

Your Spirit-Powered Prescription for the Dangerous Disease of Secondhand Offense

Editor's Note: This is Part 1 of a two-part article. Find Part 2 at [this link](#).

Secondhand offense is like a cultural virus. It permeates our world and infects anyone who allows it to have access to his or her heart and mind. It spreads to everyone unless their emotional immune system is resistant through kindness and resilient through gathering objective understanding.

My definition of "offense" is as follows: observed or perceived attitude, belief or action that insults, displeases or angers the recipient or target. The

Secondhand offense is like a cultural virus. It permeates our world and infects anyone who allows it to have access to his or her heart and mind. It spreads to everyone unless their emotional immune system is resistant through kindness and resilient through gathering objective understanding.

My definition of offense is as follows: observed or perceived attitude, belief or action that insults, displeases or angers the recipient or target. The *secondhand* element reveals that the offense is borrowed from another. In other words, secondhand offense is invited in when we grant access to someone else's offense to affect our thoughts and emotions.

As we further unpack the concept of secondhand offense, we will discover how destructive it is to our emotional health and how it leads to propagating a false narrative. We become a pawn in another person's experience; this only widens divides,

advocates toxicity as a noble cause and alienates us from valuable people.

When I was dating the love of my life and we were discussing marriage, he told me he was not going to wake up to my cigarette breath. I had to choose between him and cigarettes. I chose him! But my smoking habit was not only a physical addiction, but also an emotional one. It was so hard to quit! For love, I made the hard choice to give it up. However, I still carried the emotional addiction for almost 10 years. Though I never put another cigarette in my mouth, I craved it. When someone lit a cigarette, I would linger close and breathe deeply. Even if it wasn't mine, I would still get caught up in the effect.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that secondhand smoke not only causes lung cancer in those who have never smoked, but releases over 7,000 chemicals, hundreds of which are toxic and can cause death.

My husband decided he was not going to marry a smoker; I decided I wanted him more than smoking. Not only did our choices result in over 40 years of marriage and counting, they also gave us both a greater quality of life.

Secondhand offense is not just about you, but the original owner. It is their offense. Something happened to them or they perceived something and chose to harbor hard feelings. They chose not to forgive, to slander the offender, to spew negativity towards their reputation, to allow it to take them captive and to toxify their life. When you choose to *breathe in* that information, neural memory is formed like data entering a computer in your mind. The more you rehearse the original owner's offense, the more established the memory becomes in your own brain. You take it on as if it were your own. It is not even your experience, yet it is creating an automatic pattern of thought in you about a person, experience or belief. The more you *breathe in* secondhand offense, you can

become addicted to the crisis, drama and offense that is subconsciously searching for others to poison.

Just as the Centers for Disease Control wants to protect people from secondhand smoke, I want to protect you from secondhand offense, which is toxic to your mental health. Guarding your body from secondhand smoke will protect you from toxic chemicals; guarding your mind from secondhand offense will keep you from emotional toxicity. You are the guardian of what you will think and say as well as what you entertain from another individual. When you protect your private world from offense it will empower you to lead others, be solution-driven and help to create a positive atmosphere in your spheres of influence.

Overcoming the Powerless Place

Life has not been fair for anyone on the planet. The opportunity to be offended is a part of the human experience. All of us have experienced some form of abuse of power, betrayal, prejudice, bias or varying forms of maltreatment. Yes, me too! My childhood sexual molestation was an abuse of power, which stole a sense of worth from me. It put me in a place of feeling powerless. I was prejudiced against men because I was a woman trying to succeed in a *man's world*. Again, I felt powerless. I was betrayed by people who I thought loved me but were quick to move on when they didn't need me anymore. Over and over again, I felt my power being stripped from me.

Even with all that I experienced, it is not what happened to me, but what happened *in* me that shaped the trajectory of my life. Focusing on how I was victimized left me believing that I was powerless. I believed that my success would always be sabotaged.

Each of us have been offended and have built an edifice of powerlessness in our minds. This powerless place leaves us

lacking the tools to love life. Powerlessness makes us angry and hateful as we live life *taking* in order to fill the insatiable hunger to regain our power.

The very fact that we are human reveals that we are each a work in progress. We have mountains to climb, obstacles to overcome and powerless belief systems we must rewrite. There is so much we do not know or understand. However, we have the continued opportunity to grow, mature and become a valuable contributor to society.

I have learned that I am not the only one! There are so many who have experienced the same injustices as I have, and so much more. I have also witnessed so many who have made the courageous choices to take back their power through forgiveness.

Lewis B. Smedes said, "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you." It is truly eye-opening when we begin to recognize that living an angry, offended life relinquishes all of our power to that person or event. The emotions that accompany held offense negatively affect everything we do and the relationships that we have. Choosing to remain offended actually hurts me more than the offense itself.

I have watched many people use their power to make a conscious choice to rewrite their stories and to take their pain and discover their purpose. They gained victory over victimization and now are an advocate for others. Their anger has turned to empathy, their desire for revenge has turned to compassion and their fear has turned to love. This can be true of you as well.

With a strong commitment to overcome, we can reject every intent for offense and watch its lies backfire. The things that happened to me were not OK. However, through a process of healing, learning and powerful choices, what was meant for my

harm actually has now become a place of freedom. At times it may require professional help or the support of those who have overcome, but there is hope to forgive, heal, move past and regain your power.

When the hurts of life surround us, we can choose how we will respond. We can work through the negative emotions, reject every powerless thought and learn to live life fully and powerfully. {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.

Read articles like this one and other Spirit-led content in our new platform, CHARISMA PLUS.