

DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY!

Have you ever found yourself insulted and hurt by something that someone else did or said to you? Have you ever allowed the words or actions of a friend, a coworker, or even a complete stranger to damage your self-esteem? Chances are, you have- and if you have- you're not alone.

Whether it is a sideways glance from a stranger making us question our wardrobe, or a direct insult hurled our way by an angry coworker, we internalize the things that we see and hear. It is human nature to take things personally. When somebody calls you a name, it's easy to think "he said that about ME, so of course it's personal." The truth is, however, that his words are really about him and how he sees the world. The opinion he holds about you is based on his belief system; for this reason alone, those opinions are not personal. His words reflect who he is as a person, in that moment.

The words that others say to us, have very little to do *with us*. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality. When your coworker vilifies you with her words, it is more about how she sees the world, than it is about you. When your boss puts you down, it is not personal; it is about his perception of reality.

If your friend complains to you that you are selfish, this does not automatically mean you have acted selfishly. This is both a reflection and a projection of your friend's beliefs and experiences. Her complaint is based on her perception of what a good friend is and is not. When you take things personally, you are accepting responsibility for her feelings. When this happens, you may feel threatened or offended and react by defending your beliefs. This creates conflict and in turn, projects *your* beliefs onto the other person.

When you understand and accept that other people do what they do because of who they are, even when the things they do are unkind and directed at you, you will no longer be hurt by them. You may feel frustrated or disappointed, but you will not suffer the same type of pain that is felt when taking things personally.

In order to move beyond taking things too personally, you must begin by evaluating your emotional boundaries. Healthy boundaries distinguish your emotions, and responsibility for them, from someone else's and prevent you from accepting blame for his or her feelings. Healthy emotional boundaries begin with increased self-awareness, recognition of your personal needs, and assertive communication skills.

