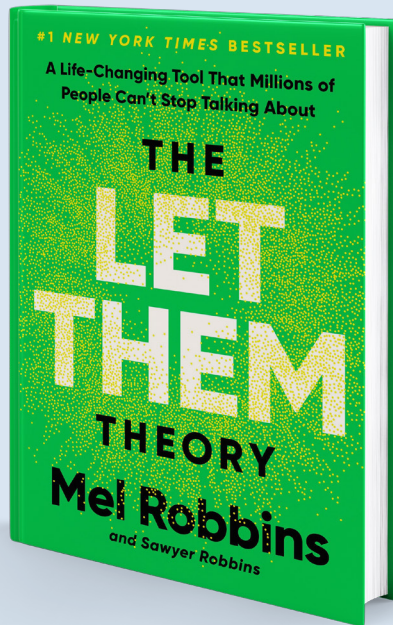


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The Let Them Theory

A Life-Changing Tool That Millions of People Can't Stop Talking About

By Mel Robbins

Mel Robbins is the creator and host of the award-winning The Mel Robbins Podcast, one of the most successful podcasts in the world, and a #1 New York Times bestselling author. She has amassed 21 million followers online and is considered the most sought-after expert in life improvement, mindset, and behavior change. The Wall Street Journal calls her a “billion-view podcaster” and TIME magazine says she gives millions of listeners around the globe “a reason to believe in themselves.”

A Book Review by Soundview

Two Simple Words That Will Set You Free

“The problem isn’t you. The problem is the power you unknowingly give to other people.” Mel Robbins writes these words very early on in her book, *The Let Them Theory: A Life-Changing Tool That Millions of People Can’t Stop Talking About*. Prior to discovering her theory, Robbins, like many people, had spent years trying to make everybody else happy in an attempt to bring herself happiness. She found out, however, that no person can ever do enough to make everybody like them. She has since come to believe that “When you stop managing everyone else, you’ll realize you have a lot more power than you thought – you’ve just unknowingly been giving it away.” The power in her Let Them Theory stems from the fact that people can avoid wasting their energy when they stop trying to control other people and instead focus on themselves, and their actions.

Let Them

Robbins explains that she first came up with this theory at her son’s prom. She had been used to teenage girls planning out minute details of their prom months in advance. This was not the case when her son came of age. While she insisted he get his date a corsage, he insisted that the girl did not want one. She secretly bought one for the girl, believing herself to know better. When her son’s date offered him a boutonniere, Robbins believed she was vindicated and pulled out the corsage she purchased, only to make the situation uncomfortable because the girl liked making her own arrangements and had already made her own corsage. After pictures, the group of teens decided to go to a taco joint in the rain, and Robbins, along with some other parents, tried to find reservations to a nice sit down restaurant. Finally, one of her daughters stopped her and told her mother to just let the teens do what they wanted to do. “Let them” she kept repeating. Finally, Robbins relented and gave her son money to go to the taco joint.

This one moment changed Robbins life as she started to use “Let Them” as a mantra of sorts for her life, letting people have whatever opinions they wanted to about her life and her choices and to do whatever they wanted to in life. This ranged from having opinions about what she posts online to the donut shop having a

right to be out of donuts. The more adopted this approach, the more she realized that most of her worries were not worth the time they took. People started to notice a change about her.

“Let Them [other people] be themselves because they are revealing who they are to you,” Robbins writes. She posted a video online about this philosophy and had many millions of people view it within one day. People resonated deeply with this idea to the extent that many people started to get the words, Let Them, tattooed on their bodies. People, Robbins writes, have an innate need for control, but in the end, nobody can ever control anybody but themselves.

Let Me

The Let Them Theory does not end with these two simple words, however. Power is found in the two words that follow: Let Me. Robbins relates the power in these words by describing an emotional reaction she had to a social media post a friend of hers made. Robbins used to be part of a social group but had lost close touch with the other women over the years. One night, however, she logged onto social media to find that the group had gone on a trip and did not invite her. They were seemingly having a wonderful time, and she was feeling profoundly excluded. She started worrying about what she did that caused her to be excluded, but she could not think of anything she did to hurt any of the women. Her immediate reaction was to fix whatever had been broken by contacting the women and trying to make amends. Finally, however, she reminded herself of her words, Let Them, and she was able to let go of a lot of the angst the photos and situation were causing her. She could simply “Let Them go on the trip.” These words do not mean that she gave in; rather they mean that she acknowledged that she could not change what happened no matter what she did.

Robbins writes that “Trying to control people and situations doesn’t calm your fears. It amplifies them.” This theory is not something she simply came up with in isolation. It is deeply rooted in stoicism, Buddhism, Radical Acceptance, and Detachment Theory. Once a person has internalized Let Them and is able to move past controlling other people, they can move on to Let Me and decide the prudent course of action in the current situation, if action is even prudent at all. Deciding what to do in response to another’s actions gives a person their power back.

Robbins explains that people get a sort of positive feedback when they say Let Them. This feedback stems from a sense of superiority that comes from knowing that they have been able to rise above a situation. These words gave Robbins the power, clarity, and space to acknowledge that nobody, including these women, owed her anything. If she wanted a better social life, she needed to do the work. With Let Me, she could decide to reach out to the women and extend social invitations to other people. Robbins was able to realize that nobody has a responsibility for her social life except herself.

This Let Me part of the theory is really where the power lies. Without it, people can feel lonely. It is in Let Me that people create the life they want with the reality they have. Loneliness is

a sign that the theory has not been implemented properly or fully. The theory is “not an excuse to stop answering your phone, to shrug your shoulders, to refuse to talk it out with a friend or family member who is hurt, to stay in a situation that hurts you, or to ignore discrimination or dangerous behavior. It is not a license to give someone the silent treatment, ghost people, avoid hard conversations, or withdraw from your relationships.” Well implemented, it should increase connection rather than exclude it.

Stress and Everyday Hassles

Robbins goes on to explain how Let Them can help people avoid some stress in everyday life. Stress can even be reduced when a person encounters a long line at a coffee shop or bad traffic. Since situations like these cannot be avoided, “learning how to respond differently to the annoying and stressful situations every day will change your life.” To do this, a person needs to create some distance between the situation and their reaction.

To explain how this works, Robbins explains a flight she was on. There was a man behind her coughing into the air without covering his mouth. Robbins had a lot going on and could not get sick. She asked the man to please cover up his mouth while coughing, but he refused. Everyday stressful situations like this one change the ways our brain functions and cause the “fight, flight, or freeze response.” Living in this state is why many people are frequently exhausted. Once a person understands the stress response, they can use the Let Them Theory to help “reset [their] stress response.” “The moment anything happens that stresses you out,” Robbins writes, “say Let Them. Put yourself in the pause. Then say Let Me and take a breath.”

When Robbins was on the plane, she could not stop the man from coughing. Instead of allowing herself to stew the entire time, she put on headphones so as not to hear him and she covered her mouth and nose with her scarf. It was the best she could do. She reclaimed her power and reduced her stress response. Robbins tells her readers that oftentimes there will be multiple different paths a person can take when they focus on their Let Me. She writes, “every situation will be different based on how you feel, what’s going on in your life right now, how much time you have, how important the issue is to you, what your values are, and what the most effective approach is.” Let Me allows the reader to “put [their] time, energy, and values at the center of [their] life.” Robbins frequently considers how long a situation will bother her when she tries to decide how to proceed. If a situation will bother her for quite some time, it is obviously of more importance than a situation that she will easily and quickly get over. She maintains that “No matter how big the problem is or how stressful something feels, there’s always something you can do through your actions and your attitude to make it better.”

Other People’s Opinions

Oftentimes, what stops people from acting even in very positive ways in their lives is the fear of other people’s opinions. It can be the most difficult to get along with those we are in the closest relationships with because they are the most likely to be honest, and we care the most about their opinions. To explain



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how this is the case, Robbins writes about how her mother was not happy with Robbins's fiancé and eventual husband. Her mother told her that had she had the choice, this is not the man she would have chosen for her daughter. Robbins came to learn that this was because her mother feared that Robbins would never return to her hometown permanently if she married her husband. This fear made sense to Robbins, and she had to learn to let her mother feel this way. After all, she realized that she likely would have felt the same way in her mother's position. She let her mother feel how she felt, and then she married her husband despite her mother's hesitations. Realizing what was happening let Robbins step away from the power struggle. The Let Them Theory allows for acceptance, and because of that, it gives "space for a deeper connection, honesty, and love."

Robbins believes that difficult adults are easier to get along with once a person realizes that most adults have the emotional maturity of an eight-year old and therefore act in similar ways to children. The reason many adults fail to mature properly emotionally is because they were shut down as kids and were not allowed to express the full range of emotions. This means that as adults, they never learned how to process these emotions. While the Let Them Theory requires a person to allow adults in their life to act and feel how they choose, the Let Them Theory ensures that adults will not be vulnerable to the childish behavior of adults because they are able to choose how to respond to such behavior. Adult readers may also recognize themselves as having poor emotional management skills, Robbins writes, and when they do, they should show themselves mercy while working to develop these skills.

Once a person starts to realize the power they have to dictate their choices, they may start to notice that some of their choices feel wrong. This was the case with a man who started to believe that he was not supposed to marry his fiancée. He knew how upset his fiancée would be and how much money people, including his parents, stood to lose should he call off the wedding. He knew that cancelling the wedding would make many people upset. Still, using the Let Them Theory, he called off the wedding, giving those who grieved or were angry time and space to feel those emotions. He knew that in the long run it was what was best for everybody, so he chose what he needed to do despite the feelings his actions caused in others.

Comparisons

Robbins believes there are two types of comparisons people can engage in. The first type can torture people as they lament the blessings others have that they do not. She maintains that

some people are just lucky in certain areas and there may be nothing a person can do to increase their own blessings in that area. Some people are just beautiful or smart or were born into money. In these situations, Robbins recommends merely letting people have those blessings without torturing yourself over them. People generally engage in upward comparison where they look at people who have more than they do and this makes them feel like they are lacking. Robbins recommends, "Let Them live their life. Let Me focus on mine."

The second type of comparison does not involve self-torture. This type of comparison can be a source of teaching in a person's life. When engaging in this second type of comparison, you look towards others who have what you want in an effort to emulate the steps they took to get there. In this way, you too can enjoy these fruits in your life. Here you can "Let Them lead the way." Robbins writes about a woman named Molly who was an interior designer. She knew the steps she needed to take in order to advance her career, but she never did them. Then one day Molly went online and found an annoying neighbor had taken those very steps she knew she should have taken and launched her own career. In this case, Molly could let herself be woken up by her friend to make the changes in her life and career that she was very capable of making.

Adult Friendships

Robbins moves on to discuss how Let Them can help with the friendships people have as adults. She discusses what she calls, "The Great Scattering." Up until adulthood, many people spend their lives with people in the same stage of life, encountering the same situations. These people take the same classes and play the same sports. People do not move through their younger years alone. Once they graduate and enter the workforce, however, this changes. People may spend their time with the same people day in and day out, but they are not all at the same life stage and have the same energy as them. This leads many people to start to feel a lack of true friendship in their lives. There are "three pillars of friendship." These are "proximity, timing, and energy." If people are not nearby, in the same life stage, and have chemistry with each other, they are unlikely to become good friends. This is part of why friendships can fade: one of the three pillars can disappear. Robbins acknowledges that when people allow friends to fade away because that is what the other chooses, it can lead to loneliness. She cautions her reader that "friendships are not a tit for tat. Do not keep score. Reach out to people because you want to. But don't expect a response."

Making new friends as an adult takes time, and it also takes con-

scious effort. A person must be willing to make the first move in friendships if they want to develop a healthy circle of friends as an adult. Robbins recommends taking classes to meet people and reaching “out to the people you’ve been hanging out with to see if anyone wants to go” to any interesting events.

Helping Influence People

Robbins moves then on to a person’s influence. It is not possible to help somebody who does not want to be helped, and it often requires a person to make hard decisions. Robbins writes about a time her daughter started waking up in the middle of the night, afraid. Robbins allowed her daughter to come spend the night in her room each night, but the girl’s anxiety continued to be a problem during the night. Eventually Robbins realized that in rescuing her daughter every time she was afraid at night, she was making it impossible for her daughter to grow. Even though it was incredibly difficult to do, Robbins started to gently walk her daughter back to her own room when she would come to Robbins, and this was what finally, after time, allowed her daughter to heal and to grow. Not all situations will be with children and will be resolved quickly, but when we allow others to fail, they give them the opportunity to grow. When we allow others to act how they choose, we can then choose how we want to react to them and show up for them and support them. Sometimes this is as difficult as withdrawing all financial support when a loved one with addiction fails to take the steps necessary to get better. Robbins maintains that it is important to “stop bailing out other adults.” She suggests her readers “believe in their ability to heal, and create an environment where change is possible.”

Robbins writes, “The reality is, adults choose who and how they love and sometimes they won’t choose you. People’s behavior tells the truth about how they feel about you... by chasing love, you chase away the deep and meaningful relationship you’re worthy of.” She maintains that people will demonstrate who they are and what they want. Robbins ends her book by discussing situations where we may want somebody to love them who does not. Her same principle of Let Them and Let Me apply here in the same ways it does in every other area of her book.

Robbins’ two principles are incredibly easy to understand, and her book does an excellent job giving examples and illustrations that show how they work in different areas of life. By the end of the book, her readers have all they need to free themselves from the prison of other people’s opinions and desires and allow themselves to live their own lives according to their own values. In this readable and highly applicable book, Robbins offers her readers a path to true internal freedom.

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