

Sometimes Pain Is Necessary

Written by Steve Marr
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Pain is often an uninvited teacher. Paul understood this when he wrote, “Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it--I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while--yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.” (2 Corinthians 7:8-9, NIV) Paul confronted an issue, not just to cause pain; but to use the pain to move the church to a better place.

Likewise, we sometimes have to suffer pain to make progress. Recently, I required rotator cuff surgery on my shoulder. Afterwards, I went to a physical therapist three days a week. During each session, the therapist stretched my shoulder in various ways. It wasn't fun and caused considerable pain. However, the pain was necessary if I wanted to reach the goal of improving my range of motion. While I didn't enjoy the pain, I enjoy the results today.

At times, I have to deal with issues that will cause my clients to experience pain. I need to remember that I am my client's servant, not their master. When a client gets stuck and has agreed to take certain steps but doesn't execute the action to match words; I have to create enough discomfort, no matter how painful, to encourage forward movement.

One client struggled to hold a couple of employees accountable for performance. I helped draft a plan to improve each person's performance. I explained ways to discuss the issues with each and even did some role-playing. After three consulting sessions, my client had done nothing about the plan. He explained that he didn't get around to it. I needed to confront my client in a blunt and uncomfortable way to encourage him to move forward. It was painful for both of us. However, as a servant, I had to encourage action.

Another client needed more business. I helped set up a plan to qualify and call on five new prospects each week, one per day. It was a manageable effort and the client agreed to do it. After three meetings, nothing had happened. He made a few customer contacts but not one per day according to the agreement. Of course the client shared the problems and other pressures that got in the way. I reminded my client of the painful truth that without increasing customers, they were headed out of businesses.

Not everybody is willing to accept painful truth. When I was in physical therapy, I saw people who resisted. They didn't want to do exercises that hurt. They didn't understand that pain is often part of progress.

We need to be very careful and constructive when forcing painful confrontations. We don't create pain because it feels good; we create pain as a way to help a person move forward. A pastor may cause pain when confronting a person about a sin issue. A kind, gentle demeanor helps. As Paul said, “Let your gentleness be evident to all.” (Philippians 4:5, NIV) The person may reject the confrontation or run away from the encounter. A wise pastor knows when to risk these confrontations.

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I understand that when I confront clients, they may choose to disengage rather than work through a painful issue. As a servant, I need to look after my client's interest rather than my own. If I just go along, accepting excuse after excuse; I may book more sessions and end up failing my client.

The same principle applies when we confront staff over poor performance. King Solomon wrote, "A servant cannot be corrected by mere words; though he understands, he will not respond." (Proverbs 29:19, NIV)

Confrontations can bring discomfort and conviction to any of us. However, if pain helps us acknowledge issues so that we begin to make progress; the pain is worth it. If we ignore the first stage of pain, the Lord has a way of allowing the pain to increase so that we will take the steps needed for personal growth.

Paul wrote a letter with a pastor's heart that caused pain. He did not want to hurt the people; he wanted to help them. When you need to have a painful confrontation or execute a necessary decision that will cause pain, use a similar heart.

Steve Marr, Your Christian Business Coach

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