

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My good friend Karen was engaged to a really nice man named Carl, but just broke up with him. This is not the first time that she's dumped a good guy because he wasn't "perfect." It's too bad, though, because Carl was crazy about her and treated her like a princess. He's honest, hardworking, smart, caring, generous, and has a great sense of humor. He's not Brad Pitt handsome but, still, a nice-looking person. Over the course of their relationship – about three years – my husband and I became good friends with Carl. Now that Karen isn't seeing him anymore, should we still keep in touch with him? I don't think Karen would see this as a betrayal; after all, she broke up with him.

-- Carole

Dear Carole,

You bring up two issues in your letter. First, let me address whether or not you and your husband should continue to keep in touch with Carl, and involve him in your circle of friends. The answer is yes. After all, you've been friends with him for three years now. It will be a loss for you, I'm sure, not to do things with Carl and Karen as a couple, but there will still be many opportunities to include Carl in your social life. Depending upon how well Karen and Carl get along in the future, you may also want to include him when you have gatherings at your home. Personally, I would invite them both, and if they are awkward or uncomfortable with that, they can work it out between themselves.

Perhaps there are other reasons that Karen has cast off these men that appear to be so nice. Maybe the "click" just isn't there. Maybe, in spite of all their good qualities, the chemistry is lacking for Karen. We can't always know these things about others, even our good friends.

However, if you are right and Karen is desperately seeking perfection, she is bound to be disappointed. There may be something like a perfect diamond or crème brulee. (How could crème brulee be other?!), but there is no such thing as perfection when it comes to human beings. As the artist Salvador Dali once observed, "Have no fear of perfection – you'll never reach it."

Think about it. Wouldn't it be great if our partners and friends were perfect people? But, wait a minute, you don't think they wish the same thing about us, do you?! Hmm...

There is a wonderful character in teaching stories from the Middle East – especially popular in Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iran. His name is Nasruddin, and in this simple story he illuminates the futility of seeking perfection, instead of loving people with all their less-than-perfect qualities.

This old Sufi tale starts with Nasruddin and his friend sitting in a café talking about life and love.

"How come you never married, Nasruddin? Asked his friend.

"Well," said Nasruddin, "I spent my youth looking for the perfect woman. In Cairo, I met a beautiful and intelligent woman with eyes like dark olives, but she was

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unkind. Then in Baghdad, I met a woman who was a wonderful and generous soul, but we had no interests in common. One woman after another would seem just right, but there would always be something missing. Then one day, I met her. She was beautiful, intelligent, generous and kind. We had everything in common. In fact, she was perfect.”

“Well,” said the friend. “Why didn’t you marry her?”

Nasruddin sipped his tea and sighed. “Well, it’s a very sad story. It seems that she was looking for the perfect man.”

We can look for perfection until the cows come home and we’ll never find it. Instead, when we accept those we love – flaws and all – we can live a happy life.

And, to get back to your first question: an essential element of a happy life is friendship. Do your best to stay friends with both Carl and Karen.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2004 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.