

“Mc” Courtesy – I’m Lovin’ It!

Recently, my teenager joined the roughly 5 million Americans working in the fast food industry. I’m proud to see my child becoming a productive young adult, and I’m hopeful that employment will reinforce the value of hard work, and boost her mental health and resilience, which have both been tested during the pandemic.

After work, my child regales me with stories from her shift – most of which are amusing, but some provide truly horrifying glimpses into just how shockingly inhumane we are willing to treat each other, especially service industry workers. The “customer is king” and “have it your way” retail philosophies that permeate our culture are too often interpreted as license to behave like entitled tyrannical despots when what we really need are more benevolent monarchs to steady the current of aggression in our society.

So, how *do* we avoid disrespecting others (and ultimately ourselves), and becoming wretched human beings that no one wants to be around? Albert Ellis, founder of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy has some suggestions:

Ellis argues that we need to watch out for irrational beliefs, including the **Three Basic Musts** – unconscious cognitions that shape our behavior through their influence on our views of ourselves, others, the world around us, and what the future holds. These irrational beliefs include:

- *I must do well and always receive others’ approval, or else I am no good*
- *I must be treated considerately, fairly, kindly, and in exactly the way I want to be treated*
- *I must always get what I want, when I want it; and I must never get what I do not want*

It may be hard to imagine expressing any of these beliefs out loud, and that’s because most of us aren’t sociopaths. However, during our ugliest public displays, one or more of the above beliefs is a likely at play. Ellis provides a framework for understanding the roots of our unflattering behavior

- A- **Activating Event** – What happened? Ex. – A drive-thru worker forgets to include ketchup with your Kid’s Meal order, which you don’t discover until your incensed child points it out to you.
- B- **Belief**. What irrational belief(s) is/are operating in the background? Using the same scenario as above, *‘Those people are idiots! They always mess up my order! I cannot stand being disrespected like this!’*
- C- **Consequence** – The more we convince ourselves that our beliefs are accurate, the more we are to do things like: drive back and berate the drive-thru worker, yell at our children for expressing disappointment, rashly post something degrading online, or attempt to secure others’ sympathy in the face of such atrocity.

So, how do we put a stop to this slow-motion train wreck? Again, Ellis for the win!

- D- **Dispute** your belief(s). Are food service workers truly idiots, or do they forget things when they are busy just like you? Do they always mess up your order, or do they in fact get it right most of the time? Is a forgotten condiment really worth more than your self-respect and humanity? Instead try to focus on thoughts like ‘I’m just glad that I didn’t have to cook’; ‘people make mistakes when they’re busy’; ‘we have ketchup in the fridge’; or ‘here’s an opportunity to help a child learn to manage disappointment’
- E- **Effect** of challenging the belief – Notice the difference in how you feel when you focus on these latter thoughts? Less furious, more calm and patient. And the net benefits? Less belligerent behavior, reduced risk of jail time, lowered blood pressure, better dinner conversation, and greater ability to live within your values.

It takes humility to even consider that our views may be imbalanced and unhelpful, especially when we’re stressed. It also takes determined practice, patience for failure, and compassion toward ourselves and others to make a change when we recognize that it is needed. The good news is, the outcomes are worth the effort and provide reinforcement to keep at it!