

Language of Choice

For many people, the upcoming American elections won't provide the opportunity to vote for the candidate they would like to see as president. Instead, they'll be voting against the person they *don't* want. I wonder what would happen if every single person were to stay home and not vote? Of course there's no way that 100% of American citizens would agree not to vote. But it's the assumption that they don't have a choice that takes away the choice.

This is what happens in life. You have to take your child to gymnastics class, you have to do the dishes and you have to walk the dog. You *have to*. You *have to*? Who says?

By the end of the day you don't even know what you want anymore. Even the things you thought you wanted to do are duly recorded in your calendar and checked off, but you lose touch with your original reason for writing them there in the first place.

When one of my children was in ninth grade, I drove him to and home from school every day, a twenty-minute drive in each direction, so he could practice his drums. Sometimes I was very tired, and I had to force myself. It didn't always *feel* like a choice but it *was* a choice. Looking back, it was one of the best decisions I made in my life. Today he is a professional musician, and time after time I am rewarded by the results of my commitment to him that year.

How can you regain a sense of control in your life? The way you talk to yourself is not a trivial matter. Your words have power. Saying 'I have to clean the house' is not the same as saying 'I want to create an environment that's clean and uncluttered, that's a pleasure to live and work in.' Take notice of how many times you tell yourself, in your head or out loud, 'I have to.' Then, you might want to practice saying 'I want to.' I have found it also helps when I've made a conscious effort to ask myself **why** I want to do something.

It's important to check in with yourself on this, because 'what you want' changes from moment to moment. The reality that's facing you – inside and out – is never exactly the same. One day you feel good about being self-disciplined. It gives you a sense of control knowing your day has a structure to it and the tasks you set out to do are getting done. A different day you rebel inwardly against any routine, and what makes you feel good that day is being free to be spontaneous.

Through his Logotherapy, Viktor Frankl contributed to the helping field a concept called *meaning of the moment*. Frankl said that life is one big question-and-answer test. No one but you can know the significance of the question. No one but you can give the right answer.

On top of your daily tasks are the sorts of things that just happen to you. No one asked your opinion about it. You get sick. Someone screams at you. Your finances are in bad shape. And you start to question whether anything is in your control.

Freedom is not about how limited you are or are not, but about sitting in the driver's seat, taking charge of your own life. Even when you're not happy about what's happening, you can choose to see what's good in the situation and what you can do to make it better.

Therefore, *everything* is a choice! The one factor that gives you a sense of control is internal, not external. You can't control life's 'test conditions.' You can only make the best possible choice *within* those conditions. When you use the language of choice in your head and in your words:

- You stop fighting what you don't have the power to change
- You take responsibility for what you do have the power to change

Responsibility can feel like a dirty word. It's hard to face up to the consequences of your mistakes. It takes guts to admit that you are responsible for making the decisions that determine your life. But by doing so, you are no longer a helpless victim.

Moreover, there is a flip side. You take credit for the good that you do. Especially when your choice is a difficult one, you are making a statement: 'My life matters. I am worth it!' 'He is precious to me.' 'This is worth investing in.' There is good in the world because of you. This too was your choice.