



Each time we don't forgive ourselves or others is like a stone upon our heart.

~ Gail Grant

This packet includes the main materials for the **Life Lessons: Forgiveness** series that meets at Deborah's Palm on the first Wednesday of the month at noon and the third Wednesday at 1:15pm-2:45pm for those who want to go deeper. The article from Mayo Clinic on Forgiveness is included. It provides an excellent introduction to the topic and the benefits of Forgiveness. This document and others may be found at [www.GLGC.com/goodstuff/](http://www.GLGC.com/goodstuff/) along with all other handouts from the Life Lessons Series.

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## **-1- Forgiveness Foundations: Re-Framing Script**

Forgiveness is critical if we want to live a happier, healthier, fuller life. Each time we don't forgive ourselves or others is like a stone upon our heart. Revisiting this situation or grudge causes our brain to build neural networks built on resentment, fear, pain, and loss that dominate our outlook and color our judgment. Each time we revisit a grudge, it gets stronger and strengthens the template for grudges and its priority in understanding situations. Grudges hurt ourselves more than anyone else. By identifying and clearing out grudges, we can live more abundant lives.

Grudges come in all shapes and sizes. Some grievances include a reconciliation while others may not. Not all grudges are against a single person. We all have grudges against behaviors, classes of people, and situations. It is often hard to admit these grudges but it is impossible to clear them out without first recognizing them. You can practice reframing using common grudges, such as:

- Bad drivers
- Berners not supporting Hillary
- People who are perpetually late/don't follow through/cancel at the last minute

The primary purpose of forgiveness is to release yourself from the burden of blame/grudge. ***It may or may not involve reconciliation with another person.*** This is done by letting go of the grudge through re-framing it.

### **A Re-Framing Template**

Action	Example
1. State your overall goal.	I want to be free of grudges so I can live a better life.
2. Name the grievance/grudge.	Drivers on the road cut in line, refuse to let you in, honk or make gestures. It is irritating.
3. Articulate its impact.	This grudge makes me grumpy when driving and can carry over to other encounters.
4. What would life be like without this grudge?	I would be more gracious and kind as a driver and I would be happier.
5. Reframing the grievance: reasons this person/group may have done/do this.	People are always in such a rush. Sometimes the rush is habit, other times for a valid reason. I have no way of knowing which.
6. Reframing the grievance: do others do this, have you done this, is it common?	This is common and I have done it and others do it. I only hurt myself by holding on to the irritation.
7. Summarize the reframing.	By realizing that this is common and may have more to do with others than me, I can begin to let go of this.
8. Explore alternative avenues to meet possible needs.	I can look for kindness instead of impatience on the road.
9. Reaffirm life without this grudge.	By letting go, I'll be able to be more relaxed on the road and not be bothered by other drivers' actions.
10. Act if/when it comes back.	Rearticulate the steps.

## **-2- School of Life**

*Life is a school where we learn skills and behaviors that help us to become better people. We take courses in things we need to learn and help teach others as we learn. If we don't pass a course, we will repeat it until we do.*

### **Types of Courses:**

**Remedial:** You can't even recognize it or are in denial

**Intro:** You know what it is but you can't do it yet

**101:** Trying to make or making progress at the basic level

**201:** Some skills developed, working on strengthening this for more advanced work

**Graduate Work:** Teaching you to teach it or more deeply integrate it.

**Intensive:** A short course that shows you just how far you have to go or have gone. Often used to get you off a high horse of thinking you have a besetting problem conquered for all time or encourage you in a slump.

Some examples of course areas: Gratitude, Trust, Listening, Patience, Helpfulness, Service, Love, Mindfulness, Renewal, Self-Care, Letting Go, Flexibility, Forgiveness, Voicing Needs

### **My Course Load:**

Forgiveness 201; finally passed 101 after spending a few years in remedial forgiveness

Positive Assumption Training 101; Negative Assumption Remedial 101; still repeating these courses but getting closer to passing.

Compulsive Fixing Recovery 101 (revolving repeat)

Self-Care 101 (revolving repeat)

### **Your Top Classes and Levels:**

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
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### -3- Hardwiring Happiness by Rick Hanson, Ph.D.

For more than 99% of the past 60 million years, we needed our instincts (p. 221). Survival of the species required that our ancestors pay attention to the negative, not the positive. Times have changed, but our brain has not. Our brain has **Teflon for good** experiences and **Velcro for bad** experiences (p. 27). We gravitate to the negative/adversarial because that kept us alive in the past.

What you pay attention to – what you rest your mind on – is the primary shaper of your brain. The more attention you pay to negative things, the more negative you become. The cost of negative experiences routinely outweigh their benefits, and often there's no benefit at all, just pain with no gain. *Since neurons that fire together wire together, staying with a negative experience past the point that's useful is like running laps in Hell: You dig the track a little deeper in your brain each time you go around it.* (p. 12)

Positive experiences always have gain and rarely have pain. They usually feel good in the moment. The most direct way to grow inner strengths such as determination or compassion is to have experiences of them in the first place. If you want to develop gratitude, keep resting your mind on feeling thankful. By paying attention to the good, you can hardwire your brain to be happier. (p. 13)

There are three "operating systems" in your brain. These developed in three stages that are loosely associated with reptile, mammal, and primate/human phases of evolution. ***Although we do not need these systems for survival any longer, they still operate as if our lives depended on their function.*** (p. 33)

#### **Features of the Avoiding, Approaching, Attaching Systems (p. 36)**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Avoiding</b>	<b>Approaching</b>	<b>Attaching</b>
<b>Need</b>	Safety	Satisfaction	Connection
<b>Challenge</b>	Threat	Loss	Rejection
<b>Attends to</b>	Risks	Opportunities	Relationships
<b>Priorities</b>	Preventing declines	Promoting improvements	Sexuality, intimacy, self-worth
<b>Appreciates from others</b>	Reassurance	Encouragement	Warmth
<b>Capabilities</b>	Freeze, flight, fight	Forage, sustained chase	Empathy, bonding, language
<b>Behavioral inclination</b>	Caution, inhibition, withdrawal	Eagerness, excitation, pursuit	Sociability, bonding, affection
<b>Key neurotransmitter systems</b>	Acetylcholine	Dopamine, opioids	Oxytocin, vasopressin
<b>Branch of vagus nerve</b>	First		Second
<b>Key area of brain</b>	Right hemisphere; less left prefrontal activation	Left hemisphere; more left prefrontal activation	Social engagement system
<b>System Origin</b>	<b>Reptilian</b>	<b>Mammalian</b>	<b>Primate</b>

## Responsive Mode of the Three Systems (p. 40)

Characteristic	Avoiding	Approaching	Attaching
<b>Sense of Self</b>	Safe	Satisfied	Connected
<b>View of World</b>	Protection	Sufficiency	Inclusion
<b>Stance</b>	Confident	Fulfilled	Related
<b>Copes through</b>	Asserting	Aspiring	Caring
<b>Related actions</b>	Dignity, gravity, restraint	Generosity, creativity	Empathy, compassion, kindness, cooperation, affection
<b>Central experience</b>	Peace	Contentment	Love
<b>Related feelings</b>	Strong, calm, relaxed, tranquil, agency, efficacy	Grateful, glad, enthusiastic, accomplished, successful	Seen, liked, appreciated, worthy, cherished, special

When a system is in responsive mode, it is quiescent. Its prime directive – safety, satisfaction, connection – has been met so we are free to respond in a positive manner. Unfortunately, we often put ourselves into reactive mode through stress, perceptions, and situations.

## Reactive Mode of the Three Systems (p. 47)

Characteristic	Avoiding	Approaching	Attaching
<b>Sense of Self</b>	Unsafe	Unsatisfied	Disconnected
<b>View of World</b>	Danger	Scarcity	Exclusion
<b>Stance</b>	Aversive	Coveting	Separated
<b>Copes through</b>	Resisting	Grasping	Clinging
<b>Related actions</b>	Appease, freeze, flee flight	Drivenness, addiction	Reproach, quarreling, prejudice
<b>Central experience</b>	Fear	Frustration	Heartache
<b>Related feelings</b>	Angry, immobilized, defeated, weak, overwhelmed, helpless	Disappointed, failed, sad, grieving	Hurt, dismissed, abandoned, mistreated, provoked, aggrieved, envious, jealous, rejected, lonely, ashamed, inadequate, unworthy

By simply staying with positive experiences, emotions and memories, we can begin to rewire the default paths through our brain to feel safe, satisfied, and connected as our default mode. When we approach life from the responsive mode, we are happier and those around us have a more positive experience with us.

***When we are open, fulfilled, and loved, those around us feel more open, fulfilled, and loved.***

**Summary of Responsive and Reactive Modes (p. 51)**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Responsive</b>	<b>Reactive</b>
<b>Sense of Self</b>	Safe, satisfied, connected	Unsafe, unsatisfied, disconnected
<b>View of World</b>	Protection, sufficiency, inclusion	Danger, scarcity, exclusion
<b>Stance</b>	Confident, fulfilled, related	Aversive, coveting, separated
<b>Copes through</b>	Asserting, aspiring, caring	Resisting, grasping, clinging
<b>Metabolism</b>	Replenishment	Depletion
<b>Bodily systems</b>	Building up	Wearing down
<b>Effect on health</b>	Salutogenic	Pathogenic
<b>Equilibrium</b>	Stable, homeostatic	Disturbed, allostatic
<b>Central Experience</b>	Peace, contentment, love	Fear, frustration, heartache

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## **-6-** The Neurology of Forgiveness: Retraining our Brain – Part One

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### Why re-wire?

1. Our brains naturally developed Velcro for bad and Teflon for good for survival in earlier times.
2. Staying with the negative reinforces our natural predilection for negative.
3. Our bodies cannot heal when we are in reactive mode.
4. We are more relaxed when we are in responsive mode.
5. Positive experiences can tip the scale from reactive to responsive mode and help to change the default mode.

Retraining our brain is done by rewiring the default neural pathways from negative to positive by exercising and the building of the positive pathways through persistent use. ***Whatever you focus on shapes your brain and guides your interactions with the world. It is your default stance.***

**Hardwiring Happiness Examples:** The purpose of these examples is to give you a flavor for what rewiring can look like. To see more about that situation, go to the listed page number in the book.

P59: A woman suddenly **lost a relationship** after more than a decade of happiness. He was the love of her life. After he left, she felt empty and despairing. She talked with her friends, exercised, meditated, and saw a therapist, all of which helped but her grief still felt intense, and sometimes overwhelming. She decided to add taking in the good to the other things she was doing to feel better and something began to shift. When she went for a run, she felt good. "When I stayed with how this felt it was like the good feelings were soaking into my brain from the body up," she said. The same thing happened when she took a hot bath and let the relaxation sink in. "My sadness and hopelessness began to pass away." After a few weeks, she said that ***taking in the good feelings a few times each day had played a real role in easing her sense of loss.***

P67: I love to take in the good whenever I eat an **orange**. I have at least two a day, so I get an opportunity to experience this moment often. As I break through the skin, I gently close my eyes and breathe in the sweet scent. I hold that pleasure in my mind and think about how I am the first person ever to see inside this orange and taste its fruit. Although this experience takes less than a minute, it has an enormously positive effect on my mood and energy level. I look forward to it throughout the day.

P69: I was having **panic attacks**, and so each day I went out on my back porch and focused on my garden. I would look at the plants I love and watch the insects buzz around, the birds hop between plants, and the sunshine filter through the leaves. For a few minutes, I would take in the feelings of safety I had in my garden. Sometimes I imagined this confidence and peace making a golden protective bubble around me. Then I would pick up a small object from the garden and put it in my pocket. When I started to feel uncomfortable anxiety, I held the object, remembering how I felt in my garden, and bringing those feelings of strength and peace into my mind.

P84: **morning refuge** It was dark when I awoke, and I listened to the magical sound of light rain on the skylights, warmly snuggled under my comforter. I felt safe and loved, and soaked in this feeling. After getting up, the dogs and I headed to the dog park, which we had to ourselves in the early morning. It was quiet -- no birds chirping, very few cars going by, a sense of peace and solitude in a busy city. ***I felt so grateful. I closed my eyes, breathed deeply, and gave myself to it.***

P94: I live in **Detroit**, where 40% of the land has been abandoned, which means that it is like living in nature amidst urban ruins. The other day when I was out in the urban prairie. I was literally stopped in my tracks by a tree full of raucous birds. I looked up, taking in the sounds and the sights, letting them fill every part of me. I became aware of the hum of the distant freeway, which created a symphony played by birds and cars. Taking in moments like these has helped me see the world in a new way. Sometimes, late afternoon sunlight on the red brick of an abandoned building can be almost too beautiful for words.

P96: **hill of flowers**. There is a hillside near my house that is covered with flowers most of the year. When I am working in an office building, I know the hill is still beautiful: the colors, the brilliant purples, oranges, blues, and pinks. In my mind I can see the squirrels running over the mossy rocks. ***It is like my little sanctuary at work, to know that the flowers are there while I sit in meetings.***

P98: **good work**. There is an awkward stage in medical residency when haunting doubts about your professional competency hover like dark clouds. To cope, I really took it in when things did go well, such as the gratitude from a schizophrenic patient others had given up on, who told me he cherished our therapy sessions together as he slowly began to regain his life. ***The more I let in real examples of being competent, the last I heard the negative tape playing in my head and the happier and more engaged I felt.***

Changing your brain with **H.E.A.L (p. 61):**

1. **Have a positive experience.** Look for things that are positive in the foreground or back ground, no matter how small, such as beautiful weather, enjoying time with a friend, a book, an view, or a memory. If you don't find one, create it by calling to mind something positive, such as an accomplishment, something for which you are thankful, someone close to you. This step *activates* a positive mental state and the next three steps *install* it in your brain.
2. **Enrich it.** Stay with the experience for 5-10 seconds longer. Savor it, feel it in your body, mind, heart, and soul/spirit. Look for a new aspect, such as the good a friend brings out in you, the color of the sky at sunset, the soft warmth of the sun. Relate the experience to others in your life. The more aspects of yourself you involve in your enrichment, the stronger the experience. *The greater the duration, intensity, multimodality, novelty, and personal relevance, the greater the retention. (p. 111ff)*
3. **Absorb it.** Imagine the experience sinking into you. Find a visual that works for you - healing balm, warm oil, golden light, music, angel wings - and use this to feel the experience become part of you. **(p. 91ff)**
4. **Link it to positive and negative material.** Link the experience to others of like kind or those of opposite kind. You might want to link someone's praise to a bad memory of past bullying so that the praise arises with the bullying memory to lessen its impact. **(p.128ff)**
  - a. When something triggers a painful negative memory, it stays in the foreground of your brain for several minutes to several hours, depending on how strong it is. **(p. 130)**
  - b. During that time, you can link positive information to the negative. It is possible to even erase the negative by overpowering it with the positive. Examples: tragic death of a loved one, deeply embarrassing moment, trauma, fear. **(p. 135ff)** **One Minute for Good: p. 176**

**Avoiding Harms Antidotes**

Negative Material	Positive Experience
Weakness	Strength
Helplessness	Effectiveness
Alarm	Protection, safety, calm
Anxiety, fear, worry	Reassurance, seeing strengths, you're okay now
Feeling contaminated	Cleansing, sensing ways you ARE healthy
Sensitivity, Hypersensitive Fight or Flight	Soothing of the senses, activation of calm
Immobilization,freezing	Physical activity, venting

**Approaching Rewards Antidotes**

Negative Material	Positive Experience
Disappointment, sadness, loss	Gratitude, gladness, beauty, pleasure, gain
Frustration	Accomplishment, seeing goals attained
Failure	Success
Drivenness	Satisfaction, fulfillment
Boredom, apathy	Feeling the rich fullness of this moment

**Attaching to Others Antidotes**

Negative Material	Positive Experience
Abandoned, neglected	Feeling loved
Ignored, misunderstood	Feeling seen, receiving empathy
Left out, excluded	Belonging, feeling wanted
Inadequacy, shame, worthlessness	Feeling recognized, appreciated, prized
Loneliness	Friendship, being kind to others, self caring
False front, "imposter syndrome"	Feeling accepted, accepting self, sincerity
Resentment, anger at someone	Assertiveness, others' support, self-compassion



## **-8- Mayo Clinic on Forgiveness**

Nearly everyone has been hurt by the actions or words of another. Perhaps your mother criticized your parenting skills, your colleague sabotaged a project or your partner had an affair. These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance.

But if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Generally, forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The act that hurt or offended you might always remain a part of your life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help you focus on other, more positive parts of your life. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize or justify the wrong. You can forgive the person without excusing the act.

Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life.

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for happiness, health and peace. Forgiveness can lead to:

- Healthier relationships
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Lower blood pressure
- Fewer symptoms of depression
- Stronger immune system
- Improved heart health
- Higher self-esteem

When you're hurt by someone you love and trust, you might become angry, sad or confused. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice. If you're unforgiving, you might:

- Bring anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience
- Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- Become depressed or anxious
- Feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- Lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others

Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. To begin, you might:

- Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life at a given time
- Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being
- Actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you, when you're ready
- Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life

As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt. You might even find compassion and understanding.

Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit wrong or doesn't speak of his or her sorrow. If you find yourself stuck:

- Consider the situation from the other person's point of view.
- Ask yourself why he or she would behave in such a way. Perhaps you would have reacted similarly if you faced the same situation.
- Reflect on times you've hurt others and on those who've forgiven you.
- Write in a journal, pray or use guided meditation — or talk with a person you've found to be wise and compassionate, such as a spiritual leader, a mental health provider, or an impartial loved one or friend.
- Be aware that forgiveness is a process and even small hurts may need to be revisited and forgiven over and over again.

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. This isn't always the case, however.

Reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.

If you haven't reached a state of forgiveness, being near the person who hurt you might prompt you to be tense and stressful. To handle these situations:

- Remember that you can choose to attend or avoid specific functions and gatherings. If you choose to attend, don't be surprised by a certain amount of awkwardness and perhaps even more intense feelings.
- Respect yourself and do what seems best.
- Do your best to keep an open heart and mind. You might find that the experience helps you to move forward with forgiveness.

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to wield in your life.

The first step is to honestly assess and acknowledge the wrongs you've done and how those wrongs have affected others. At the same time, avoid judging yourself too harshly. You're human, and you'll make mistakes.

If you're truly sorry for something you've said or done, consider admitting it to those you've harmed. Speak of your sincere sorrow or regret, and specifically ask for forgiveness — without making excuses.

Remember, however, you can't force someone to forgive you. Others need to move to forgiveness in their own time. Whatever the outcome, commit to treating others with compassion, empathy and respect.

Original article: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/forgiveness/art-20047692>