

# AVOID RELATIONSHIP RESENTMENT

When people start working on boundaries, one of the biggest reasons they cite is to reduce resentment in their relationships. One way to do that is by thinking about what you really want and are willing to give in a relationship. Many people find themselves giving up so much in a relationship that they lose themselves in the process. This doesn't end up serving anyone. Instead, it leads to resentment and bitterness.

Everyone has needs in a relationship, and when you try to ignore these needs, your body and emotions will start to sound on high alarm. Irritability may be an early sign, though it doesn't take long for this building resentment to eat at a relationship, and hurt everyone involved.

## REFLECTING ON RESENTMENT IN YOUR LIFE

- ▶ Now, take the time to reflect. Are you already feeling the effects of resentment? If so, how is it impacting your sense of self, and the relationship?

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## WANTING, WILLING, OR RESENTFUL COMPLIANCE

*I tend to divide the activities we do for our partners into three categories – the things we want to do, the things we're willing to do, and the things we do out of resentful compliance.*

*Wanting* to do something involves a wholebody “yes” feeling (“sounds like fun!”). Being *willing* to do an activity means it might not be your favorite, but you're okay with it because you know it's important to your partner and you have the time and energy to give. In other words, it's a gift freely given out of compassion – not guilt or obligation.

*Resentful compliance* involves saying yes to something you don't really want to do just so the other person will leave you alone. It sounds like an agreement, but isn't really one, and can



involve saying yes but then simply failing to follow through (or becoming bitter and resentful if you do follow through).

Examples of things you might give in a relationship could include things like: driving your partner to work, making meals, providing a listening ear, offering financial advice, giving up your paid job so you can stay home with the kids, compromising on vacation plans, seeing less of your friends, having less alone time so you can support your partner in a crisis, spending time with their family, helping them out of debt, exploring your sexuality together... and so much more.

The important thing to remember is that depending on the dynamics of your relationship and how much time and energy you have on a given day, the examples listed above could really fall into any of the three categories I've described. When you look closely at what you give in a relationship, how much of it are you doing out of a wanting or willing mindset, and how much are you doing out of resentful compliance?

- ▶ Think of everything you give in your relationship – in terms of time, energy, and resources – and add it into one of the three categories below.

WANTING	WILLING	RESENTFULLY COMPLIANT



# SETTING LIMITS

▶ What is the first thing on your list of resentfully compliant behaviors that you're ready to start saying "no" to?

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▶ What will help you take this action? (eg., inner strength, external support of some kind, or a reminder about your worth)

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**More on the concept of Resentful Compliance:**

"Resentful Compliance Versus Commitment", June 27, 2011,  
by Jim Hutt, PhD, Family Problems Topic Expert Contributor.

