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# Work and Buddhist practice

**By Ines Steggewentze**

We all know this situation: at work it doesn't go the way we want, we feel frustrated and we believe people we work with do things the wrong way.

But, if we give a close look at it, what frustrates us in these situations, what hurts us, always gets us back to ourselves.

- Perceptions we have are our perceptions
- What we expect of others are our expectations
- How we picture others are our pictures

Our perceptions, expectations and pictures are often miles away from reality. The others are what they are, as much as we are what we are, impermanent at each moment yet real, impermanent yet complete.

As soon as we think people we work with should behave differently, we separate from them and it is not them who part from us. We start complaining, we find them ungrateful, messy, hopeless and it does hurt us, frustrate us and upset us.

Our suffering starts from the moment we believe we know what the truth is, and when we hold on to our views about the others. We feel we aren't taken seriously. We give and we think that our gift is turned down or not respected. I believe the roots of burnout come from this way of belittling and devaluing ourselves and not because the others exhaust us.

We could then think that the others have nothing to do with our frustration. Of course they do. But we have no power on what the others do. We can only offer our services, support and accompany them.

Sometimes the first vow of the bodhisattva is translated in the following manner: "Living beings are innumerable, and I make the vow to save them all." But we cannot save anyone. We can only make the vow to help the others to free themselves by themselves.

The ideal of the bodhisattva is very useful for my job as a social worker in a college: the unlimited help expressed in this vow became for me a great source of energy. Unlimited support is not necessarily the sign of a help syndrome, and in order to avoid such development, it is necessary to remain mushotoku. Do what must be done with compassion and wisdom without really expecting anything. Building bridges may be as useful as raising borders. What matters is what is relevant, what is useful in the present situation.

What I do in the dojo during zazen helps me in my job : concentration on the on-going action, and getting back to the observation of the breathing.

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As a bodhisattva I strive to see the world as a dojo and consider all human beings, including difficult people, as a Sangha, and to live my life day after day, like a sesshin.

It sounds good, but it is the outcome of my practice. It is for me both a challenge and liberation.