

*Names are changed to honor client confidentiality*

## **Recreate You**

This is the time of the year when we pause amidst our habituated routines and consider making life changes.

I typically ask two questions of my clients: “How do you want your life to look?” and “How are you hindering that?”

It’s impossible to act on our dreams and desires until we know how we blindly sabotage them.

Anna is clear about what she wants. She wants to be respected and appreciated for her value. In social settings and in her marriage, she’s barely noticed and her opinions are ignored.

“People don’t take me seriously as a person,” she said.

She gave several incidents, and in each one, she reacted passively—silently fuming inside. Sometimes the fuming goes on for days. It makes for a miserable person.

“What is it about me that attracts such people?” she asked. “Do I wear a sign on my forehead that says, ‘Walk on me?’”

“Well, yes,” I said. “The bottom line is this: If you don’t want to be treated like a doormat, stop being one.”

Anna received doormat-training at an early age. Scrunching down, self-denying and submitting are natural reactions to an explosive, narcissistic mother.

Not only did Anna play it safe by employing those behaviors, she was easily overshadowed by the boisterous, attention-seeking ways of her mom. So, understandably, she grew accustomed to being invisible and insignificant.

But it’s an outdated, habitual pattern, a useless piece of baggage that now works against her.

Anna’s frustration is a clear indication that it’s time to rid herself of that self-defeating relic. I told her she was living from her old self, portraying herself as diminished and inferior.

“How can I change now?” she asked.

“It’s all in how you carry yourself,” I said.

“You’re telling me to pretend to be someone I’m not?” Anna asked.

I pointed out that she’s already quite successful—too successful, really—at acting like someone meeker than she really is. How much harder could it be to act more like her true self?

Anna’s true—hidden—self is impressive. Not only does she possess a sharp mind filled with keen insights, she has a witty sense of humor that never stops. Her one-liners keep me rolling in the aisles. She just needs to show others what she’s made of, but the thought makes her nervous.

“I want to feel comfortable and confident before I try,” she said.

I explained that it doesn’t work that way. Arriving at a sense of ease with a changed behavior is a byproduct of taking action. Like basketball, we can’t get good at it without lots of practice.

As Anna holds her head high, people will respond accordingly. At first she can pretend to be confident—practicing a different posture, meeting people’s eyes without flinching—but eventually it will become her reality.

Anna gave it a try, and to her delight, she was successful.

Recently, her cousin called to announce that he and his wife were in town and wanted to come over. “It was late afternoon when they called,” she said. “The short notice was annoying.”

Anna handled it with poise. She told him, “We typically eat around 6:00, so if you want to arrive at that time, Ken and I will eat earlier. And I know you’re used to staying up late, but we’re usually done for the day by 9:00. We get up early.”

There was a pause on the other end of the line. “Okay,” he responded, “how about if we come at 6:00 and stay until around 8:00?”

“That would be perfect,” she replied. “We’ll be seeing you soon.”

“How would you have handled that in the past?” I asked,

“As always, I’d bend to please the other person. I would have said: ‘Come whenever you want. I’ll feed you. Stay as long as you want—it doesn’t matter.’”

Underneath such words, though, Anna would be thinking something quite different. “I’d be irritated over having to pull a meal together at the last minute,” she said, “and cringing at the thought of how late they might keep us up.”

Another incident representing progress took place in a restaurant. “I ordered tea,” she said, “but the server failed to bring a saucer for the used tea bag.”

Ordinarily, she would feel hurt and diminished by the omission—like her needs were ignored. She would just sit and stew instead of speaking up. But Anna transcended her usual pattern and asked for what she needed. The server was apologetic and graciously brought a saucer.

Anna made a simple resolution. She resolved to be the type of person people respect.

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