Are You Giving Up Your Rights for This?

"You make me so mad."

Have you ever said something like that? Of course you have. So have I. At one point in time (or in my case approximately 108,283 times) we've all said those words.

Here's a translation of that phrase you might not like: "You control me."

When you let what someone else does or says "make" you mad, you let that person control you. You give away your power to choose your actions.

You give up your right not to be offended. You give up your right not to get angry. You give up your right to be at peace, to be happy, and to focus on your calling.

I've said those words so many times myself. Time after time, I've chose to relinquish my rights and my power. I've allowed another person to control me.

"It's a free country"

Most of you reading this are in the United States. Here, within certain parameters, people have the right to say what they want to say and do what they want to do.

In other words, they have the right to say stupid things. They have the right to say offensive and hurtful things and even to stretch the truth to make a point.

And you have the right to ignore them. To let it go. To remind ourselves of who we really are.

Easier said than done

This is easier said than done, especially when dealing with those closest to us.

I've blamed others for my emotional state of being more than I'd like to admit. I've allowed something they said, even when it wasn't that bad, to set me off on the wrong course.

When I give up control to someone else's words or actions, I literally lose control of myself. That's when my anger boils over and the rage sets in. That's when I say things that I regret. That's when a destructive cycle begins.

But ignoring people when they speak ill of me or do something to hurt me is hard. It feels so good to fight back.

But at what cost?

What am I giving up my rights for?

The temporary satisfaction of getting back at someone?

The numbing of the pain I felt?

The release of bottled up frustration?

The truth is I get nothing out of it. I only make the problem worse.

Who defines you?

When you give up your rights and cede control to someone else, you allow someone else to define you. You allow someone else to control your destiny.

You increase their importance and diminish your own. If someone has the ability to "make" you mad, you've decided that placing their opinion of you above anyone else's. You worship their opinion of you.

As I mentioned earlier, it leads to a destructive cycle. You simply cannot live a productive or successful life when you give up your rights to ignore the negative words and actions of others and to choose your response.

Stopping the cycle

Stopping the cycle once it begins is devastatingly hard. The damage done in a short period of time is often massive. If you've ever been a part of a knock-down-drag-out verbal fight with your spouse, you know what I mean. You say things you regret, the silent treatment lasts for what seems like months (maybe it does), and you lose some of your joy.

Stopping that cycle before it begins seems hard, but I've seen it work wonders. It's imperative to keeping the rights you have and the control you have of your own emotions.

I am very much working on this myself. Just ask my wife, Tara. She'll tell you I'm somewhere between 2 and 15% of the way there. I hope it's more like 25%. But here is what I've learned so far:

How to keep control when others try to steal it

1. Withhold your first reaction.

AKA, bite your tongue. Whatever first comes to your mind, do *not* say that.

2. Walk away if needed.

Consider which is worse: walking away from an explosive situation or being in the middle of an explosive situation.

3. Withhold the next reaction, too.

Odds are, your second reaction is essentially a more logical version of the first. In other words, it's still going to lead to the same place.

4. Resolve to speak in love.

Whatever you do, make sure you speak in love, not in anger. Even if that means it takes you an hour or four.

5. Focus on "I feel" statements.

What you feel is just that. It's what *you* feel. No one *did* anything to you. No one *made* you feel this way.

Example: "I cannot believe you said that. How could you be so insensitive?" becomes "I feel upset right now. It feels like you didn't consider me when you said that."

Avoid accusations and focus on how you feel.

6. Do a post-mortem.

What buttons did you discover were pushed? Over time, you will notice a pattern and develop responses to each button. How did you respond? What worked and what didn't?

I started documenting this in my journal recently. I'm keeping track of the things I say that deescalate volatile situations and those that escalate them. Did calling for a timeout work best or just not saying anything? Did lowering my voice work or not?

So far, I only have one discovery but I know that in time I will have a long list of positive responses to explosive situations.

7. When all else fails, end the relationship.

This does not apply to all relationships, especially marriage. But there are times when you simply have to end the relationship.

If your cousin constantly ruins the family Thanksgiving, stop inviting him. If your friend from high school consistently leaves you angrier than before you spoke to her, stop talking to her.

It is a measure of last resort, but often necessary.

Whatever you do, don't give up your rights to choose your response to others, to keep your own peace, pursue happiness, and live out your purpose.

How have you given up your rights? What strategies have you used to keep control in the face of hurtful words or actions?