

Doing The Work: Trusting the Truth

How to answer the questions you hate to hear

By Kathryn Dixon

Some questions that come up in life just make my stomach turn -- How much do you weigh? How many times have you been married? Have you ever been fired? You probably have a few of your own un-favorites, yes? Changing the subject may seem the easiest solution to these invasive queries, but perhaps they show up for a reason. Maybe they are in fact an opportunity to come to peace with the truth.

My truth seems to occasionally bear a thriving kinship with traditional wisdoms, and yet also veers wildly from them in ways that tend to keep me from any organized church. Upon reflection, I also note that my truth tends to change. It just keeps refining and expanding, and sacred cows of the past have become fertilizer for the richness of my current relationship with it.

The notion that for me to respect, value or even love you, it is of the utmost importance that we share the same truths, or at least not hold ones that are diametrically opposed, confounds the issue. Agreement is not a feat easily accomplished in this temporal realm of duality. "If you love me, you'll agree with me." "If you respect me you won't question me and my current version of truth." Yikes. It has never worked. No matter how hard I've tried. Then there's always the question of how much truth is relevant -- do I tell everything, or "Just the facts, Ma'am"?

Most of us can agree that we tend to skimp on the truth in the course of our daily affairs, ranging from dismissing minor details to hedging on integrity in relationships and business dealings. Sometimes fear of the truth gets so big that we find ourselves in the middle of a juicy whopper before we even know it, clueless about how we got there. It doesn't matter how big or little the skimp; the common denominator of all skimping is unrest. This article can't tackle the question of what truth really is, but it may be helpful to take a look at what it isn't. By pondering the results of avoiding simple truths in our lives, we just might be inspired to make better friends with it and thereby enjoy a deeper awareness of its nature.

The tool for this adventure will be self-inquiry via The Work of Byron Katie (www.thework.org), one of the simplest yet most powerful vehicles for clarity and freedom that I've come across. It's just four questions you can ask yourself, followed by a "turn-around." The questions themselves don't transform; your answers do it. At the end of it all, most folks suddenly find themselves in a world that is kinder, freer and lots more fun. If you feel so inclined, I encourage you to find your own answers to the questions. Theories are arguable; experience is transformational.

Start with the belief: If I tell the truth, I might lose something.

Question 1: Can I really know that it's true? Well, no. But it sure looks like I could. Who would like me if they knew how much I really weigh? Who would hire me if they knew I'd been fired three times? Who would marry me if they knew I'd blown the marriage thing twice?

Question 2: What do I get when I hold this belief? I get fear and withdrawal. I get to live in a shallow world. I treat myself like the true me is a loser. I treat people like they are not very kind, compassionate or forgiving. I get to feel unworthy, live in denial and dismiss the truth in order to get something I think I want more.

Question 3A: Can I see a reason to drop the belief? Yes. And please don't ask me to drop it; while the effects are devastating, it's familiar and all I've ever known. Question 3B: Can I see a reason to keep the belief that doesn't cause stress? No. Not a one. Every time I live from this belief, my stomach lurches and my throat closes -- not a good combo.

Question 4: Who would I be without the belief? Not so afraid. I'd be more open. I'd be 100% honest instead of 94%. I might actually feel fearless -- uncompromising and not needy. I'd be living in a kinder world, being kinder to myself and others. I'd make peace with myself and peace with the world -- exactly as I am.

The "turn-around" is the pearl of The Work; recreate the original statement in various ways, revealing insightful and freeing perspectives. In this case, the first and most obvious is turning the statement around to its opposite:

If I tell the truth, I won't lose something.

How would I know? I rarely if ever risk it, and I certainly can't know the future before it happens. Maybe I wouldn't lose anything that really matters to me in the long haul. With the old belief, even if I got what I thought I wanted, it would come at the cost of my integrity, and that is actually a greater loss than losing anything external to me.

If I don't tell the truth, I will lose something.

Yes, there is no doubt about that. When I don't tell the truth, or all of it, I lose self-respect and also fail to show respect for others. I lose a world where it is safe to be honest. I also lose me.

So, will I always tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth from here on? Probably not, just yet. I've skimmed on it for awhile, it's an old habit that may take some time to break. But after this inquiry, it doesn't look so scary to tell the whole truth to the world or myself anymore -- especially when I can see so clearly what the cost of holding back really is.

To thine own self be true. I'm more open to the possibilities of that than ever. The idea

feels really, really good. And when I'm open to living true to myself, I will undoubtedly be truer to you as well.
