

TRUTH

For as long as I can remember, saying “no” to people has been hard for me. Whether it was fear of rejection, being criticized or disliked—or fear of hurting someone’s feelings, or not honoring my own needs—it’s been something I’ve worked hard to overcome for many years. I guess you could say I’ve been a chronic caretaker for most of my life.

But I’ve had many revelations over the years as related to my caretaking. I’ve learned that while *most* people could stand to be *more* giving and compassionate, I’ve had to learn to take care of *myself* first. You know that expression, “If you want to be happy, help others”? As a *recovering* caretaker type, my *new* mantra has become “everyone else can fuck off!”

And, I’ve come a long, long way—especially since my early 20’s, when - for example - some sketchy guy I met on the BART train in San Francisco followed me all the way to my place of work, and tried to get himself a *job* there—and I *still* couldn’t bring myself to tell him to leave me alone—or to fuck off.

Since then, while I’ve come a long way and gotten much better about this—it still remains a challenge that I grapple with, and even when I successfully assert my boundaries, I often still feel weird about it and doubt myself.

For example, the other day, my boundary skills were put to the test. I was working on my laptop in a cafe in Boulder, when this guy approached, asking, “Does anyone have an iphone charger I can borrow? My phone’s dead.”

For some reason I could not yet identify, I felt an immediate resistance to this guy. And yet, when no one else volunteered, I said, “Sure, I have one!” I started digging through my bag, looking for my charger when he came over to me and held his phone out expectantly as if he wanted me to charge it for him THAT INSTANT—even though I was *clearly* busy looking for the charger he’d just asked for.

This was a sign to me of someone who’s clueless and possibly lacking boundaries, and I felt immediately put off. But I was proud of myself for simply and neutrally saying, “Oh, *you* can plug it in somewhere,” and handed him the charger.

Then, when he nicely offered to buy me a drink as thanks, I politely said no. There was nothing *wrong* with his offer, but I was slammed with work and—I had this weird spidey-sense that I didn’t want any further interaction with this guy.

And then, self-doubt set in. Self-doubt—the gateway drug to “not being able to say no.” “Being afraid to say no’s” distant cousin. I was *doubting* the creepy vibe I was getting from him and saying to myself critically, “Rachel, I’m sure he’s a perfectly nice person. *Why* are you being so resistant?”

Then—lphone guy started chatting up the woman next to me while plugging in his phone. He was kneeling on the ground next to her - WAY up in her personal space - and said to her, “You know, I am so grateful for your smile today!” (Creepy, right?)

He then started to tell her why—apparently his friend had borrowed his car and then forgotten where he parked it, and now iphone guy was trying to find it. I found myself curious about the story, and started to wonder if I was missing out on what was simply a pleasant Boulder small-community type of interaction where strangers become friends, and began to doubt my initial aversion again. The woman was listening and smiling, so I turned towards their conversation.

But then his next few sentences confirmed my initial instinct. He said, “Yes, my friend is...let’s just say, “celestial” for lack of a better word. And, on one hand, I want to be mad at him for losing my car, but on the other, he’s my brother and I love him more than I’m bothered by his mistake. And I realize that love and acceptance of others is more important than anger, and...”

As he continued his story, I started to zone out, realizing it was going on WAY TOO LONG, and not only was he *totally* oversharing with a bunch of strangers, but I started to recognize that this guy was a classic self-indulgent hippy narcissist-type that’s all too prevalent in Boulder—stopping everyone around him from doing what they’re doing—and, by the way still holding my iphone charger that he’d not even plugged in yet.

And, another crucial detail: he was carrying a wooden flute. Yes—a wooden flute. The very *existence* of this wooden flute should have been all that I needed to tip me off that this guy was a weirdo. You know the way you know when you see someone walking down the street with a parrot—or a snake—on their shoulder? You just know something’s not right.

Anyhow, I rolled my eyes on the inside with the realization of, “oh,THIS guy,” and put my headphones back on and stopped listening to flute-dude’s self-indulgent story to try and get back to work.

And yet.

I found myself being pulled into the vortex of this guy's energy-suck. Because *now* this guy was sitting at the table of the woman next to me, and still talking to her. And, even though I had my headphones on and couldn't hear anything they were saying, I couldn't help but feel like *she* didn't really want to be talking to him either.

Flash forward about twenty minutes to where I had finally become so engrossed in my work, that I didn't even notice that iphone-flute guy had temporarily left the cafe, and that the woman next to me was now trying to get my attention.

She said to me, "Hi! I'm so sorry to bother you. I don't know what to do. That guy—he just keeps talking to me, and I keep telling him nicely that I have work to do. But then he keeps talking to me and asking for my number, and I keep saying no, but he just keeps asking. And then he just left all his stuff on my table including his phone and asked me to watch it for him while he... goes for a walk with his FLUTE, or whatever?!?—and, really, while I should just ask him to leave me alone, now *I* just want to leave and avoid it all. But I also feel responsible for his stuff now. And I thought I should let you know since he's using your charger. I don't know why but I can't just tell him to leave. What's wrong with me??"

I felt particularly compelled to help her, as I could very-much relate to her situation. I listened some more, and validated her, and reinforced that she had every right in the world to say "no," or "leave me alone," (or, "fuck off" for that matter) without having to caretake this guy's feelings. And, I also helped her to finally make the decision to just leave the cafe, and not deal with it anymore.

Once she was gone, I thought back on the whole situation. And I realized that I *knew* there was something off about this guy from the *second* he asked to borrow my phone charger.

My truth was that I *knew* in two *seconds* that this guy had a weird energy, but I didn't trust my instincts and instead of judging him, turned the judgment on mySELF—not trusting *my TRUTH*.

She wasn't listening to *her TRUTH* that the guy was skeezing her out. And *she* was trying to be nice instead of speaking up and telling him to—wait for it—fuck. off.

And, even though the woman and I *wanted* to judge him nicely, the TRUTH is that he was an energy-vampire. Wooden-flute-carrying. WEIRDO.

So. Today's lesson: be true to yourself, say "fuck off" more often and *never* trust a dude with a wooden flute.