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COMMENTARY »

**Breanne Felicella: Why people-pleasing is displeasing**

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UNSPASH/MARLIESE STREEFLAND

**By Breanne Felicella**

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that if your neighbour reversed his truck into your backyard to unload his garbage, it may stir some outrage.

And if your mother-in-law moved in without asking, I'm guessing there would be some tension, and unless you're way more awesome than I am, you're not handing paint out to kids and inviting them to decorate your fences.

When it comes to the boundaries of our property, we lay the lines hard and firm. But when it comes to the boundaries of our time, energy, and mental and emotional well-being, we allow people to dump their garbage or move in rent-free in order to not upset them with our "no".

But why?

People-pleasing.

People-pleasing is something that we do in order to avoid the discomfort of other people being disappointed in us.

We willingly give away too much of our time or energy because we believe our value comes from our efforts. We silence our needs and feelings because we believe we are less lovable or worthy if we cause inconvenience or annoyance. We lie and abandon our truth in order to attempt to control people's happiness with us.

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We often talk about people-pleasing as our inability to say no or our discomfort with others' disappointment, but what about the real danger: when we internalize others unhappiness as our personal failures? That if people are unhappy, it's because we didn't do enough, we didn't try hard enough, or that we're not good enough or lovable enough.

The results? A generation of women masquerading behind a label of being "nice" who believe that if they sacrifice enough to make others happy, they will be happy themselves.

Except they're left feeling resentful, unfulfilled, anxious, and lacking any true identity or security.

If you're not sure if you're a people pleaser, here are some common traits:

- You feel responsible for how other people feel.
- You have difficulty saying no.
- You often apologize or feel guilty.
- You feel uncomfortable if someone is angry with you.
- You need praise to feel good.
- You go to great length to avoid conflict.
- You don't admit when your feelings are hurt.

If this is you, the good news is that being a people pleaser is not who you are! People-pleasing is a way that you were conditioned to act.

People pleasers start off as parent pleasers. If your parents only showed you love or praise when you were conforming to their needs or expectations, you eventually learned that you need to please others to feel safe, loved, and accepted. Oftentimes, people pleasers were asked to swallow their "no" or their needs to make other adults happy and comfortable, thus creating the belief that they should abandon and sacrifice themselves to put other people's happiness first.

If you were raised by parents who criticized, got angry, or gaslit you when you expressed your own personality, saying things like "You're so oversensitive", you learned to keep your true feelings hidden and do everything you can to feel validated by those who surround you.

It can be a hard pill to swallow to realize the origins of your people-pleasing, and you probably feel guilt and shame at the thought of it; don't forget, you were taught to feel this way. Discovering where our people-pleasing is rooted helps us look at ourselves with gentleness and compassion instead of shame and judgement.

I hear so many women resign themselves to being people pleasers because the anxiety of setting boundaries or being vocal with their honesty is too overwhelming, and I am here to say that you are too valuable, too worthy, and too lovable to live your life silent and compliant!

I am here to say that you can speak your peace and keep others in your life happy. Setting boundaries does not mean cutting people out or being intolerable; it means knowing your personal limits and being clear about them to respect your own health and well-being while also creating mutually giving and trustful relationships.

The exciting truth is that you can decide at this very moment to recondition yourself with new beliefs and change the actions you carry out. You can discover where your people-pleasing is rooted and how to take actionable steps to begin setting healthy boundaries.

This is your moment to decide who you really are, how you really feel, and what you really want! It's time to start including someone in your pleasing—yourself.

Remember, it's not your job to keep others happy; that's their job. Feeling happy is their choice, not your obligation.

It's time to walk away from the belief that your worth is tied to other people's feelings and start believing that the only happiness you're responsible for is your own.

*Breanne Felicella is a certified counsellor.*