

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info



The Rebel & The Status Quo

So tell me, do you see yourself more as a traditional rule-follower or a rebel change-agent? Or a little bit of each?

I ask because I think that we can often experience unnecessary conflicts between these two reasonable urges, in ourselves and our culture. But if we can embrace the value of both approaches, it can help us bridge viewpoints, be empathetic, combine the best of both styles, and create longer-lasting solutions to our culture's current crises.

To see how, let's first look at the gifts and downsides of each mindset.

Status Quo (aka Authority, Tradition, Rules, Orthodoxy)

When we're in this mindset, we align with the core beliefs of a group, such as our family, school, workplace, social group, medical or legal system, political party, religion, or culture.

By doing this, we can connect with existing alliances, benefit from others' experiences, access mechanisms for conflict resolution, and receive generations of accumulated wisdom.

We also sometimes accept our groups' core beliefs for simpler reasons, such as: being too busy to investigate everything ourselves; hearing ideas so often that they just seem to be true; wanting to avoid the hassles of disagreeing with authority figures; and choosing to just "go along to get along."

However, we can pay a high price if we just blindly follow the status quo. That's because common beliefs can also be wrong, outdated, harmful, contradictory, disconnected from reality, and a violation of our essential values.

Worse, they can be forced onto others in ways that are dogmatic, unfair, cruel, and only benefiting the powerful. As a result, we can all experience health and emotional

harm, incompetent laws, increased crime, financial difficulties, religious wars, eco-destruction, etc.

The Rebel (aka Questioning, Innovating, Cynical, Disruptive)

The negative form of authority can generate the second part of our dialectic: the rebel. In this mindset, we don't just accept information on face value. We look deeper, weigh different viewpoints, notice what's wrong or missing, discover deeper truths, speak truth to power, and act for improvements. Through this process, we can all learn and grow.

However, rebellion also has its negative forms. In the name of freedom, we can discard the proverbial baby with the bathwater, and too broadly reject competency, agreements, and responsibilities. We can also ignore key distinctions, unfairly accuse others, deflect potential allies, feed cynicism and inaction, nurture disorder and violence, undermine useful systems, and squander the hard work of generations.

The Dance Between the Two

So how can we weave together the best of these two mindsets?

First, I encourage the rebel in us to see that we don't really want to discard every lesson learned, conflict resolved, or process developed. That just makes our work more difficult, and leaves people afraid and vulnerable to dictators' soothing promises. So it's often more fair and fruitful to first seek to constructively improve existing systems.

And I invite the status quo side of us to recognize that nothing is perfect and things need to evolve. Thus it's smart to stay open to new information, perspectives, and needs. Through that, we can become more competent, compassionate, inclusive, and wise.

I also want to note that these two mindsets can occur in unexpected ways. So, for instance, even a group that seeks to make big changes can use an abusive status quo approach, dogmatically demanding that everyone agree with its specific answers. On the other hand, a corporation can systematically nurture innovation, to better serve customers and our shared well-being.

Applying These Ideas

Now how can we use these ideas to further our work for a healthier world?

- 1) Reflect on your own dance with both forces.** When have you gone along with the rules and when have you rebelled? In each case, why and what resulted?
- 2) Explore different ways to respond to each mindset.** Can you affirm the authentic needs and values in both?
- 3) Engage constructively with people of opposite viewpoints.** Approach them with respect (no personal attacks); seek meaningful facts and skillful thinking (to create objective common ground); negotiate for all stakeholders' rights (to be fair); and seek win/win remedies that value both competency and freedom.

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical.

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