

How to Stay True to Your Sweet Self & Build Boundaries (at the same time!).

By Sarah Harvey

Yes, I've often been a doormat.

Yep, I work part-time as a people-pleaser.

Uh-huh, I've lost count of all the times I've been called "too nice."

I'm a kindness-is-the-answer-type of girl.

I'm an I-give-everyone-a-chance-or-two-or-three-or-four-type of girl.

I'm an I-know-you-might-be-fighting-an-inner-battle-so-I'll-hear-you-out type of girl.

Because of this, my kindness is all too often mistaken for weakness.

Why is kindness weak?

Why is compassion cowardly?

Why is sensitivity scrawny?

I've been fighting an internal battle that can be summed up in this small, but seriously heavy question:

How can I stay true to my soft inner self and create boundaries to protect myself from being taken advantage of?

For a while, I thought that I had to become a mean, harsh, and bitter person to create boundaries. That I had to scream them out and be aggressive. That I had to get rid of my softness.

But, the thing is: that doesn't feel like me.

I refuse to lessen my softness or sensitivity.

I refuse to become harsh.

That doesn't feel like the answer at all.

That would feel like compromising myself.

And, that is not what I'm looking to do.

Compromising myself would only make me even more like a doormat.

Instead, I'm coming to see that part of the answer is to actually put my sensitivity and softness in service of my needs.

We don't have to get rid of our gentleness, our sweetness, our delicateness: we can transform it into a wonderfully useful healing tool.

Here are a few tips that have helped my doormat days become numbered:

(1) Listen to your gut reaction about a person, situation or interaction.

This is where sensitivity can seriously save us. It's often palpable when we are in the presence of someone who won't treat us right.

Tune into your instant impressions and intuitive hunches:

About to go on a first date and get a terrible twinge in your tummy? Listen.

Have an ominous feeling about a new friendship? Listen.

Feel uncomfortable next to a stranger? Listen.

Feel weird about an interaction with someone? Listen.

Close your eyes and listen. Register that feeling. Validate the fuck out of that feeling. Then listen some more, harder, and more fiercely to decide what to do from there.

(2) Know that you can leave any situation at any time, if you feel trampled upon.

You do not have to sit there and take crap from people.

Nope, not ever.

It doesn't matter if you're in the middle of a date or dinner with a friend or a family meal. If you are in any situation with any person and you start to feel manipulated, criticized, abused, or walked on, then embrace your freedom and get out! Make up an excuse if you have to; sometimes it's so just important to leave that kind of violating, manipulative energy before it sucks you dry.

(3) Your words have power, so use them!

This is possibly the hardest part.

Speak up, speak out about your feelings!

Someone hurt you? Tell them.

Feeling disappointed? Divulge the details.

Don't keep it in.

Sometimes, it helps me to write out what exactly I'm feeling before I confront someone. Without editing at all, let the words, thoughts and feelings freely flow out. With increased clarity, it's easier to speak up.

(4) Take a breath and drape yourself in self-compassion.

Take a loooooonggg, luxurious breath.

Okay, one more.

Are you being compassionate towards yourself?

Sometimes we forget this.

Instead, we get wrapped up in being compassionate towards others that we forget to extend that same wonderfulness inward.

Remind yourself daily that your wants and needs matter, too. They matter a lot.

(5) People who don't respect you have absolutely no place in your life.

Have a friend/lover/co-worker who doesn't respect your opinions or feelings? Who cuts you down? Manipulates you? Criticizes you?

That is not okay. At all.

And, it's not your job to convince them that your needs are important.

It's also not your job to make excuses for their behavior.

For me, the folks who don't have simple respect for me don't get to be in my life.

Our lives should be beautiful, filled with beautiful people. We deserve nothing less.

(6) Your time is yours.

Your time is not up for grabs.

Don't let people manipulate you into giving it away. You don't have to respond to calls or texts or e-mails instantly.

You don't have to go to events you don't wish to attend.

Stand firmly in the knowledge that this day is yours and you can do with it what you'd like. Know that the ones who truly love and respect you want you to live however you wish.

(7) Find the healing beauty in solitude.

Solitude puts us back in touch with ourselves—someone we need to be in constant contact with if we're building boundaries!

Being alone so I can hear, sense, and feel only myself is incredibly empowering. Taking 10 minutes, an hour, a whole day, whatever time I can, is so vital. If I'm out of tune with what I need, then for sure I

can't tell you. Learning to be sensitive to our own needs is a beautiful thing, and more often than not, it happens when we are alone. Check in with your sweet self each day.

These tips are simple—but not necessarily easy.

It's all a process, and I still mess up and lie down like a cheap doormat sometimes, but I know how to get back up more easily and quickly.

But, more than anything, I know how to support myself regardless of any external situation.

My softness and sensitivity are like beautifully fierce falcons that surround my heart and remind me to take care of myself, always.