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## What Makes a Person Controlling? How Can It Stop?

Being termed a “control freak” is not the best experience in life, but it is something worth pondering. Why do people around you feel that you’re overly controlling? Finding out what it is that spurs you to be a controlling person is the first step to dealing with it constructively. These steps can also be useful in understanding and perhaps helping a controlling person in your life.

Consider your perfectionistic tendencies. Are you a person who needs to get everything “perfect”, “just right”, “complete”? This can be a driving factor in a controlling personality. Perfectionism can be innate, or can develop as a result of high parental or other role model expectations that you sought to live up to when young and still aim to do. You may want to read [How to Control Perfectionism](#).

Consider whether you are patient or impatient. Impatient people are often very controlling because they are incapable of waiting for a more considered outcome, or for the time needed to create a quality end result. Combine this with perfectionism and the real controlling personality comes out – an unrealistic expectation of perfect work right now! Learn [How to Be Patient](#) and [How to Be Laid Back](#).

Think about whether you need to be right – even at a huge cost. This is a central aspect of a controlling personality. It derives from a need for certainty in your life, in a very uncertain world. This aspect of a controlling personality will always drive you to override other ideas, options, and suggestions in favor of your own, because you’ve already convinced yourself that you know best.

This railroading really upsets other people. They would like to know that you have not only heard what they have to say but are actively considering their points of view and incorporating these into your plans. When you constantly override them, you undermine their ability to be part of your team. You are no longer a leader – you are a tyrant, a dictator who ignores suggestions of teammates and simply wears them down to get your way.

Be honest about your ability to commit to people and activities. Do you find yourself avoiding commitments because this feels as if you will be caught up in a web of allegiances to other people, and have to rely on their help to complete projects, or you might have to be there for them when needed? An inability to commit to others (and trust them) and to activities not driven by you is an indicator of a controlling personality. It will be quite useful for you to learn [How to Delegate](#).

Confront your sense of vulnerability. The need for control stems from a deep-seated motivation to cover up your vulnerabilities. It is quite possible that somewhere in your life you felt threatened by not meeting standards that someone set for you and you strove very hard to meet those standards, possibly at great expense of interpersonal relationships and personal development.

Think about these questions for your professional life:

What do you feel vulnerable about?

What fears loom up when you think about delegating responsibilities?

What worries face you when you think of doing a job to an average rather than complete standard?

Does order matter a great deal to you?

What expectations do you hold of other people around you? Are these realistic?

Are you a source of stress to other people? Do you thrive amid their stress?

Are you always worried about failure?

Are you happy with yourself underneath the perfect façade?

Have you ever tried to Communicate Your Weaknesses?

Consider these questions in your personal life. Just as you wish to control your subordinates, co-workers, and projects at work, you are probably overly controlling in your personal relationships.

Consider:

Are you plagued by fears that your partner is unfaithful?

Do you interrogate your partner any time s/he is a few minutes late, talking with someone else, tells you s/he is going to run some errands?

Do such interrogations end in protests of innocence and tears?

Do you bully or railroad your partner? Override his/her wishes in order to accomplish whatever it is you wanted to do?

Do you notice your partner walking on eggshells for fear of angering you?

Have you been called overly possessive, overly protective of your partner or children? Often, controlling personalities are so concerned that some bad thing will happen that they feel it necessary to constantly shelter and “protect” their families. This results in children who are fearful, timid, reluctant to take part in activities, particularly ones where practice is needed – they fear that they will not be perfect the first time, and that it will spark a lecture, training sessions, or drills from you.

Do you often find yourself instructing your kids every step of the way on every little project – even taking over – rather than letting them complete it themselves?

Do you temper every bit of praise with criticism? “Great tackle, son. You’re going to be a good football player if we can get some of that weight off you.” “You got a B+ on your Calculus exam? That’s good, but you could get an A if you would just apply yourself.” Criticism is your way of reminding them that they still don’t measure up to your standard of perfection. There’s a difference between striving for excellence and using criticism to keep a sense of oppression alive.

Think about the ways that you can tackle your controlling tendencies. There are positives about some controlling actions (you can direct people to better performances), but mostly, they're negative (you become a petty tyrant, criticizing every tiny detail of their lives). The positives are that you are often someone who pays great attention to detail, you can manage projects independently, and you are relentless in seeking complete outcomes.

On the flipside, you upset people because you assume they're incompetent, you create stress for them by pressuring them constantly, you don't trust them, and you don't let their own talents and skills shine through. Consider these ways of approaching your negative controlling tendencies:

Get professional help with treating the anxiety that drives your controlling behaviors; cognitive behavioral therapy can be very helpful.

Respect the anxieties of other people and stop overlaying your anxieties on theirs.

Start trusting people and start delegating responsibility – a big test of letting go of your need for control!

Polish up your ability to judge people's skills so that you can rely on others to do what you ask of them; equally, don't ask people to do what they're not good at doing. Play to their strengths, and your own.

Recognizing your controlling tendencies can help you channel that criticism into helpful suggestions, turn your jealousy and insecurity into an appealing romanticism, and change you from a bully into a leader. If you cannot recognize controlling aspects of your personality, admit to them and address them, you will find it difficult to sustain relationships, because most people will not volunteer to be your "subject" indefinitely.