



## HOW TO STOP BEING A MANIPULATOR

In two previous articles, I talked about the nine tactics of manipulators and how to counter their tactics. If you missed them, they can be found at [www.leslievernick.com](http://www.leslievernick.com) (look for *Archived Newsletters* on my *Free Resources* page).

I received many e-mails from readers indicating that they saw themselves as both. They were victims of manipulation as well as manipulators, and they wanted to know how to stop this destructive habit.

So how do we stop? First, you must recognize when you are doing the manipulation and that isn't always easy. Christine wrote me and said, "After reading your newsletter, I now see I manipulated all of my adult children to come home for Christmas using guilt trips. I wanted them to come home so bad, I just wouldn't accept no for an answer."



Manipulators want what they want, and they will go to great lengths to achieve their goals. Often we rationalize that the ends justify the means. But when you regularly manipulate someone, the relationship deteriorates. Even if you got all of your children to comply in coming home for Christmas, they are doing it out of guilt not love, and the underlying feeling is resentment. Is that what you want?

All healthy relationships require the freedom to say no to the other without fear or pressure. When freedom is absent and you don't allow someone to say no to you or have their own opinion on things without making them feel guilty, pressured, afraid, or stupid, then you can't have a healthy relationship with that person. Part of good emotional, mental and spiritual health is your ability to tolerate the pain and disappointment when someone doesn't do what you want. No one always gets what they want, even if what they want is good.

John e-mailed me after the newsletter and said, "My wife says I'm controlling and I never allow her to have her own opinion. I disagree. I just think I'm passionate and assertive, and she avoids conflict. Am I controlling and manipulative like she says? I don't see it."

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I encouraged him to invite honest feedback from those who know him well. I suggested he ask work colleagues, other friends, family members and children how they experience him and encourage them to tell the truth without fear of retaliation. Most of them said he was intimidating and controlling. John was flabbergasted. He had no idea. Now what?

Once you see you have this tendency to push for your own way, your own agenda and manipulate others to comply, if you want to stop doing it, you must humble yourself and confess this problem. Confess your new found awareness to God and ask people to give you direct feedback when they feel you are being manipulative toward them.

Old habits die hard and, even when we want to change, we don't always recognize what we are doing until it's already done. When you invite feedback, you are asking people to stop you right in the midst of your manipulative tactics which shows them that you are serious about changing them.

Next comes the hardest part. When they give you this feedback, you must stop. You can't keep pushing, bullying, arguing or guilt tripping. Thank them for their feedback and stop and reflect on your actions. Ask God for his help to see it as well as handle the disappointment of not getting what you want.

If we want to stop destructive patterns, we must have other people who can regularly speak into our lives, because the Bible tells us we all have a tendency to lie to ourselves (Hebrews 3:13, Jeremiah 17:9).

Your friends and family will know you mean business if you practice these four steps:

- See (become aware)
- Confess to God and to people
- Ask for feedback
- Stop when you are engaging in the pattern of manipulation

They will see you sincerely want to change this destructive pattern. Change doesn't happen overnight with anything. Even though you see something needs to change, the actual changing takes time, practice and persistence. But I promise, if you practice these steps, you can stop being a manipulator and learn to be better friend, spouse, colleague and parent.