

# **A BRIEF TREATISE ON THE ART OF NOT TAKING THINGS PERSONALLY**

by Patty Wells

The material which follows has been developed and adapted from a number of sources, including customer service training manuals, crisis counseling training, Suzette Haden Elgin, and NLP. It describes various techniques for working through some of the problems we have with conventions:

- ! Burnout in Ourselves
- ! Complaints from attendees, guests, etc.
- ! Difficult people on our committees

As you read the rest of this material you should keep in mind that everything suggested will work better if you are not taking the attacks personally. This is much easier said than done. We all have a good deal invested in fandom. We want our conventions and our pet projects to go well. Often times the people with whom we are dealing do not phrase things diplomatically. They are angry, under stress, or don't know positive ways to communicate. If we react in the same way it puts up roadblocks between us and solving the problem. You will get defensive, block out what the other person is saying, or lose composure.

There are a few ways to assist you in handling criticisms more professionally. One comes from the school of Neurolinguistic Programming via its roots in Conjoint Family Therapy.

## **LOOK FOR THE POSITIVE INTENT**

This is hard to do when someone is yelling at you, or blaming you for their problem. But you do have to deal with them, and it often easier to do so if you see what they actually want to accomplish. Almost everyone sees their motives as being for the good of the convention, or their staff. If you can find it while they're unloading on you, you feel better about working with them.

For example, the program participant who is upset because their special interest has not been adequately represented on the program. While they are ranting and raving at you, it may help keep you from strangling them to realize that they believe they have something to offer that is critically important to your attendees and your convention.

## **KEEP THE FOCUS DIRECTLY ON THE PROBLEM**

Rather than Say instead: saying to yourself:

He says I made a How can we resolve the mistake. problem?

She can't talk to me like Will you tell me what you that. feel needs to be done?

## **BE CLEAR ABOUT THE VALUE OF YOUR WORK**

You know how much effort and complexity went into your work on the convention. Remind yourself that you are doing this for a reason, you have a special talent and viewpoint to bring to it. Yours is a valuable contribution.

Now that you're making the gallant effort to check your ego at the door, let's move on to some specific problems.