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Coach's Corner: Is someone driving you crazy?

By: Sharon Pahlka

For many months now, I have been practicing the habit of saying (under my breath) "just let people be who they are going to be." This practice may not sound revolutionary, but the mental shift it brings has been a revelation for me.

We often project our values, goals and needs onto other people. Chances are, people are unable or unwilling to live up to them. The expectations I have for others sets me up for disappointment and them up for failure.

My unmet expectations are an energy drain. Expecting other people to change their behavior can give them a grip on my inner life as I become enmeshed in the shoulds, coulds and what-ifs. As I get older, I see that I have spent far too much time being upset. Instead, I would like to spend more time being at peace. Peace is linked to accepting that others are just not going to perform how I think or want them to.

Releasing people from our expectations is a gift to them. Think of how you feel when someone accepts you for just who you are. Every person has the right, and even the obligation, to live the way they think they should, regardless of what you or I expect of them. When we allow others to be who they are we are giving them a gift.

We also give ourselves a gift. Letting people be, allows you to:

Relax and enjoy the present, even if it isn't what you wanted or expected.

Make the most of reality, because you are not wasting time and energy wishing it were different.

Enjoy life and what you already have.

Notice the gifts and benefits in apparent problems.

Be less likely to react, blame, threaten, act out, or even scream...to keep your cool.

Practice accepting and loving others as they are. Appreciate the sister who makes three reminder calls for each birthday and make it a habit to enjoy each call instead of being annoyed. When the mechanic calls about yet another delay, take effective action for the future (find a new mechanic) but remain happy with the present (enjoy extra reading time on the bus).

It is not easy to bring about this change, but the peace it brings is worth changing our mindset.

Coaching Question: Are your expectations disappointing you?

Coaching Tip: When you encounter unmet expectations, you can choose to make a clear request without complaining or blaming, or you can choose to let them go. Remain bright, calm and nonjudgmental. Let go of needing to understand, as explanations can elude you for the moment.

Homework: Today, practice letting people be the way they are in all their messy imperfection. Change "requirements" to "preferences." Notice how freeing it feels to have no expectations.

Quote: The "what should be" never did exist, but people keep trying to live up to it. There is no "What should be," there is only what is. Lenny Bruce

Sharon Pahlka is a life coach and speaker. In her coaching, she helps her clients live well and meaningfully, especially those with chronic health challenges. Sharon's column, Coach's Corner, offers helpful tips from her work. Contact Sharon Pahlka via her Web site, www.lifeisagift.com.