

Stress Bytes Newsletter

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“WHEN STRESS BITES, BITE BACK!”

THE NEWSLETTER OF ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.
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You're Not the Boss of Me!

I am going to make a radical statement, which is: no one can control you unless you let them. You are always making choices about how to behave, react or respond to others' behavior. Even in extreme circumstances, if someone has a gun to your head, you still have a choice about how to respond. The safest choice might be to give in temporarily to the demands of the other person to save your life, until you are free and safe again. Then you have another choice to make, which is whether to let a dangerous person have access to you again. Hopefully, most of us won't ever experience this kind of extreme attempt to influence our behavior.

It is vital to be able to distinguish a request for a behavior change from intimidation. If the majority of requests from a spouse, partner, boss or coworker come with an implied or direct threat, then that is intimidating and should be so noted. Jokes about divorce, threats to your physical being or your children's safety, firing or demoting you are not funny. They

are intimidation tactics and are not to be tolerated.

Face it. We all make requests of others and attempt to influence their behavior because we want people to do what we ask of them. This is not unhealthy or controlling unless force, threat, violence or intimidation are involved. Think about it. We have a whole industry devoted to influencing our behavior. It is called Marketing and Advertising. Do you think of a TV commercial or radio ad as being “controlling”? After all, it is blatantly an attempt to influence your behavior.

On a lesser note, perhaps you have difficulty making choices for yourself or asserting what you really think, feel and want. Perhaps you say, “yes” when you mean, “no,” or “I don't care where we go to eat” when you really DO have a preference. If this is the case, you are voluntarily giving up your right to have a say in what you do and letting the other person make the decision. If you find yourself resenting that you never

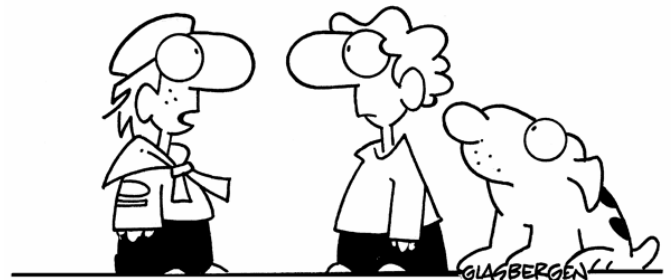
get a say, you'd better start speaking up. You also need to figure out why you let others make decisions for you, leaving you to feel disempowered, victimized, resentful, or depressed.

So when your mate says wearily, “All I want is for the house to be clean when I come home” do you hear that as a demand? As an attempt to control you? Could it also be a simple request

Cont'd on Page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

You're Not the Boss of Me!	1
You're Not the Boss of Me!	2
....continued	
Are You a Control Freak?	3
Book Recommendations	4



“My dad says I should stay in Scouts until I'm old enough to earn my Marriage Survival merit badge.”

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You're Not the Boss of Me! —cont'd

or the opening to a discussion of how to make that happen? Do you assume that there's an implied threat in that statement, i.e., "I want the house clean when I come home or else I'll leave you." Or do you assume that what they are really saying is, "I want the house clean when I come home and I expect YOU to do it"? What if what it meant was, "I want the house clean when I come home, so I am willing to pay for a housekeeper to come in once a week to do it"? This is where it is important to respond to that statement with a request for clarification or negotiation. You may want that too, but also work full-time and come home exhausted. You will need to discuss this with your mate and figure out a way to make that happen that is satisfactory to both of you.

When you speak up, ask for clarification, or negotiate a mutually satisfactory resolution, you are not a victim.

Perhaps you view the statements or requests of others as attempts to control you because you lack the confidence or skill at asserting your true needs, wants and feelings or you assume that when another person expresses a want or a feeling that it is your job automatically to do something about it. If you have a habit of always taking responsibility for meeting the needs of others without them having to ask, or of assuaging the upset feelings of others and not allowing them to develop their own way of calming or soothing themselves, you are not being respectful of them as adults. You are treating them like children and then wonder why they act like spoiled children when you grow tired of or resentful in this role.

Further, if you are the passive partner in a "controlling" relationship, you are also trying to influence the behavior of others. If you cannot gain power and influence directly, by stating your real thoughts, feelings and needs, another less direct way to assert power is by avoidance, passivity, moping, getting drunk or high, and withdrawal of love and affection. It's a way of saying "no" without having to say it directly. This is not healthy adult interaction.

So whether you are actually involved in a violent or intimidating relationship or you simply lack the skills to say truthfully and directly what you think, feel, and want, it is up to you to understand that you have choices and to get help learning how to make them.



**"My last boyfriend said I'm a control freak.
Do you think I'm a control freak? If so, say yes."**

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Are You a Control Freak?

Do you feel uncomfortable about acknowledging that someone else's opinion or way of doing something may be better than your own?

Do you believe you know what is best for other people, your friends and family?

Do you like to share your wisdom often - offering advice whether it's asked for or not?

Do you worry that something is going to go wrong unless you keep an eye on it and have some control over events?

Do you feel threatened by other people's opposing opinions or attitudes?

Do you have an obsession about checking and re-checking the work you do, and the work others do?

Do you have to do everything yourself, because nobody else can do it as well as you.?

Do you feel stressed or out of control in your relationships where give and take is required?

Have you lost previous partners because you want everything your way?

Do you tell your partner who his or her friends should be?

Do you get upset if your partner disagrees with you, having a totally different opinion on something important to you?

Do you criticize your partner frequently?

YOUR SCORE:

Mostly Yeses: You have a lot of insecurities about other people's behavior and their ability to handle situations independently. You attempt to control others because you are anxious. Until you learn to manage your anxiety and trust other people you are going to alienate others. Stop trying to take over... practice being more flexible in your behaviors and attitudes.

Mostly No's: What a confident soul you are! You know that despite what is going on around you, you realize that sometimes things will go wrong, this is life, and you are comfortable with trusting others to do their bit and comfortable with yourself knowing you have what it takes to deal with whatever comes your way.

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The Stress Doctor is IN!!!

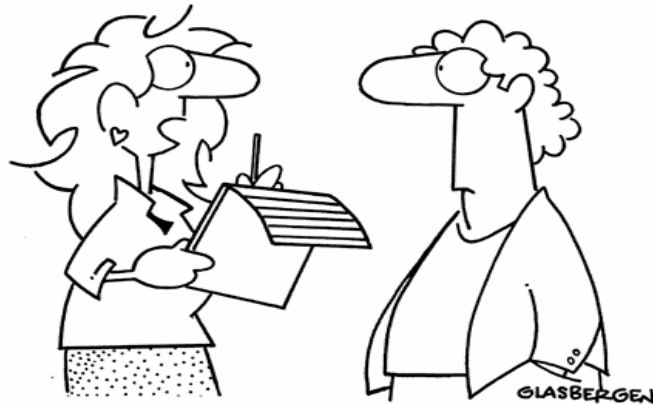
PEOPLE ARE CHANGED, NOT BY COERCION OR INTIMIDATION, BUT BY EXAMPLE. — AUTHOR UNKNOWN

IF YOU CHOOSE NOT TO DECIDE -- YOU STILL HAVE MADE A CHOICE! - NEIL PEART

WITH EVERY EXPERIENCE, YOU ALONE ARE PAINTING YOUR OWN CANVAS, THOUGHT BY THOUGHT, CHOICE BY CHOICE.— OPRAH WINFREY

YOU HAVE NO CONTROL OVER WHAT THE OTHER GUY DOES. YOU ONLY HAVE CONTROL OVER WHAT YOU DO. —A.J. KITT

WE CANNOT CONTROL THE EVIL TONGUES OF OTHERS; BUT A GOOD LIFE ENABLES US TO DISREGARD THEM. —CATO THE ELDER



“I tried to write a poem to tell you how I feel about our relationship, but I couldn’t find a word that rhymes with AAAAAAAAAAAAAUUUUUUURRRRRRGGGGGHHHHH!”

ANNETTE VAILLANCOURT, PH.D.
LICENSED CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

- Gently helping individuals, couples and groups resolve personal problems, manage stress, and reach their full potential since 1990.
- Specializing in Women’s Issues and Stress Management
- Emotional Freedom Technique for Stress Reduction.

Call **(618) 549-5935** to set up an appointment

Book Recommendations: How To Cope with Bullies, Control Freaks and other Difficult People

Do I Have to Give Up Me to Be Loved by You? by Jordan Paul and Margaret Paul

Silencing The Self: Women and Depression by Dana C. Jack

The New Assertive Woman by Lynn Z. Bloom, Karen Levin Coburn, and Joan Crystal Pearlman

The Bully at Work: What You Can Do to Stop the Hurt and Reclaim Your Dignity on the Job by Gary Namie and Ruth, Ph.D. Namie

Coping with Difficult People: The Proven-Effective Battle Plan That Has Helped Millions Deal with the Troublemakers in Their Lives at Home and at Work by Robert M. Bramson