

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I have a good friend who has been down on his luck. First his wife left him, and then he was downsized out of his job. Four months ago, he moved back to our area, where he believed he could find a better job. He asked me if he could stay with my wife and me until he got back on his feet. We eagerly agreed because, like I said, he's been a good friend. About a month ago, he found a job paying almost as much as his old one did (we're talking six figures here). But he's made no efforts to find a new place to live. As much as we like Chuck, my wife and I are over it. He comes home from work, props his feet up, eats dinner, and watches TV until he falls asleep. We have no privacy. I think it's time he moved on, but I'm having trouble asking him to leave since I really like him. Suggestions?

-- James

Dear James,

I have my own thoughts on this question, but I decided to surf the web to see if anyone else had better suggestions. When I googled "Guests who overstay their welcome," this search engine served up more than 1500 hits from others, who like yourself, are pulling their hair out as they struggle to deal with houseguests from hell. As you can imagine, these websites chronicled quite a few overwrought hosts who suggested everything from manipulation ("Get a pretend phone call from your "sick" mother who needs to stay with you for the foreseeable future") to brute force ("Throw them out!") to the bizarre ("Share with him your secret fascination with pagan sacrifice and mummification rituals.")

A feng shui site suggested that yellow is a happy and soothing color that enhances creativity, and holds a particular power for guest rooms. If you do not want guests to stay any longer than they are welcome, paint the walls buttercup. Some other creative solutions included: "Leave their bedroom door slightly open during peak mosquito season," and (a particularly cheap trick) "Suggest that they sleep in the cozy nook between the hunting horns and the tuba, neglecting to mention that your family enjoys late-night musical adventures." Lots of good ideas, to be sure, but my personal favorite was from a young woman who, when asked what she did about guests who lingered too long, wrote: "Bury them in the backyard! ...Just kidding!" Let's hope she's just kidding.

Unless you resonate uncontrollably to any of the above suggestions, I think you're only choice is to have a heart-to-heart with Chuck. Let him know that you are happy that he's found a job, and getting back on track with his life. But in no uncertain terms, tell him that you and your wife need your privacy, and that you want to work with him on a specific plan for his finding a place of his own. Give him two weeks. That's more than enough time to arrange for other lodging. It's enough time to find an apartment, or to locate a suites-type hotel where businesspeople routinely stay for a week or more. If you are aware of some of these options in your community, share that information with him. But remember, this is not your responsibility.

James, you and your wife have been more than good friends. You've been champions to help Chuck at a time when he needed friends and a place to stay. Time's up. Unless you would rather paint that guestroom a lovely yellow, or polish up the tuba, I suggest that you have this conversation post haste.

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.