

# Right, Wrong, or Different?

Do you eat corn on the cob around or across? Which is the right way to do it?

That's a trick question because there is no "right" or "wrong" way to eat corn on the cob. Yet some readers may be quick to argue one way or the other – defending their preference, citing stories of personal experience, and lessons learned on better butter management and cob handling.

Before you chuckle at the idea that someone would take such a strong position on the best way to eat corn on the cob, consider things you do or positions you hold that you automatically believe are right. Are they really? Indeed some things are more nuanced than they initially appear.



Recognizing the nuances may be hard to do. As children, many of us were coached on our behavior. A simple "yes" or "no," "that's right" or "that's not how you do it" taught us how to behave. To some extent, we learned to judge long before we learned to contemplate.

Judgments influence our personal beliefs. Once judgments are set, it can be hard to find value in further contemplating our positions or to evaluate them in the context of a new reality. It's often easier to defend our existing positions than to question them and, possibly, have to change ourselves as a result.

It's important to remember that part of our humanity is our ability to change. We are capable of expanding our knowledge and perspectives, evolving our thinking, and modifying our behaviors. So, how do we move beyond initial judgments and labels?

## Start with Self

Things such as laws, religion, and social norms – and our personal connection to them – shape our judgments. To move beyond them, consider what else may be influencing your judgment of right or wrong. Are your assessments of situations based solely on how things have always been or on traditions? Are they based solely on what's best for you?

Also, consider if you have to be right. Do you have a personal need for control or power? Or to maintain some perceived level of respect or credibility?

## Consider the Matter

It may be helpful to consider if something truly has to be either right or wrong. Relationships are often damaged by individuals who insist on being right when it doesn't really matter, and who would rather be right than be happy.

Remember the corn cob question we posed earlier – sometimes the other way is not necessarily wrong, it's simply different.

## Explore Difference

By resisting the tendency to judge and replacing it with contemplation, you invite learning and growth. In practice, this means seeking to understand an opposing position, instead of simply dismissing its value.

Use the following language to help with your exploration:

- "I hold a different belief on that, so I would really like to understand yours."
- "I feel my way is right, so please help me understand the benefit of doing it your way."
- "I'm not sure that I fully appreciate your position, can you share your reasoning with me?"
- "I want to understand why you hold that viewpoint; can you help me with that?"

This exploration broadens your perspective, expands your knowledge, and helps eliminate assumptions. It also allows opportunities for empathy. New information may change your original judgment. Or, even if you ultimately maintain your belief, gaining understanding helps you to identify nuances initially overlooked and possibilities not initially considered.

### **Build Comfort with Difference**

Being able to recognize when something really isn't about being right or wrong, but merely different can be freeing. It takes a lot of emotional effort and energy to force a position on others or to fight constant opposition. You have a right to your own thoughts and beliefs ... and others have a right to theirs.

In those cases when it's not about right or wrong but different, you can simply agree to disagree. Allowing yourself to peacefully co-exist with a difference can reduce stress for yourself and others. It also allows you to see beyond one position to a whole person.

Use the following prompts to move beyond points of difference to points of connection:

- "I don't believe we'll ever agree on this, but I know we share interest in ..."
- "I respect our right to see/do this differently and believe we will both do what we think is best."
- "While we hold different positions on this, I feel we are able to partner on ..."

From political ideologies to religious practices, generational behaviors, holiday celebrations, parenting styles, work approaches, corn on the cob eating technique, and more – perhaps it's less about right and wrong and it's more about different. Be courageous enough to contemplate the difference instead of judging it and examine existing thinking instead of automatically defending it.



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