going to approve of her in the way she wanted. She was going to have to find that in herself. Her old habit had been to see her glass as empty. She started retraining her mind to see where her cup might already be full.

Delores looked at her life and saw that she had good friends and was capable of doing well at work. She found appreciation for her parents’ business acumen and the freedom their financial success granted her to attend college full time without accruing any loans. She started to enjoy the beautiful area in which she lived and she gave herself credit for her excellent exercise routine.

Delores also practiced gratitude when doing ordinary, everyday tasks. She found that one can be thankful for anything at any time, whether it’s the beauty of the trees one passes while driving, the phenomenon of one’s breathing, or the embarrassing riches of 21st century America. When shopping, she made it a point to marvel at the opportunities she had to purchase a stupendous array of items. She learned to stop for a minute at the local shopping mall and say thanks to all of the people working there. She would walk into her local supermarket and take a moment to appreciate the abundance of food choices in front of her.

Delores had experienced the pain of parents who were more interested in their business than in caring for her. She had dwelled for years on what she had lost. Now she saw that her parents’ financial success was also a blessing. She was able to appreciate the hard work they put in to provide a life for her. Delores practiced and saw the value of the old adage that a life well lived is the best revenge.

**Moving on**

When I bumped into Delores a year after her forgiveness classes ended, it was rewarding to see the changes in her. She was filled with energy and showed a lovely smile. When I asked her about Skip, she almost responded, “Skip who?” Instead of Skip, she wanted to talk about how much she had learned about herself. When I asked about her parents, she said her relationship with them had improved. Delores accepted what they could offer and realized their enormous emotional limitations. As an adult she understood she was the one with the best chance to create a good life for herself. She was learning to let her parents off the hook. She forgave them for their mistakes.

The biggest change in Delores was the way she turned her grievances into more positive stories about herself. She talked with pride of forgiving Skip and learning how to take care of herself. Delores was a woman who took her forgiveness training to heart. She completed the full nine steps and now presented herself as a hero and not a victim. Forgiveness brought her a sense of peace that had previously eluded her for her entire life.

Of course, she did not always have it easy. She still longed for a loving and tight family and a faithful partner. When she found the longing overpowering, she told herself to make the best of what she had. She would take a walk and remind herself of the blessings of a beautiful day or the possibilities the future might bring. And sometimes, like the rest of us, there were times when she was simply unhappy.

To become a forgiving person we have to practice forgiving smaller grievances. Then, when a bigger insult comes, we are ready, willing, and able to deal with it. Alternatively, like Delores, once we learn to forgive a major grievance, we can understand the value of limiting the power that pain and anger hold over us the next time we are hurt. No one can make the people in life behave kindly, fairly, or honestly at all times. We cannot end the cruelty on this planet. What we can do is forgive the unkindness that comes our way and put energy toward meeting our positive goals. Then we can help others do the same.

Forgiveness, like other positive emotions such as hope, compassion, and appreciation, are natural expressions of our humanity. These emotions exist within a deep part of each of us. Like many things, they require practice to perfect, but with this practice they become stronger and easier to find. Ultimately, they can be as natural to us as anger and bitterness. It takes a willingness to practice forgiveness day after day to see its profound benefits to physical and emotional well being, and to our relationships. Perhaps the most fundamental benefit of forgiveness is that, over time, it allows us access to the loving emotions that can lie buried beneath grievances and grudges.

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**Nine Steps to Forgiveness by Fred Luskin**

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a couple of trusted people about your experience.

2. Make a commitment to yourself to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and no one else.

3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciling with the person who upset you or condoning the action. In forgiveness you seek the peace and understanding that come from blaming people less after they offend you and taking those offenses less personally.

4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts, and physical upset you are suffering now, not from what offended you or hurt you two minutes—or 10 years—ago.

5. At the moment you feel upset, practice stress management to soothe your body’s fight or flight response.

6. Give up expecting things from your life or from other people that they do not choose to give you. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, friendship, and prosperity, and work hard to get them. However, these are “unenforceable rules.” You will suffer when you demand that these things occur, since you do not have the power to make them happen.

7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you.

8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving power over you to the person who caused you pain, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. Put more energy into appreciating what you have rather than attending to what you do not have.

9. Amend the way you look at your past so you remind yourself of your heroic choice to forgive.