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# The Four Agreements: Building a Better you and Better Relationships

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With everything going on in the world, saying there's uncertainty is an understatement. We face a lot of unknowns, hold opinions, and feel a sense of overall unease. Feelings of fear, anxiety, panic, anger, disorder, powerlessness, and an array of other unsettling emotions have emerged. There has been a lot for individuals to disagree about and individuals have found varying ways to cope with the upheaval. Our sense of "normalcy" has been stripped away. The combination of these factors has made it easy to feel at odds within ourselves and with others.

To manage the abundance of disarray in life's current circumstances, it's helpful to be grounded by and connected to something positive that can also fulfill a sense of control. The Four Agreements (1997) is a book written by Don Miguel Ruiz, MD that can fulfill that need for grounding, hold you accountable, and ultimately help spread positivity versus negativity. Ruiz's book covers the following Four Agreements in detail: 1). Be Impeccable with your word. 2). Don't take anything personally. 3). Don't make assumptions, and 4). Always do your best. Let's break each of them down.

**Be Impeccable with Your Word:** To be impeccable with your word means to speak without sin. Ruiz talks about the power of the word and how words can set you free or enslave you. It means one should speak with integrity, say only what they mean, avoid using words to speak against yourself or others, to not use words to reject oneself, and to take responsibility for oneself rather than blaming others. If this sounds easy, ask yourself these questions:

- When was the last time you told a lie?
- When was the last time you spoke poorly about someone you care about?
- When was the last time you sat in judgement of yourself (picking apart things you don't like about yourself?)
- When was the last time you started or participated in gossip?

If you've engaged in any of these behaviors recently, I encourage you to pick up the book and begin the process of understanding how your words influence your view of self and relationships with others.

**Don't Take Anything Personally:** The second agreement discusses how we each have our own personal world view. Our personal world views are shaped by our own personal experiences. Nothing other people do is because of you; others' behaviors reflect their own world view; what they need, what they want, and how they view themselves, others, and the world, etc. Not only do we often feel our personal belief system is 100% accurate, but it also makes us feel safe. When people have beliefs that are different than our own, we get scared, defend ourselves, and try to impose our point of view on them. Instead of acting defensively or getting upset, I encourage you to:

- **Practice forgiveness.** Forgiving is a promise to not use past discretions, behaviors, or sins against the other person. It is about letting go, and not holding grudges.
- **Avoid the urge to be emotionally reactive.** Instead, understand that the person is speaking or behaving from their world view and trying to get some of their own needs met.
- **Apologize.** Apologizing doesn't always mean that you are wrong and the other person is right. It means that you value the relationship more than your ego.

**Don't make assumptions:** This is also referred to as storytelling--making up your own story about situations or people and believing them to be true! Ruiz explains that, "we create a lot of emotional poison just by making assumptions and taking it personally, because usually we start gossiping about our assumptions." To avoid making assumptions, challenge yourself to engage in the following behaviors:

- Find the courage to ask questions, especially difficult questions.
- Communicate your thoughts, wants, and needs clearly.
- Remember that others are not mind readers and that no matter how long you've been in that relationship, friendship, marriage, or worked together, other people do not know what you're thinking.
- It is your responsibility to ask for what you want.

**Always do your best:** Simply put, doing your best means putting your best foot forward in all you do. Enjoy serving others without expecting a reward. Remember:

- Your best will change from moment to moment. So will others'. Be mindful of that.
- Assume positive intent. Believe that others are doing their best at any given moment.
- Live in the moment and release the past. The past can be filled with resentments and pain. The present is yours to make of it what you will.
- Be patient with yourself and others.

In a world full of chaos, focus on the things that you CAN control. When we each hold ourselves accountable to be better people, we're also doing our part to make a better, gentler world.

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