

# SMALL Business Times

Reprinted from *Small Business Times*, February 16 2001

## What's bugging you?

*Free up energy by learning to zap away annoyances that you're tolerating*

By Jo Hawkins Donovan, for *Small Business Times*

**W**ith all my coaching clients, at some point I say, "Now I want you to stop tolerating anything." Then they look at me as if to say, "I knew this coaching thing was going to get weird at some point."

That's when I begin to talk about the energy they lose every day by tolerating things that bug them.

We human beings roll along, putting up with lots of stuff, most of which isn't necessary. Such tolerating drains our energy and puts us into cranky moods.

Some clients tell me they tolerate little nuisances like a showerhead that dribbles. Once they start listing their tolerations, they realize some are in the nuisance category, and others are real big pains in the rear, like people who drive them nuts or bore them silly.

I learned about zapping tolerations by going through three years of study at Coach University. The founder of that organization, Thomas Leonard, came up with a program about getting rid of tolerations. He made it a part of his Personal Foundation Program, which all Coach U students complete before they graduate.

As a student, I was skeptical about the program, as I am about most "new" things presented to me at this stage of life. Nevertheless, and with my skepticism right with me, I myself started ridding my life of little, then big stuff that annoyed me daily. And I got into it.

With clients, I suggest they make lists of things they are tolerating in their home life, in their relationships with family and friends, and at work. Then I ask them to identify the top five in each category, and begin eliminating them.

Sometimes zapping the tolerations costs money, like fixing the showerhead. They begin to appreciate, though, the energy cost of being agitated daily by some pesky thing or another. I coach clients to stop putting up with little things first, then move on to

the bigger items. By then, they usually get into the spirit of the process and begin to envision a problem-free life, as advocated by Thomas Leonard and those of us who studied his methods.

Obviously that doesn't mean life won't throw us a curve, like a dreaded biopsy report or something. It does mean that we resolve problems that are under our control, rather than putting up with the aggravation they cause. And the starting point is becoming acutely aware of them, by making that list of annoyances — at home, in personal relationships, and in business.

I think the relationship category is the tough one. It's amazing how someone will continue to meet regularly for lunch with a "friend" or associate who agitates him or her every time — maybe just by continually arriving 15 minutes late. We all have put up with annoying lengthy phone calls — often from relatives. I used to tolerate jokes aimed at women or ethnic groups, I'm embarrassed to say. Thank God I got tired of the discomfort and now make it clear that I am not amused by that level of humor.

Nicely though, we don't always have to dump relationships in order to resolve the problem. We do need to drum up the courage to be truthful, however, and to ask for what we want; or make it clear that we are not going to tolerate the activity any longer. That can be done with respect and compassion. Nevertheless, it is risky. We can't predict how the other person will take such honesty, this standing up for ourselves.

It is especially hard to "clean up" relationships, if doing so means confronting a superior at work. It might be a boss who throws a temper tantrum once a week, or a manager who is vague in giving directions, then explodes when the work isn't done to her liking.

These are difficult situations and sometimes insurmountable. If they can't be resolved, it may mean looking around for work elsewhere.

Yet most of my clients have been enormously successful in facing up to a superior — when they prepare themselves. They give a lot of thought to the language they will use, and the timing

of the confrontation. They scan their own behavior to see how they are contributing to the friction. And they even explore the possibility that they want the friction.

That might sound preposterous, yet some clients are getting energy from the friction in the relationship. Others are tolerating unacceptable behavior in others because they're getting a sense of belonging, especially if many other people in the office are putting up with the same poor behavior and all are having a great time grouching about what a jerk the boss is.

So part of the coaching process is learning to put up with less and less. One of my favorite authors, Anne Lamott, quotes Violet Weingarten who said, (paraphrased here) "Problem — stated at its most succinct — is life too short to be taking stuff, or is life too short to mind it?"

Weingarten's question is material for stimulating conversation. I guess I've answered it, though, at least to my satisfaction. I believe in doing our darndest to have the lives we want. For most of us, that means re-claiming the energy that we've been wasting on situations that shouldn't be there in the first place. When you stop tolerating, you find a whole reservoir of energy that you can use to upgrade the quality of life for yourself and others in your environment.

Jo Hawkins Donovan has a coaching and psychotherapy firm in Milwaukee, and can be reached at 414-271-5848 or [jo@hawkinsdonovan.com](mailto:jo@hawkinsdonovan.com). The firm's Web site is [www.hawkinsdonovan.com](http://www.hawkinsdonovan.com). Hawkins Donovan will respond to your questions in this column.