

## **Editor's Column: Coming Around Again**

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If you are of a certain age, I hope you hear the latter half of this column's title in Carly Simon's voice, because it's haunting me for sure now. As we have entered October and make our way toward November, I come closer to my work anniversary at my new institution. Admittedly, it's not until November 29, but the journey to this job began around this time last year. I was burned out, demoralized, and losing hope and a sense of self. It was a dangerous place to be, a dark place to be. I am grateful to not be in that place anymore, though I still miss my ULM family and am glad to still hear from them!

One of the things that emerged in the wake of my last column was that a significant number of you reached out to me to (1) express your support for me and (2) to express sympathy with my experiences. Some of you indicated that you'd gone through similar things in the past; some of you indicated that you were going through similar things in the present. For those of you who survived and offered your support – many kind thanks! I am in a much better place now, and I am glad you are, too. For those of you who have since escaped your bad place, I am so glad you were able to make it out alive!

But for those of you who may still be operating in a bad situation – please don't give up. I realize it would be very easy for me and others to armchair quarterback your situation. "Just leave it! It's not worth your health and happiness!" is a nice sentiment, but bills are real. Supporting oneself, or oneself and a partner and family, is real. These are realities that do not always accommodate one's desires and holistic being. Being a human being in contemporary

society is not easy whatsoever. It's true that we all have choices, but sometimes the alternatives are worse than the situations in which we find ourselves. And that can be made worse by well-intentioned people who may not understand your circumstances. Your suffering is not any less valid simply because you have to remain where you are.

I recently attended an excellent Niche Academy webinar entitled "Me Difficult? Nah, They're Difficult!" which discussed dealing with difficult people in the workplace, whether it means one's coworkers or one's customers/patrons. I was super glad that the presenters covered the trauma-informed approach. I recently completed writing a book chapter on the trauma-informed approach as applied to library leadership. In both of these cases, these experiences carry with them the notion of *grace in the workplace*. This was something that I began chewing on during lockdown, especially when things were at their most uncertain but even beyond that. The notion became even more critical when I began to understand the issues that plagued my new workplace, both in and out of the library ecosystem.

We'd like to think that we leave life at the door when we get to work. But we all know that work problems follow us home and don't stay in the workplace; the problems may live in the workplace, but they don't have boundaries. They follow us home and haunt our thoughts. We check our emails (either because we have to or feel compelled to). Similarly, life does not stop at the door. It follows us in; it sits at our desk with us and looks over our shoulders. It may make us curt with our coworkers; it may make us irritable and nervous, anxious or angry. We may not always be aware of it, sitting on our shoulders like the cliché angel and devil, though it's more like a jittery pigeon chirping incessantly and annoyingly that we can't quite ignore.

Regardless, life follows us into work, and we have to remember that, both for ourselves and our coworkers. We have to have grace for them and for ourselves. We owe it to them and

ourselves to be honest about our feelings and moods. There is nothing wrong with saying, “Hey, I’m not having a great day today. If I seem brusque or off, please be patient.” It’s okay to be honest and say, “I’m not on my A-game today. Thank you for understanding.” That gives other people a clearer context for your moods or behavior so they aren’t second-guessing you or themselves. It also helps you sit with your feelings in a more authentic and self-respecting way that may be able to help you manage them better. These actions create a space for understanding and, more importantly, for grace and compassion.

I tend to blame myself for things even when they aren’t my fault. I shoulder that responsibility in a misguided sense of trying to rectify problems, even when they may be beyond my control. While emotional intelligence is about one’s ability to manage one’s own emotions, it’s also about helping other people manage their emotions as well. However, that’s not the same thing as *controlling* their emotions. As my husband reminds me: “Megan, you can’t and don’t control people at that level.” Which, let’s face it, THANK GOODNESS. We cannot gatekeep other people’s emotions any more than we want others gatekeeping our own.

But what we can control is our own reactions. Yes, I am invoking the Stoics. But it’s not just for the purpose of reminding ourselves that some things are beyond our control. I remind myself of the Stoics whenever I feel overwhelmed by something. The Stoics would say that we can choose to not let things touch us. While I don’t whole-heartedly agree with that sentiment, I think we have more choice and free will with regard to our own emotions and reactions than we want to admit. Frankly, sometimes it feels good to let oneself get mad or have unkind thoughts. And there’s nothing wrong with that; feelings are neither good nor bad; they are merely feelings. What matters is how we choose to act on those feelings, especially towards other people. And we do have a choice about that.

If I sound rather preachy, I don't mean to. This column is as much about reminding ourselves that we are human and fallible and have bad days as it is remembering that others are human and fallible and have bad days, too. This column is a reminder to be gentle with yourself and others – to extend grace to yourself and others. It is a reminder that a support system is critical, whatever your circumstances. I survived my bad situation because I have an excellent support system of family, friends, and colleagues. Folx who reached out to me after my last column often mentioned the importance of support. For those of you still in bad circumstances, make sure you have support. Make sure you give yourself grace.

We can all use a little grace every day, whether we give it to ourselves or others.

## REMINDERS FOR HARD DAYS

WHOLE HEARTED SCHOOL COACHING

1. A bad day does not equal a bad life. *You are not this struggle.*
2. Not all thoughts are true. *Phew.*
3. Feelings are not facts. *But all your feelings are valid, real, and allowed.*
4. The only way out is through. *DARN IT.*
- 5. Your worth is not contingent on circumstances.  
↙ *You are LOVABLE and ENOUGH always.* ↘
6. Nothing stays the same. *Life guarantees this.*
7. You can't be everything to everyone. *But you can be true to yourself.*
8. *Be gentle with yourself.* And trust your inner voice, strength, and resilience. *(And be vulnerable)*
9. *You're not alone.* It's okay to ask for help. ^
10. Focus on the things you can control.  
*Let go of the rest.* *This is easier said than done.*