2. The Central Shift

"Life is a balance of holding on and letting go."

– Rumi

On January 6, 2021, over two thousand people stormed the U.S. Capitol building in a shocking display of insurrection. The U.S. Capitol Police, entrusted with the safety and security of this symbol of democracy, faced an unprecedented challenge in managing and controlling the surge of rioters. It wasn't an easy task. One Capitol Police officer described just how violent it was: "what I saw was just a war scene," she said "It was like something I had seen in the Middle East. There were officers on the ground.

They were bleeding. They were throwing up. I was slipping in people's blood. It was hours of hand-to-hand combat." 9

Another officer, who was pulled off the front line, dragged down the capitol steps, shocked with a stun gun and beaten, suffered a heart attack because of the incident. Recounting the experience in front of the congressional committee established to investigate the riot, he shared: "What makes the struggle harder and more painful is to know so many of my fellow citizens, including so many of the people I put my life at risk to defend, are downplaying or outright denying what happened, I feel like I went to hell and back to protect them, and the people in this room, but too many are now telling me that hell doesn't exist, or that hell actually wasn't that bad. The indifference shown to my colleagues is disgraceful."

What happened in the United States on January 6th and continues to unfold today is both devastating and heartbreaking. It's scary to imagine, but the scenes of that day revealed a threat to our democracy that did not end when the Capital was cleared, and the mob disbanded. What we witnessed, akin to an act of civil war fueled by distrust, frustration, and anger, was the result of a virus that continues to spread through our society. This virus, which has been misdiagnosed and mislabeled infects anyone it encounters – regardless of age, race, gender, or party affiliation. It doesn't only live in democrats or republicans, and it isn't attached to the ideologies they believe. It infects everyone, and it has already achieved a pandemic-like status. The virus is polarized thinking.

The Plague of Polarized Thinking

Polarized thinking or black and white thinking is a plague on our society. It infects our politics, our institutions, our communities, and our psyches. Once infected, complexities are oversimplified into absolutes, leaving no room for middle ground or nuanced understanding. Such binary thinking forces issues into two opposing camps, creating a divide that hinders constructive dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. It promotes an 'us versus them' mentality, where the richness of diverse perspectives is lost in the battle to be right.

The events of January 6th were an extreme example of polarized thinking on steroids, but this plague is much more insidious. In work environments, polarized thinking can be particularly damaging. Many years ago, I worked with a client named Jack, who was, by many accounts, an excellent leader in the firm. He had climbed the corporate ladder with a clear vision of success, driven by strong convictions and a singular approach to business challenges. Early in his career, his approach was an asset, propelling him through the ranks as he tackled problems with unwavering certainty.

However, as he ascended to higher leadership roles, the drawbacks of his rigid mindset began to surface. His partners found his degree of certainty not just unyielding but increasingly frustrating. Jack viewed every decision through a black-and-white lens, leaving little room for the nuanced considerations that complex business scenarios often required. He was seen as inflexible and stubborn, a leader more interested in being right than being effective.

This need to be right permeated almost every interaction, casting a shadow on his otherwise commendable performance. Colleagues began to shy away from collaborating with him, wary of his domineering style and narrow outlook. This led to lost opportunities for the firm and a whole host of morale issues on the team.

For Jack, the consequences were deeply personal as well. The stress of constantly needing to prove his point, to uphold his rigid views, started taking a toll. His performance, once on a meteoric rise, began to plateau. The isolation from his peers grew, as did the realization that his way of thinking was no longer serving him well. Ultimately, Jack's inability to adapt led to burnout. His once-promising career didn't only stall, it regressed. He ended up demoted for his lack of growth and performance.

Jack's story should be a lesson to all of us. Polarized thinking reduces the rich tapestry of life into a simplistic black-and-white narrative that keeps us from performing at our peak. When we habitually categorize concepts, people, or situations into two extreme and opposite groups, without recognizing the nuances, we create unnecessary conflicts. Once caught in this dichotomy, we overlook the diverse range of options and insights available in the middle ground. We lose sight of options and unwittingly fall prey to 5 crushing consequences.

1. Erosion of Nuanced Understanding

One of the most significant downsides of polarized thinking is the loss of nuanced understanding. In a world increasingly viewed through a binary lens, the subtleties and

complexities of issues are often overlooked. This oversimplification leads to a superficial grasp of problems, where nuance and subtlety is ignored. For instance, in political discourse, complex policy matters are reduced to simple for-or-against positions, stripping away the depth and breadth needed for comprehensive solutions. In personal relationships, it can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, as people are quickly categorized into rigid, oversimplified roles. The richness of human experience and the multifaceted nature of our issues demand a more nuanced approach, one that polarized thinking fails to provide.

2. Impediment to Conflict Resolution

Polarized thinking acts as a significant barrier to effective conflict resolution. When individuals or groups see only two opposing sides of an issue, it becomes challenging to find common ground. Each side becomes entrenched in its viewpoint, viewing compromise as a weakness rather than a path to mutual understanding. This mentality creates a deadlock, where the primary goal shifts from resolving the conflict to defeating the opposing side. In such an environment, opportunities for creative solutions are missed, and the potential for escalation increases. Whether in international relations, workplace disputes, or personal disagreements, the inability to step out of a polarized mindset hinders the resolution process and can exacerbate tensions.

3. Stifling Personal Growth

Polarized thinking stifles personal growth. It locks individuals into rigid belief systems, prevents them from exploring new ideas, and shrinks their perspective. As one hampers the ability to adapt, learn, and evolve; progress comes to a halt and the ability to change is diminished. People thrive on the exchange of diverse ideas and the blending of different viewpoints. When polarized thinking dominates, it impedes this dynamic exchange, leading to a society that is less adaptable, less innovative, and less inclusive.

4. Damage to Relationships

Polarized thinking can cause significant harm to our relationships. It emphasizes differences over commonalities, leading to an atmosphere of distrust and animosity. In such an environment, teamwork breaks down, as individuals align themselves more rigidly with groups or ideologies that make them feel comfortable. This division can manifest in various forms, from political polarization to social segregation, undermining the collective strength and harmony of a community, organization, or nation.

5. Mental and Emotional Health Consequences

Finally, the impact of polarized thinking on mental and emotional health cannot be overlooked. This black-and-white worldview can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and frustration, as individuals feel pressured to conform to one side or the other. It can also contribute to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness, particularly in situations where compromise and collaboration seem impossible. The constant exposure to polarizing narratives, especially

through media and social networks, reinforces negative emotions and create a sense of being perpetually embattled. For individuals, navigating a world dominated by polarized thinking can be mentally and emotionally exhausting, impacting overall well-being.

Why We Embrace Polarized Thinking

It is important to acknowledge polarized thinking isn't all bad. We embrace it because it appears to help us in many ways. Amid the chaos of modern life, where we feel buried in emails, texts, information, and the deluge of deadlines racing toward us on an unstoppable conveyor belt, the simplicity and clarity offered by black and white thinking is enticing. It's like finding a pause button that briefly slows the frenetic pace, allowing us to catch our breath by dividing everything into neatly organized boxes of 'us' versus 'them,' and 'right' versus 'wrong.'

This desire to divide the world into binaries is more than just a mental shortcut; it taps into our deep-seated need for comfort and security. In the face of life's uncertainties, knowing where we stand on an issue provides a reassuring sense of stability. It gives us something we can cling to when our experience feels too complex.

Polarized thinking strengthens our sense of identity and belonging. When the January 6th insurrectionists stormed the capitol, they didn't believe they were insurrectionists. They thought they were patriots who were doing a service to their country. Their sense of identity and belonging were anchored to a cause that they felt was righteous, and they

were willing to "fight like hell" in service of that identity. Right or wrong – and let's be clear that I believe the actions of the angry mob on January 6th were wrong –polarized thinking strengthens one's sense of belonging. It provides a powerful sense of identity and connects us in profound ways.

Polarized thinking also has a galvanizing effect on people. Much like the rallying cry to stop the steal drove the mob toward violence, there are plenty of examples that illustrate the positive and generative power of this binary worldview. The Civil Rights movement, the Women's suffrage movement, and the Anti-Apartheid Movement illustrate how polarized thinking can act as a catalyst for positive change by framing issues in terms of clear moral and ethical dichotomies. Similarly, in your personal life, polarized thinking can serve as a powerful motivator, propelling you to take decisive action based on a clear understanding of your own principles and convictions.

Finally, the cognitive efficiency of polarized thinking cannot be ignored. When faced with a challenge where every fraction of a second counts, categorizing the world in a black and white way helps us navigate the endless stream of information with more ease. It's akin to developing a personal productivity hack for our brains, allowing us to process and react to new information with speed. But as with any shortcut, it's crucial to remember what's at stake. When we oversimplify things, we limit our ability to grow.

The Power of Progressive Thinking

If polarized thinking is a plague, progressive thinking is the antidote. At its heart, progressive thinking is a forward-thinking, open-minded approach to moving through life. If you want to understand issues, solve problems, strengthen relationships, and make better decisions, embracing this mindset is essential. Progressive thinking helps us to question the status quo, look beyond immediate constraints and consider what is possible. It infuses in us a blend of creativity, critical analysis, and an unyielding belief in progress.

Consider the case of Sarah, a client of mine, who was a rising star in a technology firm. Sarah was known for her exceptional operational skills and her ability to solve problems quickly. But much like Jack who I mentioned earlier, as she climbed the corporate ladder, she hit a plateau. Despite her hard work and dedication, she wasn't seen as a strategic thinker, which became a significant barrier to further advancement.

Sarah's approach to leadership was heavily skewed towards problem-solving and she tended to get stuck in a polarized point of view. She excelled in crisis management due to the galvanizing power of her polarized perspective but struggled to engage in long-term strategic thinking. This was highlighted when her desire to prove a point led to a missed opportunity for her company to invest in an emerging technology.

When Sarah and I began working together, we focused on helping her make the central shift between polarized

thinking and a progressive approach. We worked on developing her ability to not just react to immediate problems but also to recognize and look for opportunities. This meant shifting her attention from exclusively firefighting to also considering what could be – from what was going wrong to what could go right.

Through our sessions, Sarah learned to balance her innate problem-solving skills with a more visionary outlook. She started to incorporate more 'what if' scenarios into her planning, considering longer-term implications and innovative possibilities alongside immediate challenges. This shift in perspective was transformative. Not only did it enhance her decision-making process, but it also allowed her to lead her team in a more dynamic and forward-thinking manner.

As a result of this central shift, Sarah's leadership effectiveness increased significantly. People started to recognize her not only for her operational excellence but also for her strategic contributions. Her ability to think progressively marked her as a leader in her organization and she was recognized and rewarded for her efforts. Sarah's transition from a mediocre leader to one who is highly regarded demonstrates the power of the central shift.

Similarly, a client named Bob also came to me at a crossroads, both in his professional life and his personal life. As an executive in a construction company, Bob was known for his decisive leadership style. At work, his approach to problem-solving and decision-making was highly analytical, often leaving little room for alternative viewpoints. This

method had served him well in the early years of his career, propelling him up the ranks. However, as the dynamics of his team evolved, with new, diverse talents coming on board, the limitations of his black-and-white thinking began to surface.

Similarly, at home, Bob found himself increasingly at odds with his family. His wife, a creative and open-minded individual, often felt dismissed by Bob's rigid way of thinking. His children, growing up in a world far more complex than the one Bob was used to, found it hard to connect with their father, who always seemed to see things in terms of right and wrong, with little appreciation for the nuances in between.

Bob's journey toward progressive thinking began with a realization during one of our sessions: his polarized perspective was not only limiting his professional growth but was also driving a wedge between him and his loved ones. He recognized the need for change but was unsure how to break free from the patterns of thought that had dominated much of his adult life.

We began by asking him to make time to reflect, encouraging Bob to take time daily to consider the perspectives of others and write in a journal. As a tough and straightforward guy who worked in a blue-collar environment, this felt challenging for him, but in time, Bob began to see that the ideas and emotions that others experienced were relatable. He remembered moments when he too felt and believed such things, and he began to feel empathy for the younger generation of workers he was

asked to lead. He began to see his team's diverse viewpoints not as a challenge to his authority but as a resource that could lead to more creative, collaborative solutions.

Simultaneously, Bob worked on the practice of listening actively. He made a conscious effort to listen without judgement – suspending his desire to solve problems quickly - and he even spent time listening just for the sake of listening and supporting those around him. This shift in approach transformed his conversations, and for the first time in years, Bob felt he was truly connecting with the people around him.

One day, in one of our coaching sessions, Bob shared a story about the impact this was having on him and his family. He shared how good it felt to engage with his wife and children without the immediate need to respond or correct. He expressed that he finally felt like he understood his children and he reveled in the fact that he was starting to appreciate his family's creativity, concerns, and aspirations on a much deeper level.

The changes that Bob made didn't happen overnight. It was a process filled with moments of discomfort, but as he embraced the principles of progressive thinking and let go of a polarized perspective, the impact was profound. At work, his team began to thrive because Bob started to lead from a place of curiosity and openness rather than control and certainty. Projects that had been stuck in the pipeline began to move forward as Bob got out of the way and encouraged innovative thinking and collaborative problem-solving in his team.

At home, the transformation was equally remarkable. Bob's relationship with his wife blossomed as they found new ways to communicate and support each other's dreams. His children, seeing the changes in their father, opened up to share more of their lives with him. His relationships improved dramatically, and his stress withered away. The household, once marked by tension and misunderstanding, became a place of laughter, creativity, and mutual respect.

Bob and Sarah's stories are a testament to the power of moving away from polarized thinking. By embracing the complexity of the world and learning to think progressively, they not only became more effective leaders but also more understanding individuals. Their journeys illustrate that the path to personal and professional fulfillment often lies in the willingness to explore the shades of gray, to listen, reflect, and accept the many truths that define the human experience.

Making the Central Shift

Shifting between a polarized and progressive perspective isn't easy. Throughout our lives, we were taught to view change as a difficult and dramatic move from one state to another—a leap across a chasm of habit or behavior. You'll find numerous books and articles that promote this philosophy, implying that the secret to success requires a seismic shift that casts aside the old in favor of the new. Books like John Maxwell's "Leadershift" are a case in point, advocating a journey from one polarity to another. This approach, while valuable to some, simplifies the complexity

of human nature into binary choices and misses an important point: change is more nuanced than that!

I propose a different approach, and I call it the Central Shift. The Central Shift is the ability to appreciate and hold onto contradictory ideas simultaneously and shift between different perspectives. It's all about seeing beyond black or white choices and realizing life is like an infinite spectrum of colors. Think of it as learning to balance, to find a middle ground where we can appreciate both sides of any issue – even embracing or supporting an extreme perspective if necessary. This shift isn't just another strategy; it's a fundamental change in how we see problems and opportunities. Instead of picking one side and dismissing the other, "The Central Shift" encourages us to blend the best of both, creating better, more practical solutions. It's about getting comfortable with life's complexities and using them to our advantage, making us more adaptable and open to new ideas.

This idea isn't new. In the 1930's, the American Novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote: "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function." (Fitzgerald 1936) More recently, Roger Martin elaborated on this notion when he introduced us to "Integrative Thinking," a concept that champions the ability to hold two conflicting ideas in mind and, instead of choosing one over the other, generating a creative resolution that contains elements of both but is superior to each. (Martin 2007)

Ken Wilbur talked about this when he suggested that we learn to "transcend and include". His advice to move past our previous understandings while weaving them into a richer, more comprehensive tapestry of thought encapsulates the essence of the Central Shift—where progress is not about rejecting past perspectives outright but about building on them to create something more nuanced and effective. I believe this is what the great 13th century poet Rumi was talking about when he said that "life is a balance of holding on and letting go."

For those of you who are seeing the power of the central shift but wondering how to apply this concept, I want to point out that it is simple, but it isn't easy. It can be a breeze for some and a bit trickier for others, especially if you're used to seeing the world in strict black and white terms. But no stress—there are personal practices that you can employ to increase the chances of making the central shift. The practices require little more than a bit of time and attention and you can return to these practices whenever you lose your way.

Three Key Practices

Now that we're clear on what the central shift is, let's look at the three key practices in greater detail. The practices are: (1) Connect, (2) Reflect, (3) Accept. It is important to note that the practices work incredibly well when combined but you may only need to apply one to get the job done. Let's take a closer look at each practice and consider how we might apply these in our day-to-day lives.

Practice 1: Connect

Making the central shift requires us to connect and engage with others – particularly people we don't agree with. This may feel uncomfortable if you are stuck in a polarized perspective, but it is essential. This practice, while seemingly straightforward, harbors challenges that can deter many from pursuing it further. The fear of confrontation, the potential for frustration, and the risk of being proven wrong dissuade many of us from stepping out of our comfort zones to engage with those who hold different views or perspectives. It is precisely this engagement, however, that is critical for fostering the kind of growth and understanding necessary for making the central shift.

The reluctance to connect with others, especially with those who have different or strong opinions, is a natural response to discomfort. This discomfort, though, is the crucible in which true learning and development are forged. It's a practice best described with a powerful metaphor that I love to share with my clients because it illustrates the transformative power of connecting with people who will challenge your thinking.

Imagine, if you will, that you are a jagged rock with very sharp edges. If you were tossed into a quiet and calm river what would happen? In this serene environment, you may sit undisturbed for centuries, retaining your original form, with little to no alteration or transformation. As water slowly passed by you for centuries, you would remain where you landed when you were tossed into that river,

maintaining a similar form with sharp edges and rough texture.

Now, imagine that you were tossed into a raging river. The strong current would force you to roll and tumble, continuously colliding with other elements in the water. After a short period of time, you would be pushed through the river on an epic journey. You would experience much of what the river has to offer as you bumped into other rocks, passed through rapids, and collided over beautiful waterfalls. It wouldn't be easy but in time you would lose your sharp edges. The river would transform you into a smooth, polished stone – something that others would see as useful, easy to be around, and beautiful.

This metaphor came to life for me several years ago when I worked with a client named Steve. Steve was an incredibly intelligent young man with an Ivy League education and a penchant for strategic thinking. His intellectual prowess and visionary ideas for his firm were unparalleled, but his brilliance became a barrier because his colleagues didn't understand him. Feeling somewhat intimidated and overshadowed by him, they found it challenging to communicate with him and began to shut him out. It wasn't Steve's intention to alienate others, but his intellectual demeanor was just standard operating procedure for how he engaged with the world.

The turning point came when the CEO recognized Steve's potential as a future leader but also saw the 'rough edges' that were holding him back. His interactions, though never mean-spirited, came across as a bit confusing and off-

putting, leading him towards isolation and a focus on less impactful work. The CEO's feedback was a wake-up call for Steve and prompted him to seek guidance on how to bridge the gap between his capabilities and how he connected with his colleagues.

Our work began with understanding Steve's aspirations. I was surprised to learn that he had a deep desire to connect with others. He genuinely appreciated his coworkers and yearned for more effective interactions with the Executive Leadership team. Unfortunately, he felt that they were always on a different wavelength, and he couldn't understand why. He believed in himself and his ideas so strongly he couldn't see why they didn't see eye to eye with him. "I keep sharing ideas and offering suggestions to them" he shared with me, "but they don't appear to understand the value I'm bringing forward."

Steve and I went to work on the sole goal of helping him build stronger relationships with the executives in the firm. He had the access he needed; he was just approaching them from a completely wrong perspective. Steve's polarized perspective was that his ideas and intelligence were the pathway to progress, but the executives wanted something different. In order to bridge the gap, Steve would have to connect in a way he wasn't used to.

I suggested that Steve start to connect with the executives more frequently and asked him to try an experiment. Instead of showing up with ideas and suggestions, show up with questions. Ask them big open-

ended questions about their goals and aspirations, and listen intently for their perspective.

Steve was a quick study. He embraced the practice wholeheartedly and began to soften his rough edges as he listened intently, asked insightful questions, and approached conversations with genuine curiosity, rather than a drive to demonstrate his intellect. This shift in approach allowed him to truly hear what others really wanted and showed him that his ideas weren't far off. He also learned how to weave his perspective into the perspective of others through a process I call "perspective weaving" and he started to feel more confident about what he was bringing to the table.

Within just two years, the change in Steve was remarkable. His new way of connecting with others, coupled with his undoubted talent and vision, led to a well-deserved promotion into an executive role. From this position of leadership, Steve became a pivotal force in the company's growth, proving that the most brilliant minds need to connect emotionally not intellectually to realize their full potential.

To soften our rough edges—to evolve into more rounded, open-minded individuals—we must be willing to throw ourselves into the raging river of relationships. This means actively seeking out and engaging with people and ideas that challenge us, that push us beyond our intellectual and emotional comfort zones. It is through this engagement that we expose ourselves to the abrasive yet enlightening forces that can polish our perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs.

Connecting with others, particularly those with whom we disagree, is not about seeking confrontation for its own sake. Rather, it's about understanding that the friction generated by these encounters is a catalyst for growth. Connection invites us to confront our biases, to question our assumptions, and to consider alternative viewpoints. This practice is essential for anyone looking to make the central shift.

Practice 2: Reflect

Whenever we are confronted with perspectives that challenge us, we should reflect. Reflection is a powerful practice that helps us digest the interactions we've had, search for insights and grow from each encounter. This practice is crucial, particularly after experiencing the discomfort that often comes from challenging conversations. It's about looking inward and asking ourselves a series of questions that guide our understanding and acceptance of different perspectives.

When you reflect, start by considering the other person's point of view. This isn't just about acknowledging that they have a different opinion, but genuinely trying to see the world through their eyes. Asking questions like: "what do they believe? what would lead someone to believe that? and what beliefs inform that belief?" pushes us deeper into their mindset and helps us explore the convictions behind their stance. Understanding what someone believes is one thing, but pondering what might lead them to hold such beliefs is where real empathy begins. It's about tracing the roots of

their perspectives, which often reveals common human experiences and emotions.

Understanding another's perspective is only useful if we can consider how their perspective might be right. This doesn't mean we forsake our own beliefs, but it opens us up to the possibility that different perspectives can hold truth. It's a practice in humility and openness, recognizing that our viewpoint is not the sole arbiter of truth. From here, we begin to question how this aligns with our own point of view. It's not about finding discrepancies but about seeking connections and common ground, however tenuous they might seem at first.

Reflecting on our beliefs in light of this newfound perspective is a deeply personal process. Asking what I really believe? and how might my belief complement the belief that another holds? is the ultimate expression of empathy. This question asks us to strip away the noise and get to the heart of our convictions. It's an invitation to reassess and revalidate our values in the context of a broader, more inclusive understanding of the world.

As we continue to reflect, we then ponder how we can make our beliefs complement each other. This isn't about compromising our values but about finding ways to enrich our worldview by incorporating the insights gained from others. It leads to a richer, more nuanced understanding of life's complexities.

The final step in this reflective practice is considering how we can accept someone else's belief while also standing firm in our own convictions. It's about finding balance and

respect, acknowledging the validity of differing viewpoints without losing sight of our own. This balance is the essence of making the central shift, allowing us to remain true to ourselves while being open to the world around us. Table 1 provides a list of questions you can ask when reflecting.

(1) What is the other person's point of view?
(2) What does this person believe?
(3) What would lead this person to believe that?
(4) How might this person be right?
(5) How does this align with my point of view?
(6) What do I really believe?
(7) How can I make our beliefs complement each other?
(8) How can I accept this person's belief but also stand in my conviction?

Practice 3: Accept

What would you do if you had plans to do something outside today but discovered to your dismay that it was going to rain all day? Perhaps you were planning to do some yard work, or you were going to have a family picnic. For me, it would likely be a golf outing. Would you sit in your house and pout all day? Would you slip into a state of depression and never get out of bed? Would you call up the weather man to complain or jump on X to call him out for the terrible weather conditions? Would you start a rumor about him or circulate information about a conspiracy theory that claims he is part of a vast

government cabal designed to keep us from enjoying sunshine?

Chances are if you are like most people, you wouldn't do any of those things because you are grounded in the logic that we can't change the weather. You are giving up on polarized thinking, and you are grounded in the fact that some days it rains and snows, and on others the sun shines – that's just life! As disappointing as it may be and as frustrated as you may feel, we all know that the best path forward is to accept it and get on with our day. We find something else to do because we can't control the weather!

Why then is it so hard for us to accept that others feel or believe something that is different from what we feel or believe? Why do we have such an ingrained desire to be right and to exert our righteousness over others? What would happen if we just accepted people for who they are and what they are bringing to the table? What would happen if someone showed up in an emotional storm and we allowed their emotions to rain a little bit? Would it kill us, or would it make us stronger?

Michael J. Fox once said that "Acceptance is the key to everything". This is a wise and powerful statement made by a man who has struggled with a debilitating disease that has taken a lot away from him. Another profound statement of his is that "Acceptance doesn't mean resignation; it means understanding that something is what it is and that there's got to be a way through it." This is the brand of acceptance I'm talking about when I suggest that you embrace this practice to make the central shift.

What Michael knows and what we all can learn from him is that there is a fine distinction between acceptance and acceptance. Acceptance itself is a nuanced term that can mean different things to different people. For Michael, it is one thing to accept that one has a disease like Parkinson's and another to accept that it is a death sentence that you can't do anything about. Perhaps that is why he started the Michael J. Fox Foundation which is doing amazing work to cure Parkinson's – a disease that effects millions of people worldwide.

What does Michael J. Fox's story of acceptance have to do with you? Michael J. Fox's story of acceptance teaches us to embracing life's uncertainties and challenges with resilience and grace. It teaches us that acceptance is not about passivity or defeat but about recognizing reality as it stands and finding constructive ways to navigate through it. Just as we adapt to a rainy day by altering our plans, accepting differing beliefs or perspectives from those around us requires a similar flexibility and openness. It's about allowing room for the emotional storms of others, understanding that this doesn't weaken us, but rather strengthens our capacity for empathy, connection, and growth.

Fox's journey and his proactive approach to battling Parkinson's disease through his foundation shows us the profound strength that lies in acceptance. It's a powerful reminder that acceptance can lead to action, change, and, most importantly, to making a difference not just in our lives, but in the world. Michael's story of acceptance,

courage, and resilience offers a model that we can follow as we strive to embrace the central shift. It also shows us through example that there are practical strategies you can use to practice acceptance under any circumstances.

First, Michael's insight that "acceptance doesn't mean resignation" is incredibly useful when you find yourself at odds with someone. Accepting their viewpoint—or accepting them for who they are—doesn't imply you agree with or submit to their perspective. Instead, it's an acknowledgment of reality as it presents itself, much like how we accept a rainy day that ruins our outdoor plans. You recognize the situation, adjust your expectations, and move forward. This approach allows us to engage with others without feeling the need to change or challenge every conflicting belief we encounter, embodying the essence of a mature and healthy response to life's variability.

Secondly, it is important to accept that someone else's perspective is not "The Truth" but rather "A Truth." This realization opens us up to the idea that multiple truths can exist simultaneously, reducing tension and making it easier to "agree to disagree" in a calm and collected manner. By acknowledging that our understanding of truth is not absolute, we create room for dialogue, growth, and mutual respect, even in the face of stark differences.

Lastly, adopting and applying non-violent communication strategies can be transformative. While I'll delve deeper into this topic later in the book, it's worth noting here as a cornerstone of practicing acceptance. Non-violent communication teaches us to express our needs and

listen to others without judgment or aggression, fostering a space where diverse perspectives can coexist without conflict. This method not only aids in accepting others but also in being heard and understood ourselves.

These strategies are just three of many ways we can practice acceptance in our daily lives. By practicing acceptance, we prepare ourselves to navigate disagreements with empathy and openness. By embracing these approaches, we not only cultivate a more accepting attitude towards others but also enrich our own experiences, learning to thrive amidst the vast spectrum of human beliefs and perspectives.