

WORK IT RIGHT! - #1 Improving Relationships On and Off the Job

by Gini Graham Scott

LEARNING TO LET 'EM GO!

You've probably heard the expression from playing poker: "You've got to know when to hold 'em and when to fold 'em." You've also got to know when to "let 'em go" – or walk away, in relationships, not just in cards or financial deals.

That's what Susan discovered when a long-term social and work relationship broke down. While working as an administrative assistant in a big company, Susan often saw Anna at parties, at an after work pub, and at Chamber of Commerce socials. Soon they were friends, talking about personal experiences and parties, and Susan told Anna about her plans to develop a PR and advertising career, initially along with her current work. A few months later, when Anna hoped to start a training program for managers on motivating employees, she came to Susan.

At first, the relationship seemed like a perfect match. When Susan shared her PR ideas and wrote suggested copy, Anna raved about them, telling her "You're the greatest!" and "You write so fast and well!" Between the PR discussions, they also chatted about the latest parties and gossip.

But over the next months, Anna became more and more demanding. She called Susan to ask for a few minutes of advice here and there, and when Susan added these to the bill, Anna got angry. "You're nickel and diming me. That's no way to treat your customers." So Susan backed down, not wanting to hurt a client and friend.

Another time, Anna had a rush project, and Susan said she could do it in place of another project, thinking Anna would appreciate her effort. But Anna yelled at her, saying: “Are you trying to make me feel guilty that you are giving up work for me?” “No, no,” Susan quickly apologized to placate Anna’s feelings, not wanting to offend a friend or client for her new business.

It was the beginning of a recurring pattern. Again and again, Anna criticized something Susan was doing, and Susan tried to smooth over the relationship by apologizing and sometimes adjusting the bill, until finally Susan decided enough was enough. After she gave up a weekend and worked hard to meet another PR deadline, Anna complained of mistakes, which Susan thought were due to unclear instructions from Anna and an outside vendor Anna had hired to assist on the project. But when Anna refused to simply agree there had been a communications breakdown and split the difference, wanting to further discuss what went wrong, Susan decided that was it. She told Anna, “Then, don’t pay me at all,” and walked away, giving up \$1000 in income.

Yet for Susan, leaving felt liberating. She felt she had been trying to preserve the friendship and new client relationship for too long, repeatedly giving Anna the benefit of the doubt. So she had deferred to Anna’s criticisms, though she increasingly felt Anna was asking for too much. So she had backed down – until now.

Such scenarios happen again and again. You are new to doing something. You have developed a relationship with a friend or associate. You feel something is wrong in what the other person is asking of you, but are afraid to rock the boat. You want to

give someone the benefit of the doubt and show respect. For whatever reason, you let a too long relationship drag on.

When that happens, it may be worth it to simply walk away and let that relationship go. Whatever the situation, it's time to move on. You may have to experience some financial or psychic cost to do so. But in the long run, the act of disconnecting is worth it. It's time to simply LET GO!

Today's Take-Aways:

- Don't get stuck holding on too long when the relationship is sinking.
- When you're in a leaky relationship, it's time to bail out -- and then get out.
- If holding or folding isn't working for you, it's time to let go and go.

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