

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My neighbor, Beverly, is a very nice person, and has always been helpful and kind to me. In fact, she is generous and takes excellent care of my dog when I go out of town on business trips. But here's the problem. She cannot stop talking. We live in a townhouse community, and it is easy for her to see when I come home. Before I've had a chance to put down my briefcase, check my voice mail, and change my clothes, she's in my kitchen, settling in for an hour long chat about what she did all day. She's married, but her husband travels a lot, and her children are grown and live in other states. She's home alone all day, and I'm sure she is in need of conversation, but how do I nicely tell her to cut this out? I don't want to hurt her feelings, but this problem is so pervasive that I've considered sneaking home after dark and hiding in the basement.

-- Eleanor

Dear Eleanor,

I think there are many better solutions to your problem than having to skulk through the bushes and take up residence as a cellar dweller in your own home. I also think it is safe to assume that Beverly is lonely. Who wouldn't be lonely after staying home all day with a traveling husband and your children grown and gone?

While you may have compassion for Beverly's situation, it is not your problem. Your good feelings about her will erode over time and will be replaced by resentment. This is not a firm foundation for a friendship. You need to act pronto before you take to wearing disguises simply to get through your front door in peace.

There is no way out of this except by being honest. Tell Beverly just how much you love having her as a neighbor and friend. Express appreciation for all that she does for you. Then let her know that you need your space when you come from work. Let her know that you're tired after a long day, and don't want to immediately engage in a conversation with anyone.

Make sure to include Beverly in gatherings at your home. Initiate getting together with her on your own terms. Help her feel like she has a special place in your life, and encourage her to meet with some of your other neighbors. I really think this is as far as your responsibility can go.

Beverly will grow if she can reflect on why she can't stop talking. Is she anxious? Is she being self-defeating by behaving in overbearing ways? Is she unconscious about how her behavior is impacting others (you, for example)? Does she realize that yammering on about oneself causes others to glaze over? Does she need to discover the fine art of listening? She obviously hasn't heeded the wisdom that American writer May Sarton suggested when she said, "Most people have to talk so they won't hear."

In addition to your neighbor's imperfect verbal social skills, she seems to be running on empty in the area of emotional **(intelligence)** – the ability to read other people's reactions to us.

Comment [KB1]:

Comment [KB2R1]:

Your Personal Coach
Kathleen Brehony
2/9/05

If I were Beverly, I would take a long, honest look at my life. I would ask myself if there were richer, more passionate ways of living. I would wonder if I could put my golden tongue to use by having conversations with people who might hunger for contact. For example, I'd check out opportunities to volunteer at a local nursing home where new friends would be delighted to see me coming, rather than wanting to run for the hills.

Your first priority is to have an honest talk with Beverly, and to establish some new perimeters for your relationship with her. Once you have done that, in the context of your ongoing friendship, perhaps you can make some suggestions that will help her find more opportunities to connect with others.

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.