

Aunt Bossy: The Life Coach Your Mother Never Was

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 15 July 2014 12:30



Dear Aunt Bossy,

I am having an argument with a friend of mine who says that people who always act nice are "people pleasers" and are very insecure. She thinks that people who are nasty are more honest and secure. What do you think?

Nice Nellie

Dear NN,

Ah, a great topic.

First let's talk about so called "people pleasers." People are nice for different reasons, but those who dismiss others as "people pleasers" are generally not in danger of being thought of as nice and, in fact, are threatened by niceness.

It is true that some "people pleasers" are insecure and desperate for others to like them. That is usually pretty obvious, but there is nothing bad about it, except that it is sad that people live with that kind of insecurity. How wonderful that they don't treat people poorly to make themselves feel more powerful and controlling. Only a cruel person treats these kinds of "people pleasers" badly. They usually deserve our patience and attention. With time, treating them well can put their behavior into a healthier context.

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Aunt Bossy's hobby is spreading fun and joy, so she could be looked upon as a "people pleaser." However, she has found that those who accuse her of that are basically saying that they aren't capable of being so nice and are resentful that she pleases others. Too bad.

Let's take a look at a few types of "people pleasers."

There are psychopaths who come across as nice to lure their victims in. It is one of their tools. It is up to us to be discerning about niceness.

Then we have utilitarian niceness. People in many kinds of sales and service are more successful if they are nice. This doesn't mean it is phony. The really good ones enjoy treating people well. In medicine, nice doctors have far fewer liability suits. And, needless to say, a good call girl is like the nicest woman in the world.

There are people who are just naturally kind and nice. We need to be very grateful for them and treat them with great respect, even if sometimes they do seem a little unrealistic about life.

Then, there is most of us. We are the ones who don't always feel naturally kind and nice, but make the decision to be that way whenever humanly possible for us. We have to train ourselves to find the best in others and practice that skill until it becomes automatic.

So, what about nasty people?

Most nasty people are nasty for one of two reasons, or a combination thereof: lack of discipline and/or evil.

We all get grouchy. Undisciplined people react to their inner grouch by taking it out on others. Most of us are in pain of one kind or another at some time in our lives. The undisciplined take it

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out on others.

The other kind of nasty is the really scary kind. That is the nasty where people are so insecure and/or unhappy that they purposely punish others, especially those who appear to have a more carefree life, or those upon whom they depend. They use nasty to lord it over others, make others unhappy and even destroy others.

This can be subtle or not. Bette Davis once said about another starlet, "I don't know why she hates me. I never did anything for her." Ponder that.

Being nasty can run the range from disparaging another's niceness to vicious gossip once that person walks out of the room. It is used to isolate and destroy.

Since we are all a great big jumble of qualities and emotions, paying attention to the nice/nasty continuum is fascinating. In the end it all boils down to this: Nice, in all its forms (except the psychopathic) works for all of us. Nasty backfires and destroys the nasty giver way before it gets to the receiver.

Be nice, people.

Pax Vobiscum,

AB

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June column follow up:

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Last month Aunt Bossy answered a [letter about a person who was being controlled by an employee and who was in danger because of it.](#) Someone suggested that Aunt Bossy should have recommended getting the authorities and/or relatives involved.

This is a tough one.

Firstly, the situation is subtle and many people would not see it as dangerous. Secondly, because of the nature of the relationship, the boss is ultimately in charge. Thirdly, we can't control the whole world, and it really sounded as if it were only the business of the people involved. The boss was not completely debilitated and gets other value from the employee. The relatives are too smart not to be aware, but find value in the relationship anyway. Life is not black and white.

Aunt Bossy stands by her advice to move along.

In response to a second letter in that column, Aunt Bossy received an objection to the recommendation she'd made to someone who saw a friend in a potentially bad situation with a gold-digger. The reader suggested recommending legal protection, a pre-nup, and other controls. However, the relationship in question was new and nowhere near being in need of that kind of intervention. Nobody's business except the people involved. Yet.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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