

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

I'm having all kinds of problems with people in my life. My boyfriend and I are constantly fighting, my best friend won't talk to me, my neighbor and I have started a lawsuit about our property line, and my boss is impossible to work for. With all these problem relationships, my life is miserable and I feel terrible about myself. How is it possible that I am always surrounded by such difficult people?

-- Over It

Dear Over It,

There are only two possible explanations for your present situation: 1) You are like a heat-seeking missile and are unconsciously drawn to others who are going to make your life miserable (perhaps to learn some lessons in life); or 2) It's not them, it's you.

Once I conducted a therapy group and everyone was complaining and blaming others for the problems they were experiencing. After an hour of these rants, an old woman who appeared to have nodded off during most of the conversation moved forward in her chair and delivered these words of wisdom, "I always believe that if more than four people are ticked off at me at the same time, maybe it is something I've done!" Everyone scooted back in their chairs and avoided commenting. They didn't like the idea that it was very likely that their problems were of their own making, and that they were not taking responsibility for their own lives. But the old woman was right. We have to be gently but firmly self-honest about ourselves if we are to grow psychologically and spiritually.

When we blame others we neglect an important opportunity to learn. We also fail to find the answers to our problems because we're always looking in the wrong direction – outside rather than inside ourselves. Most importantly, we give away our own personal power when we neglect to take full self-responsibility for our lives. You can see this truth evidenced by the honest assessment of patterns in your life. Do you always have problems with your boss? Not just this one, but other bosses or supervisors over the years? Do the same issues come up over and over again with different boyfriends? Friends? Neighbors? If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," then you have to be honest about what's going on here. The chances are excellent that you are causing or at least contributing to the problems.

The only one who can take your life from miserable to wonderful is you. I recommend honestly looking at these relationship problems and instead of focusing on what these other people are doing, look at yourself. Look carefully and with self-love at your own behaviors and attitudes. Be rigorously self-honest, but that doesn't mean putting yourself down. Accepting responsibility for our lives is meant to improve our self-respect, not diminish it. Acknowledge areas where you've made mistakes and then make amends as appropriate. You can learn and grow by understanding your mistakes.

Take responsibility for your own feelings – no one has the power to make us feel anything without our explicit consent. Take personal responsibility for healing your own

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pain and making yourself happy. Decide to use your will, and change what needs to be changed. Then have the courage to do exactly that. Remember that your happiness is entirely in your own hands. Nobody else can do this for you. Never, ever surrender responsibility for your own life to other people. That worldview requires taking a great deal of self-accountability, but there is enormous freedom and power in it. You can't change other people, the winds, or the tides, but -- you'll be happy to know -- you can change yourself. You are the author of your own destiny.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) All of the "Your Personal Coach" columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.