

ACE WOMEN'S Network™ Michigan

Mentoring Mondays
October 19, 2020

In our last review, we learned that the desire to be perfect can actually be a trap. This week we will learn about another trap. “The desire to be wonderful in all circumstances – to be thoughtful and nice and make everyone around you feel good – is known among coaches as the disease to please.” This desire to be wonderful can also be a trap.

Habit 8: The Disease to Please

Chronic pleasers routinely say ‘yes’ to practically every task or job, knowing that it will eat up their time and bring little or no benefit. You may be aware of all the drawbacks for chronic pleasers, but you find yourself hooked on pleasing because the effort you put into being helpful and putting others first makes you feel like a good person. Psychologists and coaches will tell you that the disease to please is more typically found in women. Why?

“The answer is probably a combination of factors. As already noted, research shows that girls are more likely to be rewarded for being obedient, agreeable, helpful to others, and ‘nice,’ both at home and at school. And organizations often shepherd entry and mid-level women into ‘helping positions,’ where they’re judged on their ability to meet the needs of others and may be penalized for self-assertion. . . . While the need to please may serve you in the earlier stages of your career, it will impede you as you move higher, eroding your capacity to demonstrate leadership and serving as the ultimate tool for *giving your power away*.”

The case study we look at today is about Nancy, a senior administrator at a highly rated regional medical center. “She started her career as a receptionist with only two years of community college. No one in her family had gone beyond high school, and she had never envisioned herself in management. But she was smart, efficient, very hardworking, and remarkably warm and cheerful. Soon after she started, medical teams began relying on her to coordinate with patients.”

Nancy did a remarkable job and patients loved the way she interacted with them. The center received notes from patients about how she had helped them. Community ratings for the center began to rise and a large donation from a local philanthropist was received because his mother had been so well treated by Nancy. Ultimately, she rose through the ranks and was asked to start an outreach initiative. Eventually, the medical center was acquired by a larger system and many

of Nancy's innovations were adopted. She flourished for a time and then began to hit some bumps. Simply put, she was being spread too thin. Everyone wanted to deal with Nancy because she had the "magic touch." "Staff found it easier to bring her in than to try to deal with difficult situations themselves. They saw her as the linchpin for when things got rough."

"As Nancy struggled to meet so many responsibilities, her staff began to question her approach. Some felt marginalized and viewed her as always swooping in to do their jobs. . . . Despite her efforts, a number of high-profile patients who were accustomed to her being there for them sensed she was drawing away and grew resentful. Her attempt to please everyone was failing."

With the assistance of a coach, Nancy began to realize what is required when in a leadership position. You cannot be everyone's best friend and be there at their beck and call. "As a senior leader in the system, she needed to give others the chance to flourish and grow, to feel their way and learn from their own mistakes. . . . Coaches who work with women report that the disease to please is becoming more problematic because expectations are ratcheting up. This is an unspoken elephant in the room at many of the women's conferences we attend, where programs on 'achieving balance' have become a standard part of the repertoire."

Nancy had to learn to say no, as well as learn to delegate. "She also saw that her habit of taking on too much was rooted in her need to feel indispensable. Nancy had to confront the fact her over-involvement had the effect of making everything about her."

With the multiplicity of responsibilities women face – as family care givers in addition to leadership responsibility – feeling guilty that we are not doing enough is a natural by-product. "Finding a way to push back against the '*disease to please*' is more essential than ever."

To secure your copy of "***How Women Rise***" by Sally Helgensen and Marshall Goldsmith, visit www.hatchettbooks.com.