

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Forgiveness

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Duration: 10 minutes

Frequency: As needed

Level of Difficulty: Moderate

Overview: When we've been wronged, anger is a natural and human emotional experience, and there is nothing wrong with feeling anger (certain behaviors associated with anger may, however, be a different story). But holding onto anger, and chronically feeling resentful, can cause us a considerable amount of suffering. Indeed, long-term resentment has been associated with increased levels of stress, diminished mental health, and physical health problems.

The antidote for this, of course, is to choose to forgive and let go. Forgiveness can help undo the psychological and physiological effects of holding a grudge, and can help us take back the power in our own lives. But before choosing to forgive another person, it's important to fully weigh the implications of this choice. There are indeed many reasons we might have for not wanting to forgive another person, and rushing into a decision to forgive can have negative consequences as well.

In order to explore this more fully, it can help to pause and reflect on both the pros and cons of forgiveness. In this practice, you'll be weighing the costs and benefits of choosing to forgive.

Instructions: Reflect for a moment on people in your life who have hurt you in some way, and who you have not yet forgiven. *Choose one such instance, and write about it:*

Person who hurt me: _____

What that person did to me: _____

Take a moment now and reflect on how the person's behavior has impacted your life: Consider how their actions hurt you emotionally, physically, or otherwise. Allow yourself to get in touch with these feelings, difficult as they may be. *Write down the ways in which this individual hurt you:*

How their actions harmed me:

Next, consider the ways in which holding onto your resentment has affected your health, your relationships with other people, and so forth over the years. Take a moment and reflect on this, and write down any observations you come up with.

Ways in which resentment has hurt me:

With that in mind, consider the costs and benefits of choosing to forgive this individual. For example, on the one hand you may feel as if he or she doesn't deserve your forgiveness; on the other hand, you may realize that holding onto this anger for any longer will continue to hurt only you. *Reflect on the various pros and cons of your choice to forgive, and write down anything that comes to mind.*

Benefits of Choosing Forgiveness	Costs of Choosing Forgiveness

Once you have completed the previous table, take a moment and reflect on what you discovered. Use the following questions to explore your experience more fully:

- Was there anything surprising about what I found?
- Was either side (benefits or costs) more powerful or persuasive?
- How do I think my life would change if I were to forgive this person?
- Did exploring the pros and cons of forgiveness move me in either direction?

How and why it works: Rushing into a decision to forgive can have several adverse consequences, including increasing our feelings of resentment as well as a likelihood that our decision will not "stick." As a result, it's important to first and foremost explore whether we even truly want to forgive the other person. This practice helps us to determine whether we do, in fact, want to move towards a decision to forgive.

Notes/Impressions:
