

Forgiveness and Boundaries - One at the expense of the other?

By Johanna Vanderpol

In my life and in other peoples' lives, I see people wanting to be forgiving. I see them sacrifice their boundaries. I see them thinking that in order to be forgiving, they need to sacrifice their boundaries. I believe that this is flawed thinking.

I have learned and continue to learn that boundaries are a healthy part of our spiritual makeup and contribute to growth. I have had to make a conscious effort to identify my boundaries. I have had to recognize when people have violated my boundaries. And I have had to confront them when they have crossed my boundaries and inform them that they cannot do this again.

It has been a process of effort and discomfort. It has shown me how my self-doubt has caused my boundaries to weaken. Whenever I have allowed my boundaries to weaken mainly because of my self-doubt, it has had adverse consequences. And when I have chosen to give myself permission to have a boundary and reinforced it when necessary, it has had a positive effect. Is the effort and discomfort worth it? Absolutely.

Asserting my boundaries has had unexpected results. People have left my life. People have chosen to have no further contact with me. At first, these outcomes left me feeling shaken. But I came to recognize that I did not want people in my life that couldn't respect me in the first place. So, it was good that they left. At first, I felt rejected. But later I felt like it was an organic outcome.

I also discovered that when I first started asserting my boundaries, I did it in a very intense, angry and resentful way. Partly because I had let it go on too long. I did not know how to proceed nor did I have the skills to proceed. I also felt angry at the person for putting me in this position in the first place. The anger drove people away. They could not handle someone being angry with them. I had started asserting my boundaries, but was doing it in a way that was alienating people. Alas, I did not need to be angry with myself because I did not do it right the first time. It was unrealistic to expect myself to find the 'right' way the first time.

Eventually, as I started to understand what was happening, I was able to start asserting my boundaries in a more matter-of-fact way. And I was able to do it as the violation occurred. This was a gradual process. This new way placed less stress on me and informed the other person without them feeling offended. Now what happens is people who can accept my boundaries become closer to me and the people who cannot accept my boundaries still leave. It still shakes me up when relationships terminate, but I am learning that it does not mean there is something wrong with me.

This work is life changing and well worth any discomfort you go through. I was able to proceed more successfully through this transition with the help of a psychotherapist. She was able to help me see some of these insights. My life is now less chaotic, more enjoyable and contains more spiritual growth. The chaos of people causing unnecessary drama in my life has been eliminated. This has allowed a sense of peace in my life. I now freely and consciously choose the people and

the activities in my life. It is lived on a higher plane. And all because of honouring boundaries.

So, what is forgiveness, really? Does it mean to forgive and forget? No. Not always. Does it mean we allow someone to hurt us again? No. Not if we respect ourselves. Forgiveness means that we recognize that the other person is doing the best they can do with the resources, skills and life experiences they have. Forgiveness comes from a place of compassion in ourselves. It can feel like a paradox to be understanding of a person who wronged you. It feels like it should be the other way around. But, many times, in reality, it is not. This is for us to forgive, learn to protect ourselves without isolating ourselves, and free our energy to put into ways that are more valuable.

For more information and to order the book *Honouring Your Emotions: Why it Matters* contact Johanna at 250-483-1877 or at info@johannavanderpol.com. Be sure to visit her website at www.johannavanderpol.com.

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