



JENNY TRYANSKY  
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT COACHING

*go inward. move forward.*

## The Power of Acceptance

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There's a problem with turning to the dictionary definition of acceptance as it relates to mental health, wellbeing and personal growth. Look up the meaning and you'll get lots of descriptions involving the words approval, acceptable or agreement. When you accept the terms of a contract, you've come to an agreement. When you accept a new job or admission into a school, you're typically accepting something you want and approve of.

On the contrary, coming to a place of acceptance within yourself about things that happen in your life has nothing to do with agreeing with, approving of or even liking those things. Instead, it has to do with accepting what's true and factual, while letting go of what you need to for the sake of finding peace within yourself.

How do you know if you've accepted what is? The answer is not easy or straightforward, but it's worth exploring. To know what it is, it helps to know what it isn't.

### The Opposite of Acceptance is Resistance

When I started on my own personal development journey, I realized I was prone to resistance. Circumstances that I didn't like often felt like they were happening *to* me, instead of simply happening. That was my first clue that I defaulted to resistance. I started to see and understand my own role in a lot of the suffering I was experiencing at work, in my personal life, and in many situations big and small.

I like to tell the story of one seemingly unremarkable day I experienced a few years ago.

I had pre-booked an appointment to get my cellphone screen fixed. In my mind, I was in control of how my day would unfold. Not only did things not go as planned, a series of unexpected events snowballed and what was supposed to be an hour at the store turned out to be five hours of delays. My initial reaction when things started to go sideways was anger. I was mad, tense and resentful, and I wanted the people who were 'doing this to me' to know it. But I started to become curious about what was possible if I loosened up on how tight my resistance was to what was happening, and allowed myself to accept it instead.

I decided to ask myself "what choices would be available to me if I accepted what's happening now instead of resisting it?". Instead of sitting in the store seething in anger and waiting in a huff (which only would have hurt me), I allowed my feelings of disappointment to be there, but decided to pass the time by going for a nice lunch. It didn't make it OK that my appointment



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time wasn't honoured. But it made the time I now had to kill much more pleasant. Instead of blowing up with fury and outrage when they told me two hours later that it was going to be another hour and a half, I accepted the facts even though I didn't like them, and went for an enjoyable walk instead. The day went on like this; more circumstances I couldn't control, more acceptance. Ultimately, a very good day unfolded even though it turned out differently than I had planned. It's not what I would have chosen to do with my time, but my willingness to accept what was instead of fight against it had a positive impact and ultimately protected my sense of wellbeing.

This isn't to say that acceptance in all situations will lead to enjoyment. Sometimes a circumstance just downright sucks and is disappointing and painful. Acceptance in these cases means acknowledging those unpleasant emotions without judging yourself for having them.

My experience made me realize how detrimental internal resistance can be, how unhealthy it feels and how it can hold us back - and how powerful acceptance can be in opening up a more peaceful way through.

### **Accepting Without Judging**

Life is full of situations that happen. Our attitude, thoughts and judgements around them, and tendency to label as 'good' or 'bad', influences how we experience these situations. While we accept the good stuff without batting an eye, it's in those situations that we label 'bad' where we typically put up a fight.

Whether we're disappointed by a loved one, diagnosed with a health issue, lose out on a job opportunity or live through a global pandemic, resisting what's true won't make the situation any different or any less unpleasant. In fact, it only adds a new layer into the mix: suffering.

Pain is an unavoidable human experience. Pain with acceptance doesn't take away the pain, but pain with resistance, or non-acceptance, results in pain *plus* suffering. The pain we experience in response to a situation is still there, and our resistance adds another layer of unpleasant emotions and causes us greater and longer struggle.

Remember, acceptance doesn't mean you agree with the situation. It also doesn't mean resigning yourself or denying your disapproval or your needs. It means accepting that the facts of a situation are real, while also validating your own feelings about what has happened even if they're unpleasant and uncomfortable.

One of my favorite descriptions of acceptance is from clinical psychologist Steven Hayes, who describes it as "active, nonjudgmental embracing of experience in the here and now." Nonjudgmental means looking at what's true and not what your mind is telling you about



what's true. Accepting the facts and not the story that we lay on top of the facts. When we tell ourselves "it shouldn't be this way" or that it should be some other way for it to be acceptable, we're caught up in story and judgement, which fuels resistance.

### **But How do I Accept?**

A lot of people struggle with this. Clients ask me all the time, "What does it look like to actually accept? What do I need to *do*? How do I know if I've gotten there?"

Acceptance is an emotional experience. It needs to be felt to be known. Most of us know what resistance feels like. For me, it's anxious, tight, oppressive. Ask yourself what you're resisting or unable to accept in your life, and notice what that feels like for you.

Acceptance brings a sense of inner calm. It's lighter, freer and makes it easier to be with the pain or disapproval we may have about what's happened. It feels compassionate. We may not feel positive feelings towards someone who has wronged or harmed us, but the act of accepting what is feels loving towards ourselves. Psychologist Tara Brach poignantly says in [her talk on genuine acceptance](#) that "when we think we're accepting another, what we're really doing is accepting what's coming up in us."

All that there is to *do* is to be willing to accept. It's not a switch you can turn on. There's no meter to tell you if you're doing it right or enough, or if acceptance has been reached or not. It's about being honest with yourself.

The phrase "it is what it is" can be experienced by one person as resignation and by another as genuine acceptance. It's about how it feels to you. If you tell yourself that you accept a situation but you don't really mean it, that's denial. If it feels like suffering or suppressing feelings, you're not in acceptance... yet. Keep working at it. Look at your emotions, allow them to be there and ask yourself what acceptance would look like and what impact it could have *for you*.

When I was diagnosed with severely low iron during a particularly stressful period in my life, my own coach asked me, "What would acceptance of exhaustion look like?" A powerful question that helped me stop struggling and wishing for a different reality where I wasn't depleted. It allowed me to give myself permission to rest more. Accepting reality made it easier to make choices that helped me get through the situation instead of fighting it.

A good question to ask yourself is "What am I willing to accept for the sake of finding peace within myself?". That reframe may just be the thing that helps diffuse tension and resistance. Acceptance is a way through; facing reality instead of turning away from it so you can make decisions about what to do next.



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Acceptance is a process that can't be forced and may even require you to re-accept again and again without judging yourself for dipping back into non-acceptance.

All we can do is be willing and open to it. That willingness is what allows acceptance to emerge.

### **Acceptance During COVID-19**

Many of us experienced resistance to what was happening during the first few months of the pandemic, because it was so hard-hitting and felt too scary to accept. You may still be struggling to accept our current reality because information about the virus and what is 'safe' and 'unsafe' keeps changing day to day.

I go through waves of acceptance. As soon as I accept the circumstances and start to get comfortable in that state of acceptance, I read an article or hear a story that pulls me right back into resistance, panic and fear. That's when I know I need to re-accept by going back through the process of checking my beliefs and thoughts against what I know to be true in the moment, and allowing space for all the emotions that come up inside of me without judging them. Once I do that, I can make choices and assess risk from a more stable place.

Acceptance may not equal agreement. But in a sense, we do make an agreement *within ourselves* when we're ready and willing to accept reality. It's a brave and compassionate act to accept what is. It means putting your own well-being ahead of being right or proving someone else wrong. Ultimately, it means finding a sense of rightness within yourself regardless of the circumstance - and that is powerful.

### **ABOUT JENNY**





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Jenny Tryansky is an ICF-credentialed Certified Professional Co-Active Coach with a **whole life/whole person approach**.

In her private practice, she works virtually with clients around the world, specializing in working one-on-one with people who are driven yet highly self-critical.

She coaches clients to build meaningful, authentic lives, tackling personal and professional challenges with self-compassion and resilience, as they move forward toward their goals fuelled with confidence instead of self-criticism.

In addition to coaching private clients, Jenny is a writer, speaker, workshop & group leader and mindful self-compassion advocate.

She juggles life in Toronto with her husband and young daughter, and her work with clients around the world.

Connect with Jenny on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) and read her [articles with helpful resources](#) on her [website](#).

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