

## Counselor's Corner

### Minding Our Own Business

Have you ever been dating someone, and the whole family and all your friends want to know when you are going to be engaged? How about after you are married, and people ask when a baby is coming? Has anyone offered ideas about how to dress, wear your hair, raise your children, decorate your home, or do your job? If you did not ask for help, then you have some well-meaning or not so well-meaning people minding your business.

These people often do not give us the space and time we need. They aren't aware that what they want, as well as when they want it, is not always compatible with our plans or dreams. They are also not respecting the fact that (in most situations) we are capable of solving our own problems. Implied somewhere is that their lives and ours are exactly alike. Worse yet, meddlers can set themselves up as authority figures or experts when there is no basis for this.

Wannabe do-gooders are often unaware of the negative impacts that can occur. They can create great pressure when they delve into areas that may be uncomfortable. An assumption seems to be present that they know the whole truth and nothing but the truth about our lives. A great divide can be created between friends, families, and co-workers, because no one wants to be cornered by these great inquirers. Gossip can start when people cannot get answers to their interrogations. Spending too much time and energy on the perceived worries and needs of others without results can make them feel unappreciated.

None of us want to make others uncomfortable, but sometimes we are guilty. T. Ann Pierce wrote an article called, "Are You Helping or Just Interfering". She provided some wonderful guidelines to help us clarify our actions. Her suggestion is to list a problem, and then draw circles around it. Within the rings, add the names or category of people by degree of ownership. The closest ring will tell us who really owns the problem. The rings will get wider, and the people who are less involved will emerge, one ring at a time. Pierce's example was a friend's divorce. In the immediate circle, the problem was stated, and the first ring belonged to the couple. In the second ring, she placed their children. The parents of the couple were positioned in the third. Finally the fourth ring contained friends. In short, she had little ownership over the problem and lacked the ability to fix or control it. Her cards, meals, and a listening ear were the only appropriate supports she could supply.

We can all benefit from this exercise when we name our problems and queries, and then place circles around them to determine how much of the problem or query we own. Sometimes we find ourselves in the first ring. At other times, we may not have the right to any of the rings.

Gretchen Rubin, author of "7 Tips for Minding Your Own Business" cited Edward Westin who said, "A lifetime can well be spent correcting and improving one's faults without bothering about others". What a great quote. When energy is spent on self-exploration rather than unnecessary worries about problems we do not own, everyone benefits.

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