

bury

the

grudge

forgive and *'give'*
with blueberry muffins

Phil Anthony M



Start here.

All day long we're carrying around suitcases of negative memories, anger, fear and hurt. This heavy luggage is literally weighing us down. At any moment they might fling open, spilling all those emotions, memories and fears into your now.

So what if you could use forgiveness to get over the grudge and lighten your load a little? What if life could be just a little easier, a bit simpler and a lot better for having flipped just a few stories using forgiveness?

Whether you have a painful memory that's overstayed its welcome, a crushing relationship that you just need to move on from, or perhaps something quite small that's just not sitting well with you, then maybe it's time to flip the story and find strength in the things you never thought possible.

Forgiveness has the power to make even the most negative of situations work for you. Read on and find out how I forgave with blueberry muffins!

Reading time: 18 minutes

Massages

and muffins.

I'm going to share a few personal stories that'll hopefully resonate with you and help kick you into action, even if it's just in a small way. Let's start with a trivial situation, but one that mattered to me all the same.

For the last few years, I've lived in Thailand working at a health and fitness retreat. There's a massage parlour up the road from me that does great, deep-tissue Thai massage. I used to go there every single day, getting the same massage for around \$10 (can't believe I spent over \$10,000 in three years on massages!). After three years of doing this, naturally the staff became friends. We'd chat about our families and our lives, and it was just great.

One evening, the shop was unusually empty. "Where is everyone?" I asked.

"It's low season," one of the women replied. "Rainy season."

“Why don’t you run a promotion? Like a buy 10 get one free pack,” I suggested (a Starbucks-style loyalty card). I wanted to help drum up business. They were great and deserved to be busy all year round. The woman smiled. “We already do!”. She pulled out a clipboard and tilted it for me to see. There were rows of names dating back to 2013, all under the heading ‘buy 10, get one free’. “See?”

I saw.

I know it’s incredibly small, but it actually hurt. In all my years of being a loyal customer, never once did they mention the promotion to me. It wasn’t the financial side that bothered me — I understood even then that they had personal reasons for wanting to get as many paid massages as possible. It was that I viewed these women as friends. And as a friend, I felt let down.

“Why didn’t you tell me? I come here every day.”

Realising for the first time what she was showing me and the implications of it, the masseuse put the clipboard away. “I’m sorry,” she said. “Very sorry. Today your massage is free.”

I paid and I left.

The new way to forgive.

On the drive home from the massage shop, I cycled through every emotion. First there was disappointment; I felt I couldn't trust these people as friends. Then frustration, then anger, then disappointment again, only this time it was bringing up all the times that people have wronged me.

In other words, I really worked myself up.

I called Melanie, one of my best friends, to complain. She listened. And then she said something that changed everything.

“Phil, you have to think about how you can overcome this story.”

“You mean, go in and demand \$1000 worth of free massages?” I suggested.

“No, you have to find a way to forgive them. To radically forgive them so that the story works for you. So that it eventually becomes funny. Otherwise you'll hold onto this and carry it with you. What can you do to get beyond this?”

At first I was thinking “Melanie, just let me have my whinge!”, but she was right. Absolutely, 100 percent right. I needed to flip the story.

Now I’m the first to admit I’m far from perfect and I’m constantly learning. But I found a way to forgive that made sense to me.

The next morning, I went to my favourite gluten-free bakery and bought my favourite treat: four juicy blueberry muffins -- if you’re ever in Phuket head over to Bake Free in Chalong and get yourself some! Anyway, I asked for them to be wrapped in a cute gift box with a huge bow. I went back to that massage shop, walked in and gave these women I’d known for years the blueberry muffins.

“I really enjoyed coming here,” I said. “It’s a great place and I’ll still recommend it, and I want to thank you. But I also want to let you know that I felt let down. I think of you girls as friends. I know I’m business ultimately, but I think of it that way. I want to give you these muffins. Please eat them, enjoy them. I thank you for everything, but goodbye.”

With that, I walked out.

The whole situation wasn’t a gain or a loss. I’m sure there were other ways I could have handled everything, but this was my way to forgive. It mattered to me that I wasn’t a pushover; it also mattered

that I ended things on a good note, that I found a way to flip the story.

The result is that today, I can retell that story and not feel too bad -- and if you go into the massage shop now, they have a sign clearly saying buy 10 get one free! Ha.

But it got me thinking: What other anger or resentment in my life was I holding onto?

Is that my phone?

After the massage and muffin incident, three strange things happened. Back to back.

Someone I had known, a kind of colleague if you like, stole my phone a few years ago. She was a young woman from Burma, hard-working to make a living for her family with probably not all that much cash. I never did anything about the situation, just kept quiet and sort of accepted it. Let it be. But it did upset me and it was always there in the back of my mind, continuing to upset me.

A few days after the muffin-giving incident, I bumped into her for the first time in a while, in the grocery store whilst I was buying a watermelon -- it was cheat day! We ended up chatting, making

small talk. She told me she had a new baby and whipped out her phone to show me photos.

Of course, it was my phone.

Can you believe it?

I jerked, startled. And she realised her faux-pas instantly. Awkward, right? The conversation stalled but in that moment, I decided it was time to change this. And so I flipped the story.

I let it go. I let it go with a big warm smile and congratulated her on the birth of her gorgeous little girl. We looked each other in the eyes. We both knew. She thanked me for forgiving her, without moving her lips. It was written in her eyes.

I'm not saying stealing is ok with me in this case, in any case in fact. And her betrayal of my trust didn't go overlooked, but finding kindness mattered more to me than being right or getting my phone back.

A call from prison.

A few days after that, after seeing that girl in the store, I got a phone call from an old friend. Let's call him Ahmed. Once upon a time we

were really close. I knew his whole family and even spent religious holidays with them when I lived and worked in Saudi Arabia. They were a huge part of my life.

Ahmed wanted to be a personal trainer but needed a car to reach clients and money to buy a car. I lent it to him.

Then he went silent. He literally blanked me.

Ahmed had my money and he literally disappeared. It hurt quite a lot on so many levels.

It had been almost two years since we spoke properly.

Then, like I said, I got this call. It was from an unknown number. When I picked up, it was Ahmed's brother, telling me my friend was in prison and that he was on the line. He wanted to talk.

So we talked. I asked how he was. He asked how I was. After five minutes, the conversation went flat. Things were so awkward that I even asked him if he was having enough protein in prison, since we used to train together and all. Of course both of us knew the elephant in the room was the money and how Ahmed had handled everything, but neither of us wanted to bring it up, not with his brother on the line listening. I hadn't told his family and I don't

think he had either. We skirted around the main thing and talked about nothing.

When I hung up, I found myself struggling to understand what Ahmed wanted. Why did he call? What was his goal with all of that? It really confused me and it brought up a lot of memories I hadn't thought about in a while.

Yet sorting through those thoughts helped me realise I had changed. We both had changed. And the money wasn't worth the pain, the anger, that I was still clinging onto. In that moment, I forgave him. And it felt great.

A weight dropped off my shoulders.

In my hour of need.

The final act of forgiveness came in the form of forgiving a dear friend. I had literally been there for her in her hour of need. Not once, not twice, but on multiple occasions. Even to the point where I had to intervene to stop her taking her life.

However, in my hour of need, she was nowhere to be seen.

I held a lot of resentment towards that relationship and how it all played out. Anyway, within a few days of the massage and muffin situation, my friend who wasn't there for me showed up in a big way. She was literally going out of her way to support me. To help me. To give the best of her for my benefit. In that moment, I again forgave.

Literally, every time, the muffins, the phone, the money, the friend, it was drop, drop, drop and DROP.

I don't know why all this happened, one after another. I just know the results of forgiving were amazing. It felt unbelievable.

It felt light.

The forgiveness

gift box.

A lot of us are walking around with huge suitcases of negative memories. Everywhere we go, they're there with us, weighing us down, slowing us down, hampering our growth. Forgiveness lets us limit the pain and frustration, but keep the lessons as hand luggage.

I work with a lot of people who talk me through so many memories with such intensity, such pain, that it's as though it happened yesterday. It's so raw in them. It's right at the tip of their tongue. At the surface.

They have those stories on tap. The fact they can relive it, word for word, pain for pain, means that at any moment things are ready to explode. You might have seen it happen at a fitness class or grocery store; you bump into someone and they turn on you with such pure rage. The smallest interaction, the smallest slight can set it off.

This is why we need forgiveness.

Let's look at the word for a moment. Forgiveness. For give. It's *for* you to *give*. It's about taking all the hurt, anger, pain, bad feeling and bad memories, and start saying "You know what? This doesn't work for me anymore. I give it away".

I want us to take those heavy suitcases of bad memories. Let's put them on the table and open them up, take out the lessons and leave the pain.

The lessons are great tools that we can use every day.

That's what happens when we forgive. We keep the lessons but we leave heaviness of those weighty raw emotions.

How to forgive? Stop trying to forget.

Forgive and forget is a contradiction. If you forgive someone, you're letting it go, but you can never really forget. I don't think you should. When we try to forget, chances are something will find the memory and it will crop up, spring out, when we least expect it.

Instead of forgetting, allow yourself to remember. But work through the memory to release the pain while keeping the lesson.

Easier said than done, right?

I know. Trust me, I've been there, and quite regularly go there!

So here are some handy tools I've found really useful.

Tool 1. See the light behind the dark.

Everyone who comes into your life, whether it's briefly meeting someone on a plane or knowing them for years, has the potential to teach you something. Each interaction can shift us, even in the tiniest of ways.

In this sense, relationships — both good and bad — are purposeful. They help us as individuals grow and develop. They provide lessons.

Some of the best lessons are wrapped in sandpaper. It's like a child putting their hand on a flame. It burns and is awful, but it only happens once, teaching them to avoid fire and protecting them in the long run.

When it comes to learning to forgive someone, think of the memories, the relationship, and look at what the purpose was. What did you learn from the interaction?

I'm going to give you a little example.

Years ago I was at a pool barbecue with maybe 40 people. My friend walks up in front of everyone and points at me. “What’s that?”

“What’s what?”

“That,” he responded. He was gesturing to my muffin tops.

I was so embarrassed and pretty angry. That night I went home and found myself obsessing over the muffin tops, just really focusing on my flaws. I couldn’t believe how I had such a physical, painful response to the guy’s words.

But I realised then that I needed to flip it, learn from it and make a change.

That’s how I ultimately ended up becoming a fitness trainer, running a marathon and running a health and fitness retreat. I joined a gym after his comment with a goal of burning off those muffin tops. Then I developed a mad love for fitness.

I’m not saying the way he behaved was right or that people should be rude for the sake of teaching us a lesson. Absolutely not! But what I am saying is that when those things happen, there’s a potential for us to grow, improve and develop.

My friend's comment opened a door. It allowed me to look into something different from what I ever imagined and it changed my life forever.

Tool 2. Care for their story.

A great way of looking at relationships is this: You can't control other people's behaviours and you can't control their stories.

They are the way today is because of the sum of all the experiences they've had up until now. You're the same. I tell those I work with to think of it like we're all swimmers in the ocean. I might go with the tide, which is popular culture and the done thing, and that's perfectly fine. You might rebel, struggling against the waves, and that's great too. Someone else might decide to build a boat and do completely their own thing. Everyone swims at different speeds and with varying intentions.

Our paths, our stories, these are completely unique to us. They're our own.

In relationships, this can often lead to distance, the distance to anger, and eventually to the need to forgive.

I struggled with this a while back. As I mentioned earlier, one of my good friends really needed support for a few months while she was working through some things. I was there at all hours, anytime, whenever she needed help. Fast forward a year later. When I was in a tough time, she didn't reciprocate. It felt like she couldn't be bothered.

Now I know that she was battling her own demons and didn't have the strength to be supportive. I wasn't thinking about her swim, her struggle.

That's the way life can be sometimes. People go along riding different waves and on different routes, so they might be up and you might be down. And that's perfectly ok.

That's a really great way of looking at things. You're not judging the other person, you're not judging yourself. You're just saying: "You know what? Right now we're on different paths."

This helps guide us toward compassion, and from there, forgiveness.

Tool 3: Let go of the negatives.

Surely no type of negative can actually feel good? Right? The three questions that follow are huge. They help us identify any negatives we are choosing to live with, that ultimately aren't all that positive. I always come back to these in many life situations, from relationships, to careers and forgiveness.

Is this working for me?

Does holding onto the anger and frustration of past slights improve you in any way? If not, get rid of it.

Is it serving me?

How does clinging to these bitter memories support your values and benefit your goals? If it doesn't, change it.

Finally, is it worthy of me?

You are worthy of the best. You're worthy of joy, love and happiness. If something isn't living up to what you're worth, maybe it's not right for you.

Let the pain, anger and frustration go. Why are you hurting yourself? Prolonging the event? Who for? Surely not yourself? Let go. Bury it. You'll feel so much lighter for it.

Practice forgiving radically... maybe even like I did in the story about muffins and massages! Give the gift of giving to forgive. Ultimately it's *for* you to *give*, right?

Tool 4: It takes two to tango.

This is a controversial one. Well it can be if you're not prepared to consider it. Think about your role in this for a minute.

When it comes to reinventing stories and looking at forgiveness, it's important we think through the things we might have done ourselves. Maybe I wasn't my most compassionate self? Wrapped up in my own version of the story? Maybe I hurt them? Maybe I could have done more.

I'm not saying take the blame. But I am saying let's shift some of that responsibility, acknowledging how we might have impacted things or contributed to the outcome in some kind of way?

Strangely, thinking about ourselves is quite tough on the ego. It requires us to consider a situation and admit that we may not be flawless or 100 percent right. To forgive, we need to check our ego at the door and be honest with ourselves.

Tool 5: Let it breathe.

Sometimes change can happen in an instant. Often it takes days, weeks, months or years.

Give it time. Don't push these things. Whilst there is no point in holding onto pain, I also don't want you to force a change. Give it all room to breathe. Let it change it in its own time.

Recently I worked with 'Sarah', a client who came to me with a lot of anger toward her mother. Growing up, her mother acted in fairly cruel ways. Even on her deathbed, the mother was purposefully hurtful. She said some bitter, sharp things.

For Sarah, the story didn't end well. It ended awfully.

When I saw her, Sarah was carrying this pain in such a raw, palpable way. It impacted every day of her life. She was struggling to find motivation, struggling to get up. She didn't feel worthy.

I didn't tell her to forgive and find the lessons. I worked with her to start understanding how she could begin to rewrite the story and find a way to embrace the positives in a seemingly negative-only situation.

How? In this case, we spoke about her goals. It turned out that Sarah wanted to be for her children what her mother never was for her. She also wanted to help other young women feel worthy and enough, exactly as they were.

See the link?

Sarah wanted to change the lives of her children and young women due to the pain her mother caused her. In her mother, in that 'sandpaper' situation, she learned what love wasn't and what other people might need. The process enabled her to be a better mother herself.

For Sarah, as for many of us, forgiveness won't happen overnight. But in finding the lessons tucked behind all the pain, she started the process.

**Tool 6: If it hasn't ended well,
it hasn't ended.**

All these little stories, these relationships, these issues and memories, on their own are quite small. But when you put them all together, interlink them in a row, this becomes the timeline of our life.

This is your world, your story, your movie. All these little parts add up. So if you can make as many of these chapters end positively, trust me, your life will be so much better.

Start the micro-changes now so that your macro-story is great. You're the author, producer and director here. You have the power to go back and reshape the way you see your past. Find ways to keep the lessons but leave the pain. Start forgiving, start flipping stories and rewrite for a better you.

If you're in the situation real-time and it's actively causing you pain or hurting your values, take control. You're in the ocean swimming. It's up to you to decide to swim against the current, float along with it or build a raft. Seize the moment to change the outcome.

Remember, the bigger the feelings of disappointment and anger, the more epic, funny and memorable your act of forgiveness needs to be. The positivity of your story of forgiveness needs to outweigh the original story.

My goal is that when I'm on my rocking chair as an old man, I'll be able to look back at the story of my life, find joy in it and tell a series of epic stories. Just like Forrest Gump!

I want that for you too.

End here.

Forgiveness is one of the most powerful weapons we have. It's a tool that works really well when we ignore our ego's need to be right. Remember, when you forgive it's all about making the situation work for you. It's about looking through some of the memories you're holding close to you and finding ways to rethink them.

The thing is, as abundant people, we can't control everything. We can't control other people or every situation. But what we can do is control our view on it. We can change our lens, change our thinking, change the words we're using. Eventually, we can even change our whole belief system around the memories. All because we were able to forgive.

So go on, treat yourself to the biggest gift of all.

Give yourself the gift of forgiveness.

And have a blueberry muffin too!

Phil Anthony M

www.PhilAnthonyM.com