

Ep #256: People Pleased



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Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

Hello, hello, my friends. What's happening? Today, we have a very exciting topic. It's called people-pleased. Have you been people-pleased? You know, if you have, you know what I'm talking about. You know what it means, and it's not good.

So, if you're new to the podcast, I want to back up just a minute and let you know that I coach very many people – a lot of people, many people – on being people-pleasers. I am a recovering people-pleaser myself and I tell my clients and y'all that people-pleasers are liars. When you are a people-pleaser, you're basically telling people what they want to hear and you're doing it because you want to change the way that they perceive you or think about you.

So, for example, if they ask you to do something, you say yes, even though you don't want to in order to people-please them, or you tell them things that aren't true about them in order to people-please them so they will feel differently about you. Now, this is not a good way to live your life because it's inauthentic. It feels off. And you end up being a version of yourself that isn't you and people like you for some version of yourself that isn't you.

Now, in this podcast, we're going to flip it. So, people pleasers are liars, and then we're also going to flip it so you are the one being people-pleased, so you're on the opposite end of that experience. And there's degrees of this. So I think all of us are people-pleasers and people-pleased in some ways with our, you know, politeness and the way that we function in the world. I think there's a certain degree of it that's fine.

It's when people-pleasing goes bad that we have to – people-pleasing gone wrong is what we have to address. It's when you're going through your life constantly lying about who you are in order to get people to like you. Or, on the other side of it, you are a person who is feeling trapped by being people-pleased by other people.

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You can see and learn about all my previous work on people-pleasing in earlier podcasts, but in this one, we're going to talk about the other side of it. We're going to talk about you being at the effect of someone who is a people-pleaser. And I talked a lot about this in my – I think it was my first episode on boundaries.

And I want to talk about it in this way because it's such an insidious thing that makes you feel trapped and makes you feel like a terrible person, because when someone is trying to people-please you, they are being very nice and wonderful to you. And so, if you don't want to be people-pleased, it's very hard to say no when someone's being super kind.

So, the way that you know if you are being people-pleased is you probably are feeling some sense of obligation or guilt towards someone who is doing things for you that you may not even have asked them to do or want them to do. I had this experience – and I've talked about it a lot with my mom, right. She was just coming over to be with the kids and to hang out with me because she loves me.

So, when I would say, I don't want you to come over and love me, I sounded like a total jerk. It was terrible. My mom just wants to spend time with me and I'm telling her not to spend time with me. She was just being very thoughtful and pleasing and wonderful, and I didn't want that as much as she was doing it. But, in order to tell her I didn't want that, I ended up feeling guilty and terrible because I didn't have proper boundaries in place because I wanted to see myself as a kind loving good daughter.

And I think this happens in way more relationships than we realize, and what happens is, you, as the person being people-pleased, actually ends up feeling terrible about yourself. You're like, "I'm not a good person, I'm not kind enough, I'm not understanding enough, I don't love enough because I won't accept this person's thoughtfulness and loveliness and desire to please me."

It's almost like you're getting pleased against your own will. Nobody talks about this. And this is a real issue. So, for example, let's say you have a

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neighbor that is just lovely, very kind, very warm, just cheerful all the time. They come over every day to deliver cookies.

Now, they should know that you don't eat cookies. You're in Self Coaching Scholars, you're losing weight, you don't eat sugar and flour. So the first time they bring cookies over, you say, "Oh, thank you for the cookies. Lovely." Right, it's a beautiful gesture from your neighbor, totally good.

The second time they bring cookies over, you're like, "Oh, thank you, I guess. You don't need to bring so many cookies. We still have the other cookies." Then they come over the third day and you're like, "Oh, actually, we have plenty of cookies. We don't need more cookies." And they're like, "Oh, I just made them and I really like you and it's just very thoughtful and, you know, it's all from a place of kindness." And you're like, "I understand, but I don't really want any cookies."

And then, you kind of have to be, like, firm with them and you feel kind of like maybe you were a jerk. And you're like, "No thank you for the cookies, please, I don't want any more cookies." And then they are like, "Oh, sorry, I was just bringing you cookies. You don't have to get so mad." And then they leave. Are you with me on this, you guys?

So then you shut the door and you're like, "I'm a jerk. I just made this person upset. I shouldn't have done that." You have been people-pleased. You have been people-pleased, so the question is, what do you do with that?

So, if you're anything like me, then you have this sense of obligation. You're going to go out of your way to be super nice to that person. You're going to be on a guilt trip, which, of course, will perpetuate their people-pleasing because it will get the result that they want.

Now, here's what's important; when we are in the people-pleaser, when we are the ones people-pleasing, we are doing it for a reason. We are trying to please other people so they will think a certain way about us. We have an expectation of a result.

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So, if we're super kind to someone, it's because we want them to like us. We want them to be kind back to us. We want them to see us in a certain way. But when people-pleasing goes wrong, we might even expect more from that. Like, I expect you to be my friend and I expect you to help me out when I ask to be helped out and I expect you to accept all my gifts, even if it's every single day that I'm bringing you cookies.

That's my expectation. I'm going to be kind, but you have to hold up your end of the bargain. And what ends up happening is you end up in this relationship where you feel a sense of obligation and resentment and guilt and as if you owe someone something.

So, if we use the example of the neighbors who bring cookies over, there's kind of like this, "They've brought me cookies three days in a row. I should give them something back. Or I certainly shouldn't tell them to go away. They're being super friendly."

And because, in the beginning, it was a subtle gesture and you didn't say no, now there's no real boundary. So when they had come over the first time and said something like, "Here's some cookies that I baked for you..." if you would have said, "Oh, I'm so sorry, we don't eat sugar or flour, I really appreciate your gesture, but that's just not something that we eat. I'll take them and give them to our friends..." or whatever, then you've set a little bit of a boundary, but that same person could come back the next day and say, "hey, I made you some sugarless and flourless cookies."

Do you see what I'm saying? Then you're being people-pleased. So, in that moment, it's very challenging, but you have to understand that you telling the truth to that person is possibly the most important thing you could do if that person has some expectation or you feel some sense of obligation to that person.

And the neighbor example is a simplified example, but what I see happens more often is in relationships with families, with in-laws, with friends, is that there is this one-sidedness to the relationship and there is an expectation on the other side. I personally was a people-pleaser. I was people-pleasing

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a boyfriend of mine when I was young and he wasn't giving me the attention that I needed, and so I wanted to kind of create this sense of how amazing I was and how thoughtful I was and how wonderful I was.

And talk about over-delivering without someone asking and without someone requesting it. I would go to his house all the time uninvited and, like, deliver things to him, like thoughtful treats and thoughtful baked goods and things that I thought he would like. And I'd go to the door and give him a present. It's not like he could be, like, "What the hell are you doing here? Why are you coming here bringing me presents? Stop it."

He didn't want to be, quote en quote, rude to me, because there I was bringing him a present. It's very manipulative, right? So I was in this position where he hadn't invited me over. I was, for sure, crossing a line there, if not a boundary that I should call before I go over to somebody's home. But because I had a gift and because, "Oh, I'm just thinking of you, I'm just so thoughtful..." very manipulative of me in that moment doing that because I didn't want to be rejected and I was like overdoing all of this stuff, trying to get his love and attention in return.

And I don't know how aware I was that I was doing this at the time. One of the questions I was preparing for this was the question I was talking about with one of my friends, like, how aware are we when we're doing this – when we're in the middle of this? For me, it feels like an insecure anxiety. This people-pleasing comes from this place of insecure anxiety, so I think that the important thing to be able to distinguish when you're the one people-pleasing is, is it coming from a place of insecurity or is it coming from a place of love?

And you know if it's coming from a place of love because you don't expect anything in return, and if the person says, "I don't want that," or, "I want something different," or, "I don't prefer you giving me these things," you're totally fine with it. You're not hurt and upset and you don't try to justify or explain what you're doing. It's just like, "Oh, totally, no big deal." You're not like, "Oh, well I was just being super thoughtful and kind and nice to you."

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You're not going to this, like, guilt trip kind of justification of why you're doing nice things.

Like, if I give someone a gift and they're like, "Oh, I already have this..." I'm like, bummer, okay, no big deal. It's not like, "Oh, well I spent so much time and energy working on that." You see the difference? Really big difference. So it's almost like when people buy you presents and you've asked that they don't.

I don't know if you guys have had this experience. My preference is for people not to buy us gifts. Like, at Christmas time, we don't exchange gifts with people usually because it's not really something – we're kind of minimalist and we only have stuff in our house that we really love and that we pick and we prefer that other people don't pick what we put in our home. So we just prefer not to have people giving us gifts.

Now, of course, there are exceptions and there are people that know us really well and know that we would love a certain thing and maybe have to talk to us about it or something like that that makes it a little bit different, but it's just something for us personally. Now, if someone buys us a gift, we're like, thank you, we're not like, don't.

But it's when we've asked people, "Hey, please don't bring gifts. We're having a Christmas party, please don't bring gifts..." and then people bring them anyway. They're like, "Oh, it's just a little something, oh it's lovely, it's just a little something..." I find that to be, kind of, strange. And then other people didn't bring gifts, so then it's awkward. It's kind of weird.

That's being, I think, people-pleased, like, I insist on giving you a gift, even though you've told me not to give you a gift. It's so interesting. And the feeling is, you want to say, "Hey, actually, no thank you because we actually asked not to be given gifts..." but you're in this situation where someone has this gift, they're handing it to you; you've been people-pleased. You're, like, in that situation.

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And I think that people are like, “Oh no, they said they don’t want gifts but they don’t really mean it. I’m going to give them one anyway and they will really appreciate it.” It’s a very interesting thing to consider in human relationships, right? We’re just crazy as humans. We just do crazy things.

So let’s talk about proper boundaries so you can prevent being people-pleased. Typically, when you’re being people-pleased, it’s because you haven’t put up proper boundaries and you haven’t followed through on them. So, the example I was just giving you is, okay, if you’ve told people not to bring you gifts and they do bring you a gift, do you refuse the gift?

Do you say, “No, thank you. We really meant it. We really don’t want any gifts...” or do you accept it anyway? Very interesting thing. When the neighbor keeps coming over, can you set up a boundary early enough where you don’t end up doing it from a place of anger or frustration that strains the relationship. Like, “Please don’t. I really appreciate your thoughtfulness and I love that you’re welcoming us as a neighbor, it’s so lovely, but we would just love for you to come by – just make sure you call first. We’d love for you to come by if you call first and let’s just connect. We’d much prefer that to you bringing gifts over.”

Now, this is such an interesting thing because let’s say your neighbor really loves giving gifts and it brings them so much joy. You’re like denying them their joy of giving you a gift. This is the conversation I’ll have a lot of times with people, like, “But I love giving gifts. It’s what I love to do, even if the other person doesn’t want it, it’s what I love to do.” Then what you’re recognizing is they aren’t giving a gift for you. They’re giving the gift for them, for their experience.

So what you do with the gift shouldn’t matter to them, but if it does, if there’s some obligation or some expectation on the other end of that, that is where you really need to be clear with your boundaries and understanding that you can do it from a place of firmness and kindness, without being rude and without being angry in the moment about it.

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You guys have all heard me talk about my friend, Lori, who wanted me to donate some time for a cause that she was doing, and when I told her no, I told her I wasn't going to do that because that would have been people-pleasing. That would have been doing something that I didn't want to do, even though I love her and I want to help her, I don't want to volunteer my time. I'd rather volunteer money in another way, that's just how I roll. There will be people in your life that will be upset that you don't play into the role of people-pleaser and there will be people in your life that may be upset that you don't allow them to people-please you.

Let me give you another example; if someone comes to a party that you've invited them to and they insist on helping you, "Please let me help you wash the dishes or let me help you pass things out." They're just being kind and you're like, "No, actually, I don't want you to help. I want you to enjoy the party." And they're like, "No, no, no, I insist. I insist that I help you." And you're like, "No, actually, I'd prefer that you didn't help me. I want you to be in the party." And then you kind of like get in a fight with that person because they want to help you clean at the party and maybe they're doing it in a way that isn't how you wanted to do it or you really don't want people helping because then other people feel obligated to help.

You're kind of in this, like, challenging situation where this person is people-pleasing you, "I want to do this and there's nothing you can do about it..." kind of energy. And I know that it sounds so funny, like, oh poor you, somebody wants to help you at a party, but it is incredibly frustrating and incredibly, I think, manipulative when someone doesn't listen to your request at your own party to not do something.

And on top of that, you're feeling frustrated with yourself and guilty with yourself that you're angry at this person who was trying to help you. And anybody at the party is going to wonder why you would get mad if someone was trying to help you. That doesn't make any sense. And so you end up feeling like a crazy person. You end up feeling like a terrible person and so what happens is you start complying. You start feeling a sense of obligation to the person because they're being thoughtful.

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And so even though you don't want them helping, you give in to them helping you, comply with them helping, even though that's not what you wanted at the party. You really wanted everyone to just be able to enjoy and not get other people involved in helping, because then what happens is – and I've seen this happen to one of my friends at a party – everybody's cleaning instead of being part of the party.

And I've watched this whole thing go down. It's like really a maddening situation where, of course, it's fine, of course I'm not mad that – are you mad that I'm helping? Are you mad that I want to help you? The answer is, yeah, I'm kind of mad that I already told you I didn't want you to help and you're still insisting on helping me. Doesn't that sound terrible? Well you're kind of a jerk if you're mad at someone because they want to help you.

But it's very manipulative and it's really important that you know that that is a game that creates a sense of resentment and obligation and guilt that has you end up doing a reverse-people-please. So, basically, this person is kind of forcing their help on you, and in order for you to people-please and be pleasant, you're complying with something you don't want. And that's an example at a party, but there are entire relationships built on this where people feel like they can't have proper boundaries. They can't have proper discussions, truthful discussions because of this. If something's done out of kindness then you can't really talk about it.

So, for example, if I say to someone, "Oh hey, I took your car and filled it up with gas because I noticed you were low on gas..." and I have a very specific kind of gas that I like to put in my car and so it's kind of a bummer that you took my car and put gas in it. I really didn't want you to do that because I have this other specific kind of – but then, you know what I mean, it's like, what do you do there? How do you handle that situation where someone's really just trying to be helpful and it's not the end of the world?

No big deal, right? It happens once, thoughtful gesture, "Hey, next time, just make sure you ask. I have this specific kind of – it's not a big deal." But when it's a relationship and years go by like this where you are obligated to

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kind of accept this other person's behavior because they're telling you it's coming from a place of thoughtfulness and then you end up feeling resentment and obligation and guilt, that can ruin your opinion of yourself.

It's a very important thing to be aware of. If you are in a relationship where you are being people-pleased against your will and you're complying with a bunch of stuff that you actually don't want but you're complying with it because it's done from a place of that person's thoughtfulness, here's what I want you to ask yourself; is it what you want?

Because if the person says that they're doing something because they're being thoughtful, it is their thoughts about what they think that they're doing. I love the word thoughtful, "I was just being very thoughtful..." well of course you were; you were thinking your own thoughts, but you're not thinking my thoughts, so you don't know what's true for me.

And so, being able to communicate truthfully is sometimes very uncomfortable, but it prevents all of this type of people-pleasing, whether you're on the receiving end or on the giving end and it creates true authenticity in relationships. When I have gotten into relationships where I am being people-pleased, it's because I haven't told the truth and because I haven't set proper boundaries and expectations with the person.

And so, if a person does something for me that I didn't want them to do for me and I simply say thank you and then they keep doing it and I never say, "Hey, please don't do this anymore..." that's on me. My sense of guilt, my sense of obligation, my sense of compliance in that situation is on me.

When my mom was coming over all the time and, you know, attending every single event without even, like, asking and letting us know that she was coming over, that was on me. I didn't have any clear boundaries with her. That was totally my fault. All my feelings towards her were 100% on me. She did nothing wrong in that situation because I never communicated it to her.

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As soon as I communicated and set boundaries, our relationship was so much better. It was on me. And listen, by the way, when I set the boundaries and the communication there, it was not easy. It was difficult because it was so far down the road.

The truth is, sometimes people will want to give me things or do things for me or offer me things. Like, for example, people will say, I want to buy you dinner, can I please take you out to dinner? Lovely, thoughtful gesture, I don't want to go to dinner. I'm not interested in going to dinner. No thank you.

And the person is like, "No, really, it's this beautiful place and I'm paying and it's great." No, I really, I don't want to go is a challenging thing to say when someone's being lovely and offering you this beautiful thing. It's very challenging, y'all.

And people are like, "Oh, Brooke, that's so ridiculous..." but it's not. And I really do want to stand up to people who are feeling like all acts of kindness must be accepted, because it's simply not true. When someone offers you their hand to get out of a car, you do not have to accept it. When someone offers to carry your groceries or your bags or come to your room with your bags, it's lovely. And you can always say no.

And I feel like somebody needed to have a podcast to say that you do not have to accept gestures just because they're kind. You most certainly don't have to be rude, but you have no obligation to do things that you don't want to do, even if they're offered to you out of a sense of lovely kindness. It is something that is misused.

People will say, "Well I'm just being kind. I'm just giving this to you because I'm being kind..." as if that gives you an obligation to somehow comply with it. And it doesn't.

I had a client one time that had a mother-in-law that wanted to come over and always help with the kids and always cook all the meals. And she wanted to cook her own meals and she wanted to take care of her own kids

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most of the time. And I really related to this because the mother-in-law was loving, just loved her grandkids, she was super kind. She wasn't one of those mothers-in-law that was like rude and came over and, like, criticized her at all. It wasn't like that. She didn't even have a good reason not to have the mother-in-law be there, except that she just didn't want her there all the time.

I told her, that is reason enough. She doesn't have to be rude. You don't have to not like her. And she was feeling like the mother-in-law had to come over because the mother-in-law was so lovely and the mother-in-law was so kind and the mother-in-law genuinely just wanted to help. And she had no reason not to, except that she didn't want her there. She wanted to be alone with her kids sometimes and she wanted to cook her own meals.

My friends, that is a good enough reason. I don't want your help because I just don't want your help. It's not because you're not a good helper. It's not because you're not amazing. I just don't want it, and that's okay. And I want to give all of you permission to refuse kind things in a very kind way and to not be people-pleased against your own will.

And yes, some people will think you're a jerk. Some people think I'm a jerk just for doing this podcast. I don't care. It is not my job to people-please them into believing that I'm different than I am. And I want to give all of my listeners and all of my students permission to do the same. It's okay to say no to kindness. You do not have to have a guilt trip about it.

When someone invites you to their home for a meal on Christmas because they're being lovely and because they love you and because you're family, you can say no, and that's okay. And it's not unkind for you to say no to someone else's kindness.

We do way too much compliance, and what happens is we go to the meal and we go to the event that we don't want to go to and we're filled with resentment because we're there and we don't want to be there. That is not good for the relationship. That is not good for the other person. It's not good for you. It's not good for any level of truth or authenticity.

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Kindness is not always something that is good for you in that moment. If it is something that you don't want to do, what you're doing is pretending that you're being kind, when really, you're probably angry. And let me tell you, I've been both; I've been the people-pleaser and I've been the people-pleased.

And here's what I want to say; if you're a people-pleaser and you're trying to be kind and you're trying to be helpful and you're trying to be wonderful and you're trying to do all the things that the person, you think, the person wants, and they say no, understand that that is, of course, their right to do. And it is their prerogative to not want your help, and it doesn't mean anything about you.

Now, I've talked about the people-pleased and I've talked about the people-pleaser, and those relationships on both sides can get negative. So if you're a people-pleaser, you can be abused by somebody who takes advantage of that. They are really, "Well you didn't do it right, go do it again..." kind of energy.

But if they just say they don't want your help, that's a very different thing. That's when you have to recognize your own people-pleasing. Was it something they asked you to do, or was it something that you insisted on doing? And just taking a really clear look at it and owning, like, what is the truth?

So, for both you people-pleasers and people-pleased, which is me too, look at what is the truth in this situation, not just your truth, but did the person ask you to do that thing? Did the person communicate clearly with you? And if they didn't, that's on them, for sure. And if they did and you took it personally and tried to justify yourself, then that's on you personally. It goes all the way around, my friends.

So, I read this book one time a long time ago that was called Emotional Blackmail, and it's like people-pleased gone to the ultimate degree where the sense of obligation is created through manipulation in a way that ends up being really unhealthy for everyone involved. And I think this is just the

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beginning stages of that, feeling like you have some obligation to act in a certain way when someone acts in a certain way towards you. And you absolutely do not have that obligation.

So, as you go through the world, my friends, I want you to consider where you are people-pleasing, which means you're doing something to try and get a result, to try and get someone to think a certain way about you. And you'll know because you'll want them to have a certain response to how you're pleasing them.

Where in your life are you being people-pleased where you are going along with a sense of obligation or having a guilt trip when you say no to someone? And how can you clean that up so you can have much more authentic relationships in your life where nobody is going out of their way to try to please the other person, but you're both telling each other the truth and both taking care of pleasing yourselves?

Alright, my friends, I hope this was helpful. I know this is going to be a big one with many of you because I know when I coach people on this, they are so appreciative of me giving them permission to not be people-pleased. So, I'll be excited to hear what you all think about this one. Have a wonderful week, everyone. Bye-bye.

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