



Countering the Manipulators Tactics

Previously, I talked about 9 common tactics of manipulators and asked you to think about whether you are easy prey for manipulation. If you answered “yes”, it’s important that you understand that you will never change the manipulator when you confront their manipulative tactics directly. They will just switch to another tactic. So if you want to change, change begins with you.

You must recognize that someone is attempting to manipulate you.

Awareness is the first step of all change. But you are not going to change the person doing the manipulating. You are going to change you. Manipulation is only effective if it works to control you. Therefore, you must begin to identify what’s going on in you that keeps you easily manipulated by others.

The three most common reasons we allow ourselves to be manipulated are:

Fear: Fear comes in many forms. We may fear the loss of relationship, we may fear the disapproval of others, or we fear making someone unhappy with us. We also fear the threats and consequences of the manipulator’s actions. What if they actually succeed at doing what they threaten?

We’re too nice: We enjoy being a giver, making people happy, and taking care of other’s needs. We find satisfaction, and our self-esteem and self-worth often comes from doing for others. However, when we don’t have a clear sense of self and good boundaries, manipulators sense this in us and exploit it to their own advantage.

Guilt: We live under a lie that we should always put other people’s wants and needs ahead of our own. When we try to speak up or put our own needs out there, manipulators often exploit us and attempt to make us feel like we are doing something wrong if we don’t always put their wants and needs ahead of our own. Manipulators define love as always doing what I want/need you to do. Therefore, if we have a different opinion, need, want or feeling, we are told we are unloving and then may feel guilty if we express or want to do something different.

What you need to overcome a manipulator’s tactics:

Develop a clear sense of self: You need to know who you are, what you want, what you feel, and what you like and don’t like. You need not apologize for these things. They are what make

you you. Often times we fear that if we state what we need, feel, think or like, we're being selfish. But it isn't selfish to know who you are or what you want. That's healthy. Selfishness is demanding that you always get what you want or that other's always put you first. In the same way, when someone else demands that of you, they are being selfish and disrespectful of your personhood.

Jesus knew who he was. Because of his strong identity in the Father's Word, he was not manipulated when people wanted him to do things the Father did not call him to do. He also was not derailed when other's defined him as crazy or demon possessed.

The ability to say "no" in the face of someone's disapproval: Healthy people live in reality. The truth is, when we can't accommodate someone else's desires or needs, they naturally will feel disappointed. That's human, and most people will adjust and move on. Healthy people know that they don't always get everything they want even if what they want is legitimate.

However, when we cannot tolerate someone else's disappointment or disapproval when we say "no", then it's harder for us to say it or have boundaries. Manipulators capitalize on this weakness and use disappointment and disapproval in extreme forms to get us to do what they want.

Read Mark 1:29-39 and see how Jesus said no to Peter and his friends who were waiting to get healed. Do you think they felt disappointed? How did Jesus handle that?

Tolerate someone else's negative affect (disappointment, sadness, and/or anger without backing down: We can show empathy for someone else's sadness or hurt or even anger when we can't accommodate him/her without backing down and reversing our decision.

For example, in many of the examples of manipulation I wrote in last week's blog, a mother was attempting to get her adult child to come to her home for the holiday. If you don't want to be manipulated into saying "yes" when you want to say "no", you can say "Mom I know this is hard for you and you're disappointed and sad that we won't be there. I hope you will try to understand it's just too difficult for us to travel that far over the holiday with all the children."

Remember, a healthy relationship is characterized by mutual caring, mutual honesty and mutual respect. If you are in a relationship with someone who uses manipulation regularly, as you get stronger, you can invite him/her into healthy change simply by not allowing yourself to be manipulated. This will create a crisis of sorts in your relationship.

Either the manipulator will begin to back down and respect your time, your feelings, your desires and your needs, or they will move on to another person who is more easily manipulated.