

Charlie's Story – A Recovering Black and White Thinker

My way of thinking is that all-or-nothing-at-all thinking. It's really helped me feel safe at times, and I don't want to change. I have a history of doing bad things with gray areas. In the old days, if I thought I could do a little of this or a little of that, I'd have gone right back to square one with substance abuse and bad company.

So it made me really nervous when I found out that I would advance through the dietary guidelines of Suppers at my own pace. I wanted black and white instructions, absolute clarity, and a money back guarantee that if I followed the directions the desire to drown my sorrows with food or drink would be less. My Suppers friend told me that persisting with black and white thinking might be one of the reasons I'm plagued by acid reflux. I am so sick of this pain, and stress definitely makes it worse.

My friend suggested that I think of black and white thinking as an option, not a default setting. I could turn it on at the lab where I work, and tone it down in my personal life. It was also suggested I do a simple exercise: List the diet and lifestyle changes people can make to improve their digestion, whether I was willing to make the changes or not. I could think of several things one could do: eat more fruit, eat steamed vegetables instead of fried, prepare my own simple meals like soup, avoid big heavy meals like pizza, stop eating at the computer, remember to slow down and taste the food, and never eat while stressed but rather wait until I can sit down for a few minutes. For every suggested change I was to ask myself: Am I willing to do it today? Do I refuse to do it? Might I become willing to do it sometime? I tackled the "willing" list. That was easy. I was willing to eat more fruit. I was willing to eat steamed vegetables and lay off the fried stuff. Eventually I did all the ones on my "willing" list and when I was done, a few ideas from the "might" list had migrated over, like starting to cook. I still take my plate to the computer when I'm alone; don't like feeling alone. I put the "refuse" list in a drawer for future consideration. If I never ate when I'm stressed, I'd never eat at all. Besides, I don't want to get compulsive, that would be bad.

I'm also trying to make good observations about how my body feels; the pain provides clear feedback. Boy is it clear. I might as well dig my hands in my guts and twist them around as eat pizza. Information about what I can and can't do, can and can't eat is slowly emerging as I release my black and white thinking and rely on my own ability to watch what's going on inside me.