

The Greatest Gift of All

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Charles Dickens wasn’t talking about the holiday season when he wrote those words, but he could have been. While the holidays offer more opportunities to spend time with family and friends, the season can also kick up a hornet’s nest of spats, grudges, resentments, anger and unsettled disputes.

We have a one-word prescription: Forgiveness.

Forgiveness is the greatest gift you can give to others. It's also the greatest, most powerful gift you can give yourself.

Forgiveness is not condoning or forgetting about wrong behavior. It doesn’t guarantee that pain will go away. Rather, it is letting go of negative and potentially toxic feelings that keep us stuck: anger, vengefulness, bitterness and resentment.

Forgiveness is compared to healing, to being relieved of a weight, or gaining a sense of peace. Radio host Bernard Meltzer explains the effects: “When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future.”

Forgiving can change the course of history. After 27 years in prison, Nelson Mandela let go of anger at his tormenters to unite all the people of South Africa. He said that, “Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.”

Most of us won’t be called upon to forgive our jailors, but we may have terribly painful life events that keep us trapped. Sometimes it can be easier to



forgive a stranger than a loved one. We have few expectations of a stranger, but we feel a trust betrayed with a relative or friend who hurts us.

Forgiveness is not a once-and-done thing, it is a process. Like a muscle, we have to exercise it to strengthen it. Here are some tips to start:

Make it a value in your life. Hold forgiveness as a goal and work up to it in incremental stages.

Start with the small things. Let go of small slights and assume the best of others. Practice a small forgiveness every day and work up to the big things.

Forgive yourself. When we honestly face our own weaknesses and imperfections, it can help us develop tolerance for others.

Just do it. The holidays and the New Year give you good cover to reach out. Make the call, send the email, extend the hand.

Get help. Your EAP is here day and night even through the holidays for whatever help you may need. Give us a call.