



Transformational Relationships

Author: Thomas Klobucher

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“If you want to be great and successful, choose people who are great and successful and walk side by side with them.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

WHAT IS TRANSFORMATION?

What is transformation? For decades, I struggled with this question. I knew what I meant when I talked about “transformational relationships.” However, I had a hard time boiling down exactly what I was getting at when people asked me to define exactly what kind of relationships I meant. Then, I happened to come across a Bible verse from the book of Romans – one that I’d been reading for decades, but the meaning of which only became clear to me in later life. It reads as follows:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Regrettably, transformation is the opposite of what typically happens in interactions between human beings. *Transformation is the art of renewing your mind by discovering your own best self – and then helping others to renew their minds and discover their best selves.*

Here’s the funny thing about transformation. We cannot choose a transformational life. We can only live one! It’s not an intellectual exercise. It’s a way of being.

Let me give you an example of what I mean. A good friend of mine recently recounted to me a memorable story of transformation in action. He and his wife were watching their grandchildren for the weekend, which is one of their favorite things to do. After they had gone to church together, they took the children out for breakfast. One of them – a little girl – was having a hard time that morning. She wasn’t smiling much. She was talking, but the only subjects she cared to address had to do with what she didn’t like, didn’t have, and didn’t want to do. It happens to all of us! Maybe she just missed being with her parents. My friend wasn’t sure.

Anyway, my friend noticed that his granddaughter had a frown on her face, so he began talking about transformation. He had the distinct impression that none of what he was saying was really registering. Why is that? Because transformation is not an intellectual exercise! In any event, his granddaughter was looking around at the restaurant as though it were a kind of prison. Suddenly, he leaned over and said to her, “Sweetheart, what do you think would happen if we just started smiling at everyone around us?”

She looked at him as though he had gone a little funny in the head. But he kept going.

“Think about it,” he said. “What do you suppose would happen if, for no reason whatsoever, we just started being as nice as we possibly could to our server?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

"Wouldn't it be fun to find out?" he asked, and a grandfatherly smile flashed across his face.

The youngster thought about that as they ate their meal. At the end of the lunch, after they had all finished, my friend turned to the child and said, "So – what did you think of your sandwich?"

(He'd noticed that she had been enjoying it quite a bit.)

"It's the best grilled cheese sandwich I've ever had in my life, Grandpa," she said. There was a little grin on her face now.

"Well," he said, "what do you think would happen if you said that to our server, right out loud, while you had a great big smile on your face?"

She laughed at the idea, but then, when she realized her grandfather was serious, she started looking around for their server, whose name was Amy.

"Where'd she go, Grandpa?" the child asked.

"I guess we'll just have to keep an eye out for her," he replied.

When Amy came by to drop off the bill, the little girl stood up in her seat, grinned broadly, and said, "That was the very best grilled cheese sandwich I have ever had in my whole life!"

There was a long silence. My friend studied Amy's face. After taking a few seconds to process this unusual moment, she just about came unglued. She actually got teary-eyed with joy right there and then. She was so touched by this little girl giving her positive reinforcement that she had to wipe a tear from her eye! She must not have been expecting such an effusive outpouring of gratitude. Maybe she had been having a rough day.

The beautiful thing about this experience is that not one, but two lights got switched on that morning. The server was ecstatic, and you can bet she will remember my friend's family the next time they show up. Just as importantly, however, *the little girl now had a magic wand she could wave to engage and inspire someone, anytime she wanted. That is called transformation!*

I share this story with you at the beginning of our book because I want you to feel transformation as a positive, active presence in your life, the same way my friend and his granddaughter feel it in theirs. It's a little bit like riding a bicycle. Once you figure out what it is and how to do it, you can get back onto the bike and start pedaling anytime you want.

You can *talk* about riding a bicycle all you want. However, you have to actually *do* it a few times to get the hang of it.

That's the kind of book I want this to be for you – an experiential book, a book that inspires you to do something. At the end of each chapter, you'll find little action steps I'd like you to take – just like my friend asked his granddaughter to try something new in the restaurant. If you're willing to take on the possibility of trying something new, let's move on to chapter one!