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Free Yourself

*Forgive others,
forgive yourself.*

Q&A

with
Andy Andrews

by Sandra Bienkowski

Andy Andrews is an internationally known speaker who has spoken at the request of four U.S. presidents. He's the *New York Times* best-selling author of *The Traveler's Gift: Seven Decisions that Determine Personal Success*. His latest book is *Return to Sawyerton Springs: A Mostly True Tale Filled with Love, Learning and Laughter*. Hailed by *The New York Times* as a "modern-day Will Rogers," Andrews lost both his parents at age 19, became homeless for a time and has been on a journey to understand success ever since.

**Forgiveness is a decision;
it's not an emotion.**

SUCCESS: You often say life is about the choices you make and the actions you take. Why do you think people are often reluctant to let go of the past?



Andy Andrews: Because people don't know what it's doing to them. I think a lot of times people think that hanging on to the past is somehow punishing the person who did something to them. I have pondered this question a lot myself until I realized I was mad at someone who is dead! A lot of times, we will keep anger alive for someone who has been dead 10 or 20 years. For a long time, I was really mad at my dad because he only died because he wasn't wearing his seatbelt. I was mad at God; I was mad at my parents. I didn't realize at the time what it was doing to me.

Even if a person we are angry with is alive, we lie awake at night thinking about what that guy said or did or think about what we will say. It's theater of the mind, and most of the time, it doesn't occur to us that this bozo is sleeping peacefully, blissfully unaware that we are bent out of shape.

How can people begin to process their anger or let go of their grievance?

AA: I think people hang on to a lot of this not understanding the difference between forgiveness and trust. There is a huge difference, and most people don't see it. I will have someone come up to me after one of my talks,

telling me how angry they are, and ask, "Are you telling me this person is just going to get away with it?" And they say, "Then they will never have to pay the penalty for it." And I immediately know it's someone who doesn't understand the difference between trust and forgiveness, because there is no penalty you are going to give that person anyway. If you could, you would have already. That's up to our ultimate arbitrator, God.



So, how can people better understand this distinction between forgiveness and trust?

AA: Forgiveness is about the past and trust is about the future. Forgiveness is about letting go of something that has happened. Trust is about making a decision about what might happen. Forgiveness is about us, and trust is about them. Forgiveness is about us, what we decide, how we act, what we can do with our lives. We can't control anyone else. Trust is about how we deal with them. An example is: Do you forgive someone who steals from you? Yes. Do you continue to do business with them? Probably not. Do you forgive someone who lies to you? Yes. Do you continue to believe everything they say? No.

How can people get good at forgiving?

AA: The more I study it, the more I realize that forgiveness is a decision. It's not an emotion. Most of us have treated it like an emotion for years, which is why it has dragged us around like a dog on a leash. But it's a decision, and when you decide to forgive, your emotions will follow your decisions. We may have to decide it more than once. Maybe even hourly.

What are the consequences to people who carry grudges?

AA: People who have an unforgiving spirit cause negative actions to themselves and to others. This also applies to people who carry grudges against themselves. I know that no one has disappointed me as much as I have disappointed me, but why would you want to hold grudges against yourself? It's an unbearable load to carry, and I believe you can never be the mother you want to be, the father you want to be, the businessperson you want to be or the spouse you want to be, if you hold a grudge against yourself. There is absolutely no way that your spirit is free to show joy, congratulate yourself on your achievements, and celebrate the life you have with your family, if you have not forgiven yourself.



Andy Andrews

What are some steps people can take to forgive others and themselves?

AA: Realize it's up to you. Sit down and write down the grudges you are holding. Make a list of

the people and the things that they have done. Make a list of the things that you have done, the things you are holding against yourself. It's a process that you can go through, and for me, it was something I physically did. I sat down and wrote it all down, and I had little sheets of paper and I had a campfire. I'd forgive one and say, "That's it for that one," and I'd throw it into the fire. It was a private ceremony for me. People can do it their own way, but they should do something. Don't live like you have lived for the past 10 or 20 years. Out of the seven decisions (from his book *Mastering the Seven Decisions That Determine Personal Success*), if there's one that can sabotage your life, it's not forgiving others and yourself. **S**

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