, radical acceptance can create a profound difference in how you cope with the most painful situations in your life.