

LIVE

Advice, not always yours for the taking

QUESTION:

My sister-in-law and I had a major disagreement recently. She insists I should be handling a situation at work in a certain way. I don't think she understands and should not tell me what I should or shouldn't do because she isn't living with it the way I am. People seem to like giving

advice, even when it's not asked for — why is that? What is the best way to handle telling her I don't want her advice? I don't want to alienate her. My husband and his sister are close and he is protective of her.

Answer:

Unwelcome advice-giving is unfortunately very easy, and often comes out of a desire to be helpful and to ease a situation.

We all do it. Sometimes, however, the advice-giver is seizing an opportunity to make up for a sense of inferiority, or powerlessness and gives advice (rather than offering it to be taken or not) to feel satisfied or superior, or worse, righteous. Whatever the motivation, underneath it are expectations or assumptions and judgments about others that we are often

not aware of having.

The expectations we have for others, and the other side of the coin — fear of being judged — are formed from our early experiences in our families with important people we depend on. We take in these attitudes by osmosis, by simply living in a particular social environment and listening to and observing how people interact with each other and with us. We learn how to handle our emotions, what is right and wrong and whether we can trust others to have our best interests at heart through this everyday exposure to human interaction.

From these experiences we form our ideas of how people can behave and the limitations we must put on our own desire to change others to fit our own picture of what is acceptable. Your sister-in-law has formed a particular perspective, as you have, on how to handle your work situation.

Your question, how to tell her you don't want advice, requires first that you look at your own irritation. What are your feelings about being



to know whether there is anything worthwhile and in your best interests in what she is suggesting. Perhaps, on the other hand, you confirm your suspicion that your sister-in-law is opinionated and more interested in satisfying her own need to make you into someone who sees the world as she does.

It's also important to look at how comfortable you are setting limits with others. Sometimes it's more difficult to do this with people we know well because of the emotional investment in the relationship. However, it's possible to communicate what is acceptable and what isn't without being aggressive or reactive. If you can stay genuine and calm, she likely will too.

given unsolicited advice from her? And do these feelings reverberate inside you in this way because of experiences you had growing up? Does this blind you to seeing anything useful about what she is advising? Can you benefit at all from her opinions? It can be useful to write down your reflections on these questions. Exploring your thoughts on paper helps to connect you with your own expectations and assumptions and focus on what matters to you.

This in turn helps you become objective and calm down and can help you

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