

The Freudian Slip

Pathways to Discernment

Reprint March 2007

Castle Walls, Open fields or Picket Fences?

What picture comes to mind from the title of this edition of *The Freudian Slip*? I think of castle walls as an impermeable fortress built for protection. Picket fences designate where one yard stops and the other yard start, allowing a person to enjoy the view. Open fields show no defined designation of territory, giving a person a vague idea of his or her space.

Many people relate to the world by using castle walls, open fields or picket fences. The castle wall person fears other people, so he or she builds this impenetrable fortress for protection. Often this stronghold becomes a prison, because no one can come in or leave. So loneliness and isolation are a consequence of the castle wall approach to life.

Individuals using a picket fence approach to life have a clear idea of whom they are. These individuals can talk to others, keep out the people they do not want in their life and include the others they do want. Picket fences are not a prison, in that the individual is not trapped in the confines of the fenced in area to be with others.

Open fields have a way of ruling the individual. In that, there are vague boundaries or nonexistent boundaries. A person living a life as an open field becomes a wind-blown leaf having no control over his or her life direction. Open fields are a breeding ground for unwelcome visitors. Since there are no clear defined boundaries to the property; these unwelcome visitors cannot be evicted, becoming a source of problems for the open field individual.

What is interesting is that the "castle wall" and the "open field" individuals deal with the same levels of anxiety about other people. They see other people as dangerous, avoiding them at all costs.

For example, if someone were to find his or her way inside the castle walls, anxiety and fear would be the primary emotions for the builder of the walls.

The "fight or flight" response would be in full gear with the individual frantically building a retaining wall or tunneling out into another fortified room. The anxiety felt is fear based, because other people are perceived to be consuming all the available space of the "castle wall" individual.

"Open field" individuals face the same anxiety when others invade their territory. Since there are not defined limits to the open field, these invaders feel entitled to their place in the open field. Anxiety is a by-product of the invader's attitude of "make me leave, because I'm here to stay." One choice the "open field" person has to wrestle with revolves around, "do I make them mad at me and then they won't like me." Another choice would be to ignore these invaders, because the hassle of upsetting the peace would be avoided.

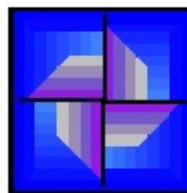
So what is your preference? Usually preferences have been established long ago because of emotional wounds. Preferences become a way of survival in bad situations, but after a while these preferences backfire. The very means to protect the initial wound now creates more wounds.

The reasonable thing to do, changing preferences, becomes anxiety provoking by itself. To change preferences means that the individual has to deal with these perceived threatening people. Changing preferences also means the wounded individual has to learn to trust himself /herself.

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For personal healing to occur, the initial wound needs to be mended. It would be nice to go back in time to surgically close the initial wound, but this is impossible. This initial wound can be closed by dealing with present day issues. The triggers for today's fears, anxiety and depressing situations are the result of yesterday's wounds.

To begin the process of healing the wounds, whether they are traumatically deep or chronically festering, the individual needs to give himself /herself permission to go against the *previously* received messages. These are the "don't" messages. By the individual allowing himself /herself to disregard these "don't" messages, he or she can reestablish his or her personal rights.

A common "don't" message for "castle wall" and "open field" individual is "don't make waves." The difference in these two individuals is the manner of coping with the giver of the message. For the "castle wall" and the "open field" individual, the message giver was very abusive and/ or all powerful.

As a means to cope the individual develops a counter message. The "castle wall" individual develops a "be numb" internal message. The "open field" individual develops a "be perfect" internal message. Both are damned if they do and damned if they don't.

The "open field" individual has a belief that if he or she is perfect, then he or she will be accepted. So the pattern becomes one of being a people pleaser, with the hopes of someday being perfect enough to be accepted by others perceived to be all powerful. However, people pleasing is a no win situation, because it is impossible to accomplish.

The "castle wall" individual believes he or she will be crushed no matter what he or she does. So to counteract the emotional pain of feeling crushed, he or she becomes emotionally numb and avoids others at all costs. As a result he or she feels very isolated and sees others as undependable and not trustworthy. If he or she were to risk reaching out for help, others would not be available.

When an individual gives himself or herself permission to disobey the "don't" messages the ability to set limits with others begins. Through the nature of disagreeing with the "don't" messages an individual has changed a belief system. Therefore saying, "I don't have to abide by your rules for me to feel safe or liked by you." It also says that "I don't have to associate with you because you are not safe nor good for me."

The next phase to wellness is for the individual to separate personal responsibility for actions, consequences and beliefs from other people. By doing this, an individual will not be taking on the other person's problems. Guilt, which is a by-product of taking others' problems, is alleviated. Guilt is a mechanism of keeping an individual in a stuck position.

Often, I hear individuals saying they would be okay if the other person would change. So after some time of

trying to "make" the others change, the individual gives up, continues doing the same thing or takes another approach. Bad feelings predominate and again the individual is stuck.

Control is the prevailing mode these individuals use in dealing with others. To learn that the only person an individual can control is himself/herself is an effect way of changing interpersonal preferences. When this lesson is learned, the individual can dissipate his or her bad feelings. Teflon becomes a protective layer and the Velcro loses its effectiveness.

To set limits does not mean an individual will make friends and influence people. When an individual takes a different approach with others, he or she needs to reevaluate the people in his or her life. The relationship may not be the best relationship for the individual.

To reevaluate the relationship, the question of, "what am I getting from this" needs to be asked. There was a reason for the castle wall or the open field way of dealing with people. So the option available to the person would be to leave, combating the storm or go back to his or her old ways. This can be a very lonely time for people willing to take the risk of interacting with people differently.

One way of combating these new bad feelings is to realize that change is a process that takes time. Another way would be to maintain a healthy sense of self, because people will launch accusations to provoke a change back to the old ways. With these accusations, look for the truth in the words. The truth is a reflection on an individual's character and the untruth is not. Remember, character is self derived and reputation is thrust upon an individual by other people!

Finding "safe" people takes time and energy. The process chalked full of risks, but is very educational. In risk taking, the individual learns who is accepting, dependable and supportive to him or her. One way to look at the risks is to visualize a path. When an individual finds his or her companion on the trail to be "unsafe" another trail can be taken. The two people part ways, because they have decided to take different paths.

The road to wellness is a process full of options. As an individual experiences the options in his or her life, a sense of empowerment is attained. The bad feelings associated with being stuck diminish. These bad feelings will not go away, but the frequency they are felt will greatly diminish. The good feelings can then fill the void left and a sense of peace attained.

Suggested Readings:

Who's Pushing Your Buttons by John Townsend
Safe People by John Townsend
Dance of Connection by Harriet Lerner
Boundaries by John Townsend