

Real Life Experience by Christopher R Edgar

Forstering peace in the world starts with creating peace within yourself

Over the past year, people have been reacting to me in ways they never did before. Strangers have been smiling at me in the street. A woman I'd just met in a coffee shop told me she "got a great vibe" from me. A man I met recently at an event told me, "I feel very peaceful around you." This sort of thing doesn't happen every day, but it has definitely occurred enough for me to start seeing it as a trend.

The most interesting aspect of these interactions is that the people who seemed pleased to be around me knew next to nothing about my status and achievements in the world. They didn't know what I do for a living, who my friends are, where I live or any other information we usually consider important in getting a sense of who someone is. Thus, it was clear they weren't simply acting happy to be around me because they were impressed with something I'd done or because they thought they could get money or business opportunities from me.

What these people did sense about me was that I was at peace. My body felt loose and relaxed, a gentle warmth was flickering in my chest and my mind was free of anguish over past events and anxieties about my possible future. When I feel this way inside, people around me actually experience the feeling within themselves as well. Humans, moments like this have taught me, are far more empathic than we usually give each other credit for. We have an acute sense of each other's emotional states.

If you'd told me three years ago I could change my way of being so that people who didn't even know me would be happy to be in my presence, I would have laughed. My belief at the time was that, if you want people to feel good around you, you need to show them you can offer them something valuable — whether it's money, social status, useful knowledge or something else. Otherwise, people will be indifferent or hostile. That's human nature, I thought — you might not like it, but you have to live with it.

I certainly wasn't the only one to hold this view of the world; it also happens to be conventional wisdom in our society. After all, don't we slave away in our jobs and the educational system, buy expensive cars and clothes and join the right social groups because we think that'll make others appreciate and respect us? If we didn't do those things, no one would talk, play or mate with us, right? Don't we have to *earn* other's love through our achievements in the world?

Unfortunately, despite this idea's popularity, it didn't hold up very well in my actual life. Three years ago, I was a highly paid, highly educated young lawyer with a luxury car and a spacious apartment. If the conventional wisdom were true, you'd think I would have been getting plenty of love and appreciation, that I'd be surrounded by a close, supportive circle of friends, that beautiful women would be vying for my attention and that, generally, people would be pleased to be around me.

In reality, I was solitary, angry and work-obsessed. In this state, my friends and loved ones weren't exactly lining up to hang out with me. On dates with women, I'd find subtle ways to convey I had money and prestige. But did a woman I dated at the time ever say to me, "I get a great vibe from you," like the woman I met in the coffee shop recently? If you answered no, you get a gold star. I spent countless hours pursuing academic and career success, expecting people to like me and want to be around me as a result, but the world simply wouldn't co-operate.

My relationships with others began to transform when I started questioning the idea that I needed to "earn" people's love and appreciation. When I put my attention on this belief, I also saw how deeply it was influencing my way of being in the world. For example, when I'd first meet someone, I'd make an effort to quickly crack a joke or tell an interesting story to prove I was someone worth associating with. Even the way I moved my body, taking long strides with my posture erect and my eyes focused ahead, was designed to make people see me as powerful and deserving of respect.

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I recognised that the behaviours I'd adopted to prove my worth were actually making people uncomfortable and driving them away. The reason was that, no matter how impressive I tried to make myself look, people could tell how I was feeling on the inside. More importantly, they actually experienced my emotional state in their own bodies. And because I was irritable and anxious most of the time back then, I was causing others to feel that way just by being around them.

The only way to improve my impact on others, it seemed, was to improve my own emotional state. With this in mind, I took up a number of practices designed to bring me inner peace. I started taking walks in the bush, simply being there and appreciating my surroundings with no plans or expectations. I sat for long periods by myself, seeking and accomplishing nothing, simply existing. When I felt like it, I'd dance and jump around my house, purely for my own amusement, with no concern for impressing anyone.

As I cultivated peace in myself, people around me — interestingly enough — started seeming more peaceful as well. It took me a while to realise I wasn't just perceiving the world as a calmer place — I was actually causing it to be more peaceful with my way of being. When people started openly acknowledging that it felt good just to be around me, I could no longer deny the reality that my inner peace was creating peace in the world.

As Gerry Shishin Wick and Iliia Shinko Perez put it in *The Great Heart Way: How To Heal Your Life And Find Self-Fulfillment*, "Our disturbing emotions are the source of unethical conduct, suffering and war ... By addressing these emotions, we create inner peace which then creates outer peace." If you want more fulfilling relationships with others, you may be able to make significant improvements by simply changing your mindset. Try giving up, if just for a few days, the notion that you need to earn people's affection, or prove to them that you're worthy of their time and attention. Instead, consider the possibility that your own emotional state — your own peace and composure — creates the quality of your interactions.

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