

Turn your enemies into powerful allies

By Barbara and Serge Roux-Levrat

We all have them, they are everywhere: people who dislike us or who feel the need to step on us on their way up the ladder. For us, the temptation to return an eye for an eye is great. Revenge has an extremely sweet *foretaste*... the problem is its extremely bitter *aftertaste*.

When we hate our enemies, we are in fact creating problems for ourselves: polluting our lives, losing our peace, limiting our possibilities, and wasting our energy on destructive thoughts. If we truly want to win the war against our enemies, we are better off choosing to treat them with compassion and sympathy. Not only can this turn them into powerful allies, but we will be free to concentrate our energy, thoughts and time on constructive activities - for ourselves and for our goals.



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This is a fact of life: no matter what we do, we will come across people who will:

- criticize, gossip and rumor about us,
- stab us in the back or sabotage our work,
- seek to belittle us or put us down,
- accuse us of something we have not done,
- exclude us from key information loops,
- try to take unmerited credit,
- pursue their own hidden agendas at our own expense,
- jockey for favor,
- etc.

These are usually the people we consider our enemies. Some are quite obvious and easy to identify, but they are the minority. Most are astute politicians who will pretend to be our friends (or to support our projects) when in fact they are ready to betray us at a key opportune time. They operate in the darkness and consequently are quite difficult to nail down.

What motivates our enemies to behave the way they do? These people act out of fear, envy, greed, lust, or ambition, because, deep down, they are wounded and hurting. They are thirsty for recognition, and power in order to have the feeling that they exist. They have a strong need to feel valuable and worthy because they have a low self-esteem and believe that they cannot win unless someone else loses. As a result, they are prepared to do anything to get ahead.

When we are confronted with such people, it is quite natural for us to treat them as our enemies too. The question is: is this beneficial to us? Does this serve us in the long run? When we simply take revenge on someone for what they have done, will our action foster collaboration? Will it promote an environment where honest discussions are the norm? Will it ultimately facilitate the implementation of our initiatives? Will it give us peace of mind or will we be consumed by feelings of hatred and apprehension?

“The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.”

Abraham Lincoln

What lesson have we learned from the African tribal wars? One tribe goes and massacres the other, then the other massacres the first one, then the first one massacres the second one again, and so on and so forth. When we look at the history of human nature we find that revenge has never been the solution to interpersonal relationship problems!

The way out has been given to us over 2,000 years ago: Jesus Christ taught us that we should *love* our enemies - this is the most effective way to overcome them! Abraham Lincoln, one of the wisest and better known US presidents, said, “the best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.”

How do we love our enemies? Firstly, let's look at what loving our enemies is not. Loving our enemies is not letting them maltreat us, abuse us, walk over us, or ruin our reputation.

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Proverbs 15:1

Loving someone is never about accepting their wrong behavior. Quite the opposite, when someone is behaving wrongly, it is our duty to let him know that this is wrong and to defend our rights. In other words, we should never play the victim in order to "love" someone. This only turns them into monsters. What we want is to show respect and compassion to them, as well as to ourselves.

Loving our enemies is when we:

- do not take revenge,
- do not seek to humiliate them,
- do not avoid them,
- continue to treat them with courtesy and respect, even if they do not deserve it,
- are willing to collaborate with them,
- give them the benefit of the doubt,
- keep the lines of communication open with them,
- choose our battles carefully,
- let go of past offences and do not hold grudges against them,
- remain optimistic, believing that they can change and conquer their fears.

Simply put, to love our enemies means that we continue to behave rightly, although they may behave wrongly. The opposite, to copy their behavior, means we have embraced their values and there is no longer any difference between them and us. We have, in fact, given them a position of leadership in our lives and we have become their followers!

Loving our enemies is a position of strength. It means that we are not compromising our values because of the other person's lack of. We are not letting them dictate how we behave. They cannot influence us because we have chosen not to be influenced by them.

How can we return good for evil? This requires not only that we are courageous, self-confident, self-controlled and emotionally strong, but that we also have the capacity to heal the emotional wounds that our enemy inflicts upon us.

Indeed, if we are not able to heal those wounds, it will be truly impossible to return good for evil, because when we are hurting, our tendency is to want to hurt. Don't we see this in failed relationships every day?

The only way to heal those wounds, is not through time, nor through forgetting what happened, nor through ignoring them either. Suppressing or repressing our emotions only seems like a solution, but manifests itself later on with dramatic consequences for ourselves.

Forgiving is the only tool that we can leverage to treat our wounds and prevent them from becoming life-long ulcers. And we need to forgive with all our heart, otherwise bad roots will spring again in our minds.

What makes it so hard to forgive others? Mostly, pride... Pride is what prompts us to falsely believe that we are better than our enemies; that we never make mistakes ourselves; that we would never have done what the other did. Pride tells us that the world is unjust, that we always get the bad end of the deal, that the other doesn't deserve our forgiveness.

The antidote to pride is humility. Humility is when we are not blind to our own faults; when we accept and acknowledge that we are not perfect and never will be no matter how much we strive for excellence. Humility is when we realize that we need forgiveness just as much as the person next door.

Have you not made the same experience as me, that we hurt work colleagues sometimes without willing it, by our comments, actions or lack of actions? As far as we are concerned, we are very happy that many of the people that we hurt did not retaliate, but forgave us instead. There is no doubt that it has helped us become better persons with time.

“Always forgive your enemies – nothing annoys them so much.”

Oscar Wilde

Loving our enemies is loving ourselves. Forgiving enables us to detoxify our mind of all the bad thoughts that we entertain when we feel unfairly treated or when we seek revenge. Psychologists tell us that unless we quickly flush out the destructive thoughts that unforgiveness

generates in our minds and hearts, we can lock ourselves in prisons of self-pity, frustration, bitterness or fear. Can we then effectively engage and mobilize other people when we live in such prisons? No.

Living in these prisons will not only limit our growth and promotion chances also, but more importantly, it will negatively affect our health as well. Our life will be anything but satisfying and rewarding because our prisons will rob us of the great corporate (not to mention private) life that we could have had, of the blessings we should have received, of the opportunities we could have seized. This is a very high price to pay!

On the contrary, when we choose to love our enemies we are in control of our lives, we live in peace (not only with others, but also with ourselves), and we open key taps of abundance. We live a life free of stress, worry and guilt. We don't have to hide from our enemies or be preoccupied with our revenge plans. Instead, we can use that energy to execute our strategy without unnecessary distractions, to become people connectors, to foster cross-unit collaboration, and to drive our teams to peak performance.

“Do good to your friends to keep them, to your enemies to win them.”
Benjamin Franklin

Strength of character

Ultimately, loving our enemies is a choice. And to exercise this choice, we must become aware of the thoughts and

emotions that we harbor each time we take a blow or are unfairly treated by someone. How can we do that? We need to: a) identify how we feel about what the person has said, done or not done; b) ask ourselves whether we should respond; and c) consciously decide how we will respond before we react. By taking this time off before responding, we will not be managed by our emotions, but by our principles. This is strength of character and is what leaders need most.

When we return good for evil, we are planting a seed of love in the hearts of our enemies, which might bring forth good fruit in very little time. Many times, a person "hates" us out of a misunderstanding, or simply because they feel ignored or disliked by us. In these cases, some sympathy from us is all that is required to turn them around.

There are other cases where no matter how hard we try, we will not succeed. However, this doesn't mean that we have wasted our time and energy: the person might continue to hate us and feel bad every time they see us, but we, on the other hand, will be free of negative emotions and thoughts – we will have inner peace! If they cut all lines of communication with us, this is okay. We just need to be willing to open ours if they tune in to our channel in the future. This is strength of character.

Concluding thoughts

Learning to love our enemies is not easy. In fact, it is a life-long journey and process. Many times, I [Serge] have personally failed to love my enemies as I should have, and I paid a big prize for it. Not only did I not have peace of mind, but also some of my projects got delayed or I failed to rally the support of key people for the initiatives I was

seeking to launch. Yes, ultimately, I crossed the finishing line successfully in most cases, but I had to both use a lot more energy and spend a lot more time than was necessary. Needless to say, my private life was also impacted.

“He who seeks vengeance must dig two graves: one for his enemy and one for himself.”
Chinese Proverb

What saved me from continuing to follow this destructive path was the realization that I was not opening many taps of abundance in my life by behaving the way I did.

After applying the power of forgiveness to both myself and those who had intentionally or unintentionally hurt me, I reaped great blessings: freedom, joy, peace and lots of new friends. It has also enabled me to grow and mature as a person. It has flattened the path before me, facilitating my achievements and making my work a lot more enjoyable.

Please do not get me wrong: I am not perfect and still fail at times to love my enemies... But what matters is not so much that I lose some battles, but that I constantly strive to be better.

The world would like us to believe that maintaining enemies is without cost. However, this is not true at all. Hatred weakens our health in the long run, it eats us up emotionally and mentally; it makes us lose our objectivity and affects the quality of our decisions. It leads us to build walls of defensiveness instead

of connecting bridges, isolating us over time and diminishing our ability to mobilize people within and across divisions. It directs our energy towards destructive activities. This is a losing path: we lose, our teams lose, our companies lose.

Conflicts are a fact of life, and therefore of corporations. If we want to become great at engaging, energizing, and focusing people on key goals, we cannot even be neutral towards our enemies.

“Always remember that others may hate you. But those who hate you won’t win unless you hate them. And then, you destroy yourself.”

Richard M. Nixon

We need to actively love them and forgive their offenses as quickly as possible. This path is empowering and positive, fostering growth and character development for all parties involved.

Do not wait longer to acknowledge this reality: decide today to make your life easier and more enjoyable by turning your enemies into powerful allies.

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If you wish to have getTalented run a “Turn your enemies into powerful allies” workshop for your unit, division or company, please contact Serge at srl@getTalented.com.