advice chief

Don't focus on things you can't control

By Jeff "Chief" Urbaniak
COLUMNIST (www.AdviceChief.com)

Do you spend a lot of time and energy trying to prevent bad things from happening? Or do you invest a lot of energy into wishing other people would change? Do you believe you can single-handedly fix everything? Do you have a hard time delegating tasks to other people? Do you believe the outcome of any situation is entirely based on how much effort you choose to exert? Do other people sometimes accuse you of being a "control freak"?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you may be focusing too much on things you can't control. You can't possibly make all of your circumstances and all the people in your life fit into the way you think things should be. When you learn to let go of the details you can't control, the amount of time and energy you'll be able to devote to the things you can control will give you the ability to accomplish incredible feats.

Trying to control everything usually starts out as a way to manage anxiety. If you believe you have everything under control, you will have convinced yourself there's nothing to worry about, but in reality, you don't have everything under control and your anxiety ends up getting worse. So don't try to control everything. If it's raining, let it rain.

The desire to fix everything can also stem from a sort of superhero complex. Some people hold on to the mistaken belief that if they just try hard enough, everything will turn out the way they want. Rather than delegating tasks or trusting others, they often choose to do it themselves to make sure it will be "done right" because they don't trust other people's capabilities.

There are several problems associated with trying to control everything:

1) You can suffer from anxiety. Every time an attempt to control something is unsuccessful, the more anxious you will feel.

2) You waste much time and energy. All of the worrying, wishing, and trying becomes exhausting and time consuming.

3) You risk damaging relationships with others. Telling people what they should do or how to do things right (especially when they're not asking for your input) isn't likely to attract many friends.

4) You'll unnecessarily blame yourself for everything. You can't prevent bad things from happening all the time so don't burden your shoulders with so much unnecessary weight.

There's a lot you can't control no matter what you think, say, or do. You can host a good party, but can't control whether people have fun. You can give your child tools to be successful, but you can't make your child be a good student. You can do your best at your job, but you can't force your boss to recognize your work. You can sell a great product, but you can't dictate who buys it. You may be the smartest person in the room, but you can't control whether people choose to follow your advice. You can nag, beg, and make threats, but you can't force someone else to behave differently. You can control how much you take care of yourself, but you can't always prevent illness. You may have the most positive attitude in the world, but still can't make the "bad" disappear.

The only thing you can control in most situations is your behavior and attitude. You also can prepare for potential damage control in advance. For instance, you can't control what happens to your luggage once you hand it to an airline employee at the airport. But what you can control is what you pack in your carry-on bag. If you have your most important belongings and an extra change of clothing with you, it won't feel like such an emergency if your luggage doesn't arrive at your destination on time.

So give yourself a break. Plan for what you can and don't focus on things you can't control.

~ The End ~