

Interview with David Richo

By Kim George

Bringing greater happiness into your life and that of your clients just got easier. Join Kim and David Richo as they upset the idea that self help is all about the courage to change what we control. We will peek into David's newest book with a look at the common, uncontrollable 'givens' that life presents to us, and how to evolve through accepting and working with them. David explains how this process brings a deeper understanding of ordinary situations: discover how to live with greater virtue and grace. He shares an outline to apply these concepts on a powerful path for the coaches' work of human evolution. David is the author of numerous books, including *How to Be an Adult in Relationships*. His current book is *The Five Things We Cannot Change and the Happiness We Find by Embracing Them*.

David, in your new book, *The Five Things We Cannot Change* you talk about the five 'givens' of life. What are they, and why is it important for people to become aware of them?

The five givens that I have shared in the book are:

- Things change,
- Things don't always go according to plan,
- Life is not always fair,
- Pain is part of everybody's life,
- People are not loving and loyal all the time.

Of course there are thousands of givens, because in every situation in the world there are givens. It's a given that if you're sitting in a house there could be an earthquake, so you need to know your earthquake safety. I see these givens -- the five I mentioned -- as important because they're the ones that also happen to be the ingredients for us to become people with character.

When you work with changes, rather than fight that possibility or complain about them, you do the grief work that makes you a deeper person. You become a person that has compassion for others. That's how it is with all five of these. If you say 'yes' to them as givens, you at the same time turn them into graces because then each of these five is a teaching device. Each one shows you how to be a better human being who is evolving with these philosophies rather than opposing them.

So there's a process for looking at these givens as a source of grace in your life?

Yes, it's deeper in the sense that the conscious life has touched and mirrored an inner unconscious feeling that is something like an archetype of the collective psyche of humanity. Each of these five givens does that. For instance, the given about 'everyday change' brings us to a deeper meaning that though things change and end, they also go through cycles and keep returning. That brings us to the archetype of resurrection. The fact that 'things don't always go according to plan' reminds us that synchronicity --

meaningful coincidence -- sometimes is at work. That brings you a much more surprising new plan on your path, and that's the archetype of the divine plan. The fact that 'life isn't always fair' brings you to the archetype of karma. The fact that 'pain is part of life' brings you to that same archetype of karma and of compassion. The fact that 'people are not loving and loyal all the time' brings you to the central theme of evolution, which is unconditional love. That no matter how other people act I'm going to respond to them in a loving and non-retaliatory way.

So the givens help us become people of virtue who see deeply into ordinary realities and connect them to archetypes. That's why I said that you become a person of depth when you work with these givens: this is the doorway into the subterranean reality. In this sense, the Latin 'subterranean' means under the earth. This isn't about some lofty ideal in the sky; it's going to the earthy roots of human kindness and in that earthy place is going to become the other half of ourselves. Conscious is above the earth, and unconscious is below earth - symbolically.

It occurs to me that if people aren't aware of these five areas and aren't able to accept them, they can often be major stumbling blocks to happiness and getting what we want.

Exactly: because you're not riding in the direction that the horse is going. You're sitting backwards in the saddle, trying to ride the horse your way. It doesn't really work that way. You have to go with what is.

There's a lot more energy and effort that's expended when you try to go against what is.

Yes. Most self-help books are about 'Give me the courage to change the things I can change.' I wrote this one because I felt too much accent went on that. They make it seem like we have too much control and we can change whatever we don't like. I thought I'd present something on the second part of the serenity prayer, which is to 'Accept something we cannot change.'

That's the happiness we find by embracing the givens of life -- the laws of the universe that were here before we came here and will be here long after we're gone. They must have a meaning: they're not penalties. Since everything is pointed in the direction of evolution in this universe of ours, it couldn't be that the givens of the human life are contrary to that. I suspected that they must help us evolve

The only method that I could find that helped me let these five givens become helpers of evolution was the word 'yes'. If I said 'yes' to each of them, I noticed that I was more serene, more compassionate, had more virtue, more trust, and more hope. Those are all evolutionary inclinations from that very Taoist view of living with self, rather than fighting it.

So saying 'yes' is your practice of acceptance? It seems like a good way to reduce resistance.

Right: it goes back to riding the horse. The idea here is to end the quarrel that we have with the way things are. For instance, one of the givens is that we have limits in our knowledge and in our way of handling things. Other people have limits too. Can I be okay with that? Can I accept the fact that I have limits and not feel ashamed that I'm not in full control of everything? This goes from the simplest thing to the most complex thing.

Here's a very simple example. You call someone on Monday and leave a message to have them call you back. Monday goes by and this person doesn't call. This person calls you late on Tuesday. Well, a given of your nature is to call the same day, but you have to say to yourself that you can't expect that other people do it the same way. This approach is saying 'yes' to the given of our differences. You would say to yourself, 'Well, some people will call the next day, and that's how they do it' rather than blaming them and saying that they're not as efficient. Does this make sense?

Absolutely!

A large given would be when a tsunami, an earthquake, a hurricane or a tornado hits your neighborhood. Instead of thinking of it as a punishment from an angry God, you say to yourself, 'Oh. This is one of the givens of being on this planet and I need to do the best I can and help other people too and not complain.' To complain is to miss the point.

The point is to see that everything beyond your control has an evolutionary twist to it. Once you accept that, you also need to go with reality. If you land on concrete reality -- rather than on your version of how things should be -- you start to notice that you're carried along. You are carried along to becoming a person of more serenity, of more humility, of less stress, and more self-respect. Those are all really good feelings. When we have feelings like that, we're less likely to want to hurt other people and engage in the wrong thing, which we see happen so much in our society.

There's a line in the book where you say, 'Pain isn't punishment and pleasure isn't reward'. You're saying that it doesn't go either way; there's no punishment or reward – it just is.

Exactly: that is the challenge of faith. A person of faith does not explain disaster as a punishment from God. A person of faith accepts the disaster as part of life on this planet and makes the best of it. To make the best of what God has given is true faith: not to explain what has happened as if it were punishment or reward. It's a difference between the mature faith and a child's faith. The latter sees everything in terms of a punishment or a reward, which is our original, primitive, default setting. We naturally want to strike back.

How do we work with that tendency?

Spiritual practice engaged in over the years helps you disable the default setting to the new setting of unconditional love rather than retaliation. Once you do that within yourself and notice how good you feel about it, you realize that God doesn't engage in retaliation either. Retaliation is such a

primitive style that it's hard to imagine that God is love mixed with maliciousness.

We live in a very abundant society. Yet we see so many people unfulfilled, unsatisfied, and generally unhappy. Why do you think this is?

I think that it's based on a number of dimensions. One is that we've put so much of our accent on acquisition and ultimately, that can become greed. We've put our accent on how can I fulfill the dream of plenty and we've thought of plenty as material goods. In other words, we've not paid as much attention to the abundance of spiritual graces that are also available to us and the importance of virtue, the importance of integrity. Instead of our accent being on becoming a person who has fulfilled his or her capacity for loving, it's wrapped around a person who's made a lot of money or who has the best car or the biggest bank account. Ultimately, that comes back to bite us because it doesn't pay attention to our full self, which includes material and immaterial. They're not even meant to be separate; they're meant to be integrated. This is one way, I would say, of looking at why it is that we have so much and yet we're still unhappy.

You have a great acronym in the book; you talk about saving FACE. FACE representing Fear, Attachment, Control and Entitlement -- all related to the ego. Tell us more about why those four areas are so important in the book.

The ego causes three things that poison your life: greed, hate, and delusion. The ego becomes your life when it is poisoned in any of these ways. This happens when it starts to have such an inflated view of itself that it thinks it's entitled to special treatment and doesn't have to endure the same givens that everybody else does, because it sees itself as above others.

So, our arrogance -- ego -- I would define as the one that changes FACE to try to save FACE. It's based on Fear first of all because it's the fear that others will not acknowledge you, love you, want you, and approve of you. It's Attachment in the sense that you become attached to your own point of view and that things are going to go your way. You Control those things to try to put it into practice, and you try to Control how other people are behaving. You believe that you're Entitled to get back at everybody that ever hurt you. You believe you're Entitled to get out of the same givens that everybody else faces. If you're in a relationship -- and yes, relationships change, but yours, you demand absolute loyalty and -- nothing is supposed to change. When you come from that kind of place, which we call ego, you're no longer coming from the healthy ego condition.

The healthy ego condition is the reverse of these four. Where fear is, we ask, 'How can I become loving?' Where attachment is, ask 'How can I let go?' Where control is, the question is, 'How can I give freedom to others?' With entitlement it's, 'How can I say yes to the same conditions that everybody else faces?' and 'How can I certainly stand up for my rights without retaliation?' The healthy ego has that set of four qualities, which I often also consider saintly qualities. Compare that with the unhealthy ego, which is trying to save FACE.

I'd like to go back to something you touched on earlier: 'becoming yes.' Is it more than just acceptance? What other aspects are there to 'becoming yes?'

I use the expression 'becoming yes' rather than just saying 'yes'. We know that this is a quality of a higher being. It's not just about our actions. By yes, I mean surrendering to the facts of life; not surrender in the sense of giving something back. It's more like aligning yourself to the realities of the world we live in -- riding that horse -- believing that it will help you move along the path of maturity. For me, yes is all that, plus the definition of love. Yes means open and vulnerable and not-in-control, and willing to be there with what is.

The other part of this -- I have a separate chapter in the book, as you know -- is yes to feeling. I believe that another part of saying yes is that it's okay to get in touch with your feelings and express them, and to be okay with other people expressing their feelings towards you. I chose four specific feelings to work with, and I'm using the little acronym SAFE because I believe that you only express your feelings when you feel safe enough to do so. If you don't feel safe enough, that's where part of the work is.

That sounds especially relevant to coaches. What does the acronym SAFE stand for?

The four feelings are: sadness, anger, fear, and exuberance.

That's the full range of feelings you work with?

Well, I chose the four central ones because they're the ones we have the most trouble with from childhood on. If it wasn't safe in childhood to express sadness, fear, anger, or exuberance, then we're not used to expressing them in adult life. When you can't express them, they cut into your full feelings.

And you relate these back to the givens?

Yes: the five givens all represent some type of loss. For example, when things change, it's the loss of the way it was before. The technology of the body to deal with loss is grief -- sadness -- and there's your first feeling. Sadness is a way of saying 'yes' to the loss that is part of each of the five givens.

The anger is appropriate because the givens do make you angry. Anger is about saying 'yes' to a given. It's paradoxical: it seems that to say 'yes', you wouldn't get angry. But healthy anger means that there's something within you that responds by feeling something other than fear. The very definition of anger is displeasure at injustice. It's normal that when we feel the given that 'things aren't always fair,' we're going to feel that injustice. Saying 'yes' doesn't mean you're no longer human. It's normal to be angry when you're cheated, and it's okay to express that feeling. I wanted to make sure that it was clear that it's okay to say yes to your feelings.

Saying 'yes' doesn't mean you accept everything in a stoical way; you feel it.

The third one, fear, is that of course it's scary when things change or don't go according to plan and feel like they're out of control. That's part of saying 'yes' to the reality of what's happening. And, finally, exuberance -- joy -- arises when we accept the givens and let that be okay. Joy rounds out the experience by making it more positive.

What experience do you mean, David?

The experience of letting the full thud of life's blows land on you without being crushed by them -- instead, you're still able to hear a calling through them. When I talk about a calling, it's the calling that we all have to express in a unique way the wisdom and compassion that's in us. The calling we all have to express the fully unconditional love that's possible for us, and it helps us get there.

Well put! That gives us a lot to work with. Is there anything else you want to add before we wrap this up?

I would like to direct the CoachVille readers to the last chapter in the book. It's titled 'A Yes to Who I Am' and includes a section I'm proud of called 'A Virtuous Framework for a Conscious Living.' On pages 179 - 184 are lists of the very specific virtues that result from a life of yes. I hope this can help people who are coaches and those who are being coached.

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