



## Ask Yourself: “What Is My Desired Outcome?”

This is your “power tool” question. It’s one that I use often in my work with clients because it works! And it will work for you, too.

Note the word choice in this question: “desired” outcome vs. what you wish for — it matters! Wishing, as on the proverbial star, isn’t enough to achieve the results you want.

This question (What is my desired outcome?), repeatedly asked on regular basis, is the key to achieving the kind of relationships and life satisfaction most of us yearn for. It laser-focuses your thoughts and increases the effectiveness of your actions.

Like a meditation mantra, it focuses the mind and gently pushes aside any thoughts that would distract you from what you’re committed to doing. In this case, it can stop old habitual, guilt-inducing thoughts in their tracks and keep you on track.

When you are clear about your desired outcome, there is no room for those old thoughts and behaviors — they become noise that you can easily choose not to pay attention to.

To be effective, the answer to this question requires two key components to reach your desired outcome:

It has to identify what you want, not what you don’t want.

— AND —

It has to be something over which you have control.

Let me give you a sort of “case study” example of a possible scenario in which you as a caregiver could find yourself.

Imagine this is you in this scenario:

Let’s say you’re trying to accommodate an insistent request from your irritated, agitated and judgmental mother, at a time when you have multiple competing demands on your time — say your career, your needs and your own family. You feel like your parent is being unreasonable, overly insistent and unappreciative.

While she has certain requests that you know can wait, some can’t: It’s important to know the difference.

When your mother calls telling you she needs clean sheets because she likes to have them changed every other day, you are aware that this request, while normal for her, is not an emergency. However, it’s painful to listen to her complain and get aggravated and blame you for not doing enough, then hearing her litany of complaints about her life.

To spare yourself from another tirade, you drop everything you had on your own to-do list and run over, leaving you feeling frustrated and aggravated. (Sound familiar?) Once you arrive at her home, the following phases would typically occur:

1. You go on automatic pilot to fix everything, “because Mom expects everything to be ‘right now’ and perfect”
2. You don’t let your mother know that you had other things to do because you needed to be seen as “cheerfully willing to do whatever it takes”
3. You grit your teeth and feel the self-sacrifice (feeling like a martyr) as you make your mom’s needs “first and only..”
4. You avoid at all costs the inevitable tirade or silent treatment you’ll get from Mom if you don’t stay and handle it!

**This is what can happen if you let go of the guilt and focus on, not only what your mother needs, but what you need as well.**

Instead of getting stuck in resisting what you don’t like about the situation (“They shouldn’t be acting like this!”), or resenting them (“After all I do for them...!”), you think about what your ultimate goal is. Maybe that’s “I want my mom to have fresh bed linens, AND I want to enjoy a sit-down dinner and a movie with my husband and kids tonight.”

When you focus on your desired outcome, you realize your brother always drops his kids off for Little League on Wednesdays, then has a couple of hours free. You let go of any thoughts that pop into your head (which have stopped you in the past!), telling you all the reasons you shouldn’t burden your brother; then you call him and simply ask, “Mom is requesting fresh linens for tonight, and I cannot get there. I have fresh sheets here, and it would be great if you could you come by and pick them up, bring them to Mom, and make up her bed before picking up the kids from practice.” And, after a long pause and a deep breath (possibly triggering your guilt and angst over calling...) he says, “I can do that, and since I haven’t seen mom for a few days, it will be a good opportunity for a quick visit.”

In this example you didn’t offer an excuse for not being able to make it. This is important, because your reason for not being able to make it to Mom’s is not needed.

You take a deep breath and realize that your plans don’t have to change, and you’ve gained some breathing room. Mom’s need is solved, she’s going to get to see her son too, and despite some initial angst and concern, you find that you feel relieved.

You would be amazed at the creativity and options that present themselves, just by asking this seemingly simple question. Options that you were totally blind to a minute earlier because you were stuck in your emotional reaction just appear out of nowhere (or, at least, with way less effort than you might think!).

Even when things aren’t perfect, and your brother can’t (or won’t) pitch in, and you may have to listen to your mother complain, or you will have to miss or postpone your plans, shifting your focus means being more aware that there are other options than the usual knee-jerk reactions.

It isn’t always possible to meet a loved one’s demands, needs or requests exactly as they want or expect. When you learn to breathe through your initial guilt reaction and can make a decision based upon a greater good. You have a right to honor that reality, without judgment, and this helps you to begin creating a life that works for you.

Focusing on your desired outcome will help you remember that you have options, including: setting boundaries, sometimes saying “no,” and making requests of others. Give yourself time to explore those options, keeping you from going into martyr mode. Give yourself permission to focus on your desired outcome, looking for the greater good, and they will come into view.

Take a moment to write down your answers the questions provided.

1. What is your desired outcome? This can be both in immediate situations as well as long-term.

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2. What steps would you have to take to achieve your desired outcome?

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3. What would you have to let go of or change in order to take those above steps? In other words, what gets in your way of taking those steps to achieve your desired outcome(s)?

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4. Are you willing to take as good care of yourself as you do of those you care for?

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