

Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

With all the huge problems in the world, this one seems pretty minor, but I'm steamed. About a month ago, a friend came to stay with me for almost a week. During her visit, I paid for extra groceries (that I couldn't afford), and prepared all our meals. She never offered to help with cleaning up, buy a bottle of wine for dinner, or anything. She comes every year, and it's always the same story. But this year, while we were out at the beach, my year-old dog (Sally) went into her suitcase and ate a pair of her shoes. I apologized, and she said, "don't worry about it." Last week, she sent me a bill for \$90 for the shoes. I saw the shoes, know the brand, and they don't sell for \$90, I assure you. What should I do?

-- Nora

Dear Nora,

I don't know if I should forward this letter to Miss Manners, or to an animal behaviorist! Your friend was not being honest when she told you "not to worry" about the fact that Sally mangled her Gucci's. Either that, or she may not have cared until she returned home, spoke with her therapist, or read a book about personal empowerment and thought – "Gee, I should really stand up for myself and let Nora pay to replace those shoes." Personally, I would have simply let the matter drop, and made certain my suitcase stayed zipped when I visited again.

I'm sure I don't have to remind you, as the companion of a young dog, that they are in their "teething stage" until about age two. When my beautiful Dorothy (now thirteen years young) was a pup, she ate the remote control for the TV, two pairs of prescription eyeglasses (not cheap ones either), the legs of the dining room table, and -- come to think of it -- several pairs of shoes belonging to my visiting cousins. I wonder what it is that makes guests' open suitcases look like Shangri-la to young dogs? You might want to consider crate training Sally, or enclosing her in a small, safe area just so that she won't get in trouble every day for chewing where she shouldn't. Trust me, she'll chew again!

Now, back to the human problem. I'd take a deep breath, yell, and then stroke a check for the \$90. You are responsible for the damage, in spite of the fact that your friend handled the situation very poorly.

Your friend would benefit by recognizing that there are good houseguests... the ones whose hosts wish they could stay an extra week...and then there are evil houseguests. For their hosts, one week seems like an eternity. Evil houseguests don't pitch in, expect to be waited on, are slobs, and don't let us know when they'll be leaving (and it couldn't be too soon). Evidentially Benjamin Franklin hosted some evil houseguests; he felt that "Fish and houseguests both smell after three days."

There is a delicate etiquette to being a houseguest. Here are some of the rules: When visiting, it is customary to offer a hostess gift like a plant, coffee, tea or something that will live on after you depart. Bring a bottle of wine or a special dessert for dinner, help with preparations, or treat your hostess/host to a meal at a fine restaurant.

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Remember, houseguests: You're saving lots of money on the lodging, so there should be something in the budget for pampering your host. And don't forget to write a thank-you note, even if you've expressed that sentiment in person. As Martha Stewart might say, "That's a good thing."

Next year – if there is a next year for this friend's visit – set out some clear expectations. If she's a close friend, and you value your relationship with her, tell her that you love her company, but that you would like to split the food expenses during her visit. Set guidelines about her responsibilities and yours. Before you leave the house, make certain that her things are neatly locked away in her room, and that Sally hasn't had a key made to get in. For now, pony up the \$90, and be glad you have another year before this houseguest hangs her beach towel at your place again. If she's not a close friend, tell her that a visit next year would not be convenient. In the meantime, take Sally to the beach and forget about it.

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.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.