**Clichés and Klutzes**

**A Serious Look at Foot in Mouth**

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| **Time will heal it** | **Get over it; it was 3 months ago** | **There’s plenty more fish in the sea** | **It’s Gods Will** | **You must be strong** |
| **You’re only young etc** | **You can always remarry** | **They had a full life** | **I know how you feel** | **There in a better place** |
| **You can always rebuild** | **Be grateful for the years that you had** | **I never liked him/her anyway** | **There’s plenty of other jobs out there** | **Build a bridge and get over it** |
| **It’s Karma** | **Toughen up** | **It was meant to be** | **It could be worse** | **Cheer up it’s not the end of the world** |
| **Life goes on** | **It’s character building** | **You’ll get over it** | **Everything happens for a reason** | **God has a new little Angel**  |

Have you ever experienced the death of a loved one, lost your job, suffered a broken relationship or been subject to some of life’s unfairness? Then it is highly likely that you have needlessly suffered at the hands or should I say the mouth of a klutz delivering a cliché. The Yiddish word “klutz” describes, in part a “clumsy, foolish, or accident prone person” whilst the French word “cliché” refers to a “trite and overused expression that has lost its meaning.”

The time has come when we must stop making excuses and carrying the load for those people who cart around their clichés and dispense them without thought. The difficulty that arises is that they principally come from those closest to us or from those who we turn to for comforting. Our pain, of course, is enhanced by the unexpected hurt created by such a dismissive comment as a cliché. Our disappointment comes from the realisation that one of our “rocks” with whom we could share our pain and tears has crumbled.

 We dared to expose ourselves with our mind numbing pain and hoped to feel some cognisance and recognition that our close friend, carer or loved one had some idea and could empathise and not sympathise - Someone who could feel “sorry” with us and not for us.

The absolute tragedy is that clichés have become almost an ideology which has permeated some in the professional ranks. I recently listened to the head of the supportive department in a large hospital charged with the emotional care of its patients tell a group of bereaved people “that an uttered cliché is better than nothing said at all”. I wondered how many bereaved people agreed with this comment and how many carried the needless burden of observed disinterest.

 Clichés are often used to escape our feelings. We hear of someone with a significant problem and we turn them into their condition and they lose their name and identity. They become “bipolar or schizophrenic”. Facile and crude remarks are made to justify abstract ideologies which will somehow justify ill thought out beliefs. Why haven’t they got over their grief in the 8-12 weeks we have allocated them? They must be “Depressed”. Get over it and move on.

Clichés can be seen as heartless, glib comments made by those in denial or are afraid to face a personal reality that is being mirrored by the sufferer. Clichés create the space to retreat from our feelings and deny others theirs. Their use is a form of emotional cowardice. The stance adopted by some who often use clichés is sometimes called “professional distance” It is just a method to create a distance and impersonal contact - a façade at best, at worst - absolute hypocrisy. No one denies that any form of loss involves grief and that it takes immense effort for all those involved.

 Professional distance is simply a survival strategy for those unaffected by the personal tragedy. It answer nothing however its cost to both parties is enormous. To deny someone their feelings because we wish to ignore ours is extremely self centred and destructive.

**Nicholas Berdyaev said that, “the greatest sin of the age is to make the concrete abstract”**

This is what happens to us when we receive this unsolicited spam. Our reality is invalidated. Our pain and agony is dismissed as an insignificant matter that will be rectified in a few weeks if only we would listen to those who do not know our pain.

Our reality is not only totally denied but we are not allowed our feelings and if grief is not about feelings then our only option is to deny them or add this attitude to our increasing burden of pain. We must not allow those who refuse to carry any personal understanding for our feelings to load us with any unjustified and additional weight.

Whilst we nearly all understand that our friends “meant well” and “didn’t know what to say” it neither eases the pain nor prevents the situation happening again. The simple truth is that we should say nothing when we do not know what to say. Telling someone that you do not know what to say but feel for them resonates with them and shows them that you are honest. The “fixit gene” that impels us to deliver a piece of curatory and profound worldly advice delivers the opposite message.

It is time that we developed simple educative programs in our organisations that taught how easy it really is to show love and compassion to others. As in all change it should begin in our home, education system, work place and social arena.

**Let’s Stamp Out Foot in Mouth**

**Bob Wyborn**

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