



WHAT CAN I LEARN FROM THIS?

“People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously. This is how character is built.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

BY CAROL L. BROOKS, SR/WA

We’ve all experienced the typical nightmare property owner. Those who are dynamically emotional, closed-minded and blatantly rude. Whether our first encounter or our most recent, the experience is rarely forgotten. The aftermath has us wondering how in the world we can get out of this mess.

As negotiators, we never know what we might find when we knock on the owner’s door. What lies beyond that door is the unknown. The unpredictable. The unexpected.

These horrendous owners can stretch us to our limits, at which point we’re only thinking about career survival...and an escape route. Far from thought is, “What can I learn from this?” But one promising thing about the brain is that once unbalanced, it will eventually get back to center. And one day we’ll hear this character-searching question in our minds.

After my first meeting with a difficult owner, I returned to my office. Well, okay, I spilled into my office. And with elbows pinned to my desk, I held my head and whined, “If I’d only known how nauseatingly despicable some owners could be, I’d never have accepted this job.”

And that’s the mystical allure of a challenge. If we knew what was ahead, we’d probably dash away in the opposite direction. We like to learn lessons the easy way. I, for one, am not into pain. But how else will we improve?

Tough owners are the chisel that will refine you.

Yet experience has taught me to go with the flow because I can actually learn something and grow from these awkward experiences.

But here it is: I can learn IF I keep an open mind and set my emotions and ego aside. Over time, I’ve learned to accept life’s jaw-dropping experiences and view them like the changing of seasons.

For example, I can accept that it’s impossible to get to summer until I’ve gone through spring. And there can be no spring without first passing through a more challenging winter. Each season offers its own unique gift of conditioning and respite. And as the harsh winter storms gust in and out, so do the objections and demands of the nightmarish property owners.

But the dreaded winter experience may be exactly what we need to sharpen our communication skills, to think creatively, to persist at win-win outcomes. They equip us for what’s next. With them, we are offered the opportunity to grow, to stretch and to hone our skills. Without them, we will only stumble from one season to another.

What can I learn from this? To answer this question, the first step requires that we look introspectively. This means we must step back, look at the situation objectively, honestly, and, oh yes, keep an open mind. And sometimes this is no easy task, but there is one thing we can be encouraged about. Our life’s experiences has brought us this far and prepared us for this new challenge. And this unwelcome twist in our career path will only help us to become seasoned negotiators.

No one wakes up in the morning, sprints out of bed, eager to collide with exhausting property owners. But through them all, I’ve learned three priceless lessons. First is to listen to the property owner. By genuinely

listening to their demands, I show them respect. And by listening, I show self-respect through a willingness to learn from others. Second is to establish a partnership with owners, because when they become part of the solution, creative paths are made toward win-win outcomes. And finally, to empathize with the predicament they face. I put myself in their shoes and create a place of safety in a seemingly threatening situation.

You may be leaning tiredly against the lamp-post of life, with its light casting eerie shadows, only intensifying your dilemma. You scratch at the confusion embedded in your predicament, wondering, What can I learn from this?

Before you embark on this journey, consider the following quote from author James Russell Miller, “If you will call your troubles experiences, and remember that every experience develops some latent force within you, you will grow vigorous and happy, however adverse your circumstances may seem to be.”



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