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Caring vs. Caring Too Much

By Susan Dunn

Caring vs. Caring Too Much by Susan Dunn, MA, The EQ Coach

DEFINITIONS

Caring – Being concerned about outcomes; paying just enough attention but not too much; to feel trouble or anxiety; to feel interest or concern. To overlook the progress of others and projects, but to have faith and confidence in other people to look after themselves and do things well enough.

Caring too much – Being too concerned about outcomes; paying too much attention; feeling too troubled or anxious; feeling overly concerned; not believing other people are competent and capable. Hovering over them and transmitting your anxiety to them so they become dysfunctional.

COMPARISONS

Supervising a project vs. Hovering over the person

Being concerned about someone and interested in the outcome vs. Worrying anxiously over someone and trying to take over.

Managing vs. Controlling

Transmitting emotions of confidence and self-assurance v. Transmitting fear, worry and anxiety

EXAMPLE

Alice cared about the outcome of the project and made herself available to the team for input and supervision. She had high emotional intelligence and was flexible and creative in planning and outcomes. She delegated easily and well. Because of this, the team worked well, and had the stamina to finish in style with plenty of energy left over for the next project. Everyone enjoyed working with Alice because she brought out the best in them and they built their self-esteem by completing successful projects.

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Harry was overly concerned about the project. He was critical and demanding of himself and others and had low emotional intelligence. He could not be satisfied with less than perfection and drove himself and others. He hovered over everyone which destroyed their self-confidence, confused them, and pulled their focus away from the work. His worry caused them to worry and undermined their self-confidence. As the "primal leader," he transmitted his anxiety to others. Every team and project he drove this way became cynical, insecure, exhausted and burnt out. No one wanted to work with him or under him, and the best people would transfer out of his department. Eventually he was fired.

KEY POINT

When you become overly concerned and caring, you cross a line into what's called an overdriven

striving. You focus on it too much and can affect your own thinking and functioning, as well as that of others. You demand too much and usually get too little. It's exhausting to everyone concerned.

BENEFITS

We are truly helpful to ourselves and to others when care enough, but not too much. It's important to have faith and confidence in others, and give them room to breathe, grow and blossom.

RELATED DISTINCTIONS

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Discerning The Loving Heart

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

How often have you had the experience of connecting with someone - a friend or a potential partner -

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who turns out to be an uncaring person? At first you think this is a really good person, and then down the line you discover that the person is self-centered, narcissistic, angry and uncaring. You wonder how you could be so wrong, and what can you do differently next time?

I have discovered in my 35 years of counseling that people seem to decide very early in their lives whether or not they want to care about and have compassion for others' feelings. As a result, people have different levels of the willingness to feel others' feelings. Some of us deeply feel others' pain and joy, while other people don't. Some people can recall caring about others' pain and joy from a very young age, while other people remember being concerned mostly with their own feelings and needs.

The people who have chosen the deeper level of compassion are often the ones that become the caretakers, while the less compassionate people become the takers. Caretakers are people who have learned to take responsibility for others' feelings and well-being, while takers are people who expect others to take responsibility for their feelings and well-being and often blame others when they don't take on this responsibility.

If you are a compassionate person who easily feels others' feelings, you might find yourself drawn to people who are in pain. Your compassionate heart naturally wants to help those people who are in pain, not only out of caring, but also because their pain is painful to you. The problem is that this person might not care about your feelings as much as you care about his or hers.

So, how do you become discerning of who has a loving, caring and compassionate heart? The first step is to focus on developing as much compassion for your own feelings as you have for others. Often, very caring people leave themselves out, caring about others far more than they care about themselves. This leaves them vulnerable to becoming the caretaker for someone who just wants someone else to take care of them, and then gets angry when you don't do it "right." If you develop compassion for yourself, you will start to feel much more quickly when someone is not really caring about you. If you are just focused on another's feelings, you won't notice what you feel, and it is your own feelings that allow you to discern caring from a lack of caring.

The next step is to understand and accept that, no matter how caring you are to others, you have no control over how caring others are with you. You can't make someone be caring, and the more you take care of another's feelings and well-being while ignoring your own, the less caring the other will be. The other person becomes a mirror for your lack of caring about yourself.

The more you learn to take full, 100% responsibility for your own feelings, the more another's lack of caring will be intolerable to you. The more you are able to stay tuned into yourself and trust your own perceptions, the quicker you will discern a lack of caring in others. The more you accept your lack of control over getting others to be caring, the quicker you will let go of people who are intent on getting caring but not much concerned with giving it.

It really doesn't take long to discern the loving heart once you have compassion for yourself, trust your perceptions, and accept your lack of control over others. People betray their intention to either give love or to get it, or to give to get, with everything they say and do. With practice, you can learn to discern the loving heart very early in a relationship. If you want to stop recreating the same

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relationships over and over, then develop your power of discernment.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course:

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