

Owning or Throwing Blame

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Let's call her Carmine. She phoned me in tears feeling demoralized. She loves talking about her passion of personal awareness. So does her friend of over twenty five years. But one day on a girlfriend trip Carmine was criticized for enthusiastically describing a concept in too much depth. Her friend said, "You go on and on." Carmine felt as if she was being treated like a two year old. She defended herself and replied, "OK, I have the message."

But Carmine's weakness, which is also her strength—an unending passion for sharing her fascination of personal development concepts--was brought up over and over again by her friend. She was told, "There you go again" or "I have to tell you again. I don't like how you don't stop talking." Ridicule in public places began. "Carmine doesn't know when she's boring the rest of us."

Carmine told me "I'm a grown woman and I don't have tools. How do I deal with people who after I agreed with them and I calm my enthusiasm still bring up the incident? What should I do?"

To Carmine's credit she originally began by hearing the complaint and said, "I got the message." She could have become a Blame Thrower and told her friend to "Back off?" and dismissed the complaint. Or she could have been a Blame Owner and added to the shaming comments by telling herself, "I'm a bore and I won't say anything anymore."

Usually in dances like this it is wise to ask yourself, "How much of this criticism is about the other person and how much is really about me?" Oftentimes people are attacking out of their own hang-ups and it has little to do with us. Carmine did a reality check by asking some other people if they noticed her taking over conversations with her fervor. That informal research was helpful in affirming that she is good company.

Sometimes we do have inappropriate behaviours that need adjustment. As my friend, Reverend Diane Edwards used to say, "If one person says you look like a horse, laugh and walk away. If two people say you look like a horse, you might want to consider the idea. If three or more people say you look like a horse it might be time to research the price of a saddle."

At the end of our conversation I suggested three questions that Carmine could ask her friend. Here they are:

- What do you want from me?
- How can I help you get it?
- What are you willing to do to help get our friendship back on track?

Some people have become habitual Blame Throwers. They believe their unhappiness is in the power and control of others. The simple and calm question, “What do you want from me?” stops blame throwing and invites others to do an internal check-in. They might ask themselves, “What is this really about? What is it I want?” Carmine reported that respectfully asking that one question made a positive difference not only in this relationship but with others. She felt sane and wise in seeking to understand her friend while maintaining her own dignity.

Next time you feel challenged, dumped on or criticized by a friend, family member or co-worker try these questions, particularly, “What do you want from me?” which invites a shift in perspective. You’ll find they add resilience to the relationship and your well being.

Note: For more information on managing criticism consider reading the article *Calming Criticism and Staying Steady with Critical Controllers* at http://www.lightheartedconcepts.com/free_articles.html

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