

# Rise to Freedom by Breaking the Power of Secondhand Offense

*Editor's Note: This is Part 2 of a two-part article. For Part 1, [click here](#).*

When offense comes, we have the opportunity to rise out of that dark place and work through the myriad of emotions to regain our confidence, courage and commitment to be our best selves. By rendering offense powerless, we declare an emancipation proclamation for our own soul. No matter what we have faced, we can walk the arduous road back to a healthy place.

## **Secondhand Offense**

Secondhand offense is a powerless place that we put ourselves in by listening to the unresolved offenses of another. It is when we borrow the offense from what has happened to someone else, not us personally. Referring again to secondhand smoke, it is similar to breathing in the toxic chemicals of what another person is emotionally *smoking*. As a result, their insult, anger and frustration gains access to your heart and affects how you feel, think and believe about their experience.

When offense is communicated by its original owner without a desire for restoration, healing or resolve, they render their power ineffective by giving it over to the situation. When I get caught in this trap, I too become powerless.

I have coached individuals who have borrowed the offense of another and held it as truth for years. This *truth* shaped their beliefs, divided relationships and rendered them a voice against the offender. What they often do not see is that while

they continue to harbor this secondhand offense, the original parties have come to healing and reconciliation and moved on with their lives. Meanwhile it continues to plague the one who decided to take on the offense as their own.

When you are offended and have had a negative experience, you have the power to work through the offense because it happened to you. You are in a powerful place to make those decisions to change what you can and choose peace in what you cannot change. However, if you carry secondhand offense, you do not have the power to work through what is not your experience. You are stuck in a powerless place.

My father was an engineer in a hospital. He had a heart attack at age 46. It was important that he have a length of time to heal. However, because he was the only one who was able to repair certain systems in the hospital, they called him back to work, in need of his skills. Shortly afterward he had another massive heart attack and died in my mother's arms. I was just 11 years old when my mother came into my bedroom to wake me up to tell me that my daddy had died. I went into the bedroom and said, "No, Mommy, Daddy is just sleeping." I was faced with the harsh reality as the coroner came and took his body away.

I held offense toward nameless doctors, hospitals and the medical community for years. I was stuck in a powerless place because I carried a secondhand offense from my mother, rehearsing her loss. Human nature and the pain of grief try to find a reason why or seek someone or something to blame. Whether or not medical negligence was the cause, I carried it as *truth*.

### **False Responsibility**

When offense is communicated by the original owner who is attacking their attacker, hating their hater, criticizing their critic or slandering their slanderer, you have a choice

to make. Either you will be a voice to empathetically help them assess their own heart and choose the high road, or you will grant access to secondhand offense. The latter will cause you to step into false responsibility and take on the burden of being a vigilante for the offended, believing it is all in the name of justice. This is not only a false narrative of true justice, but counterproductive and will keep you in a powerless place. You will assume the place of unforgiveness and resentment as you become the oppressed, controlled by the actions of another person's perpetrators.

When someone communicates offense to you, all you can do is encourage them to forgive and to take back their power. They must make that choice for themselves.

The old adage, "you can lead a horse to water but you can't make them drink" is so true. Each person must walk out his or her journey because it happened to them. Either they will live a life of bitterness or choose to become better. It's their choice. And it is your choice to not take on their offense, no matter what they choose for themselves.

Where it has already happened, now is the time to let go of the secondhand offense and loose yourself from the false responsibility to fix what you are powerless to resolve. Now is the time to climb out of that powerless place and be free.

### **The Power of Opportunity**

We understand how caustic offense is when we harbor it in our hearts. It is also damaging to every relationship in our lives. Offense never unites; it only divides. It can threaten the health of our marriage, the connection to our children and our work relationships. It will also separate us from our dearest confidants.

Every day we may be confronted with the invitation to embrace the foreboding darkness of a perceived threat to our values, beliefs or dreams. However, we carry within us the power to

choose how we will think, what we will believe and how we will respond to every opportunity presented to us, whether good or bad.

Each of us has accepted those offensive invitations in the past, but today we can choose to break their power to control us. We can lift the proverbial weights to build the muscles of self-worth, confidence, and healthy response when faced with this inevitable affront. We have the power to choose and when we choose powerfully it will build our character and mature us. When we push past the desire to retaliate and push through the negative emotions of offense, we have done the brave thing and set ourselves free.

When we are not the original owner, we are powerless to work through what was not directed towards us. If there is an abuse of power, go with them to a higher authority. If there are threats or danger, go with them to law enforcement. If it is words that are spoken out of turn, conflicting values or opinions, or the offense of years ago being rehearsed to you, you have an opportunity to establish a healthy boundary. Taking their offense is not compassion or empathy; it is validating the toxicity of their thoughts. Drawing the boundary to protect your thoughts, emotions, and beliefs will allow you to remain objective and genuinely empathetic.

Healthy boundaries let the good in and keep the bad out. It is not harsh, rude, or unloving to stop them from speaking evil of another in order to protect your own thoughts. If I don't hear the attacking and hateful word assaults, I do not have to deal with their impact on my life. The more you hear, the more it can shape your belief based upon the original owner's perceived reality. As a leader, I have learned that our reality is often subjective and must be submitted to objective discovery and a fact-finding journey.

Abraham Lincoln said, "We should be too big to take offense and too noble to give it."

Protect your heart, purpose, passion and contribution to society by working through your opportunities of offense and rejecting all secondhand offense. This is not easy to do, but so worth the investment into your emotional health. You will exemplify a way of living, loving and leading that will bring strength, safety and security within your life and realms of influence. {eoa}

**Dr. Melodye Hilton** is the co-host of the Life Exchange Podcast. Melodye works with individuals and workgroups around the globe as a leadership consultant, behavioral analyst and executive coach (.) For over 38 years, she and her husband, Steven, have served as the founders and co-leaders of Giving Light, a local church and global resource center located in the heart of central Pennsylvania. In addition, Dr. Melodye has founded the #StopDevaluation movement in an effort to see hearts and cultures healed through love and validation.

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