

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Two years ago my husband, Don, bought a sailboat – his lifelong dream. At that time, I was all in favor of it. I knew it would be a great way for our family to spend time together. I had no experience sailing, but was willing to learn, and Don was a good teacher. Since we got the boat, we spend every weekend on it, and have had lots of memorable times. The problem now is that I can't get Don off the boat. He wants to sail regardless of the weather, or whether or not I would like to do something else on the weekend. He's fixated with reading sailing magazines and – when he's not actually sailing --- you can find him at the marina or boating supply store. I'm feeling neglected and angry. I wouldn't have been supportive of buying the boat if I knew then what I know now.

-- Ticked Off First Mate

Dear Matey,

Don has proven the age-old belief that inside even a very good thing are the seeds of something not so good. If there is a fine line between passion and obsession, then Don has cruised right past it. Think about the difference between enjoying a cookie or two as a snack, and sucking down a whole bag of them. A very different image comes to mind, doesn't it? Does this feel familiar?

Sailing is a wonderful, healthy pastime that gives families terrific opportunities to learn and have adventures together, work as a crew, and explore distant shores. Throughout time, people have been drawn to the sea and the exhilarating freedom that comes with setting the sails and riding the wind. Many people believe, as the writer Isak Dinesen pointed out, "The cure for anything is salt water -- sweat, tears, or the sea." Nine days out of ten, I think I'd prefer the sea to sweat or tears!

But that's not the point. The point here is that Don is being selfish when he ignores your needs and your desire to spend time with him on terra firma occasionally, engaged in any other activity besides sailing.

Talk with Don and tell him exactly what you've just told me. Thank him for being such a good teacher, and share with him that you do love sailing with him. Let him know that you're happy that he's been able to realize his lifelong dream, but you're feeling neglected and want more equity in your marriage about how you spend your free time together (as a couple and as a family), or there could be a mutiny afoot.

If Don agrees that he's been setting the course for all of your family's time together, and is willing to learn to "play well with others;" get out a calendar. Let Don pick out some absolutely "have to be on the water" days, because there is a regatta, race, or sailing club activity. Then look at those other weekends. Offer some specific ideas about things you'd like to do. Is there a concert or an art show that is beckoning you? Do you want to schedule a few delicious weekends with no plans at all – just some space to be spontaneous and do what comes up, or do nothing at all? Those activities should be given the same kind of weight as Don's desire to be at the helm.

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When you feel that your time as a couple is more fairly representative of what each of you like to do, then cut him some slack and let him read his sailing magazines and spend his free time meandering around the marina or checking out the latest GPS devices at the boat store. This doesn't necessarily cut into time that you could be spending together.

And, by the way, you might want to share with Don that sailing regardless of the weather is not a smart idea. Competent, cautious seamen (and women) have a deep respect for wind and water, and don't leave port if it means being towed back to shore by a Coast Guard cutter or worse.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.