



Connie Podesta's Life Would Be Easy Series – Part 7 Deal Making & Breaking Strategies for Handling the Passive Personality

By Connie Podesta

“Whoa” is the passive’s favorite word. Slow down. Let’s not talk about this right now. This makes me uncomfortable. This is too stressful to think about. They don’t want to deal with things, but then they are disappointed because life doesn’t happen the way they want. Well a word to the PASSIVE—you can’t have it both ways.

Passives do get pushed around, picked on, taken advantage of and overlooked. No doubt about it. But what they don’t realize is that they are a huge part of the problem. With all the assertive, aggressive and passive-aggressive people running around, how in the world would a passive ever think they will get their needs met **WITHOUT SPEAKING UP?**

On the other hand, shame on us for being the ones who take advantage. Sure, it seems rather nice at first. Who doesn’t enjoy having someone around who doesn’t argue, disagree, or seem to care about getting their own way? Sounds pretty cool-right? Maybe for a while. Then it becomes frustrating, boring and downright irritating. Why? Because passives don’t follow through, they overcommit and under-deliver, they expect you to read their minds and they act hurt when life doesn’t go as planned.

Dealing with the Passive Person

Although it is true that passives are usually considered “nice” people, they do cause a fuss – constantly! And their “niceness” becomes annoying when we can’t seem to ever get a decision, opinion or straight answer. “Where would you like to go?” “Oh, I don’t know. Wherever you want.” For Pete’s sake— have an opinion we think (sometimes out loud!) They are frustrating and confusing, insincere and vague, wishy-washy and unreliable. They do not tell you how they **really** feel because they are too busy telling you what they think you want to hear or will keep the peace. Hello? STOP!

It is impossible to have a healthy relationship when only one person’s voice is heard.

The truth is - passives lack the trust and self-confidence needed to communicate assertively. They often do not trust us to respond positively to any assertive attempts on their part because that's just not been their experience in their lives. Plus—and here's the BIG reason—life is certainly much easier when we let other people take responsibility and ensuing blame if something goes wrong—than if we make a decision and are held responsible.

So what do you DO? Well, though it's impossible to change another person, we can change how we respond and react to people and situations. Whatever the reason, passives need a safe, functional environment where they can learn that it is crucial to be open, direct, and assertive if they want to be an integral part of **any** relationship. They need to experience what it is like to be assertive without hurting someone's feelings or making someone angry. They need to learn that there really is an UP side!

If you really want to help – you've got to make time to get to the bottom of what a passive is really trying to say. You must be the one to communicate assertively and don't be so quick to let them off the hook for making commitments you know they cannot keep. Don't let them get away with vague comments, lack of decisiveness or attempts to pass on accountability. **Hint:** give them choices: would you like to go to the movie or to the theatre. And don't do either until THEY decide. Then....make sure if the movie is bad or the play a mess, YOU don't berate them for a bad decision. Help them feel comfortable being wrong once in a while.

Here's a good example: Passive Margie says she'll go to Movie B because you invited her to spend some time together. Margie really has no earthly desire to see Movie B, but she's doing what passives do – she doesn't say how she really feels. (That's a form of lying by the way!) Internally she is either mad or nervous about doing something she doesn't want to do, but she's not going to let YOU in on that! Then when she's at the movie, she's not happy at all and begins to seethe and slowly let all the pent up feelings about all the times she has done what YOU wanted boil up inside. Then it comes out—and you have no idea what just happened. Somehow she even manages to turn it around on you and make you look like the bossy one for making her go! (Sound familiar?)

Is there any chance for survival? Well, I'm a firm believer in hope and we can help passive people learn to focus on being direct and assertive. The best thing you can do is give the passive people in your life permission to make a decision and then praise them for their participation.

If you really want to deal successfully with a passive person, you must teach them by modeling assertive behavior on how to solve problems, sort out options, share concerns, and tell the truth about what is really happening. Anyone who has ever been involved with teaching, coaching, and mentoring knows that these jobs require tact and patience. It is important that we take the time to carefully word our needs so the passive understands that...

- (a) there are options, and we really need them to be honest with us
- (b) they can trust us and safely share those honest feelings
- (c) if they really want to avoid a hassle, it would be better to resolve the issue now than to deal with it later
- d) it is more stressful to avoid confrontation (and worry about it) than to just deal with it head-on

If we are getting our needs met because a passive gives in and does what we want, we probably would rather maintain the status quo. If you truly want to keep the passives in your life passive, then it may be

fair to assume that you are an aggressive who likes to stay in control. But get ready. This situation won't last forever and at some point the table will turn. Nice as it may seem now, the relationship may not survive for two reasons:

1. A passive generally becomes very tiring and very frustrating to be around. It is hard to have respect for someone who rarely has an opinion or idea of their own. Also be aware that passives have a way of turning on you after years of giving up and giving in. They may either become aggressive or use some of the same techniques that always worked on them, or they will find a way to get even – not overtly, but secretly and deviously.
2. Getting someone to trust us and learning to trust someone who has misled, exaggerated, or lied to us takes patience and time. The first thing that must be done in order to develop trust with a passive is to look within yourself. We may not be aware of our influences because it is so easy to manipulate passives. They practically ask for it when they give in or give up so quickly. If we want the passives in our life to shape up, we must commit to being assertive with them.

Functional, healthy relationships are **not** about control and power. The passive must feel worthy and respected in our presence so that they have the confidence to share their feelings and concerns.

Here's your homework...Take Action!

Identify two passive people in your life. Think about whether you create a safe, assertive environment in which they can learn to communicate more openly. How can you help the passive people in your life trust you and feel more confident about sharing their honest feelings with you?

Take a look at how you handle communication and compromise. Are you taking a passive role and a back seat? Do you have difficulty making decisions? Do you allow yourself to be taken advantage of and then feel disappointed in them and yourself later? Do you believe that your opinions don't count? Do you hate to make a decision because you might be wrong and people will be mad at you? If so - you'd do well to study the assertive communication more closely and work towards adopting more of that into your life and relationships.

Want to learn more techniques and strategies for dealing with DIFFICULT people? Visit my site at www.conniepodesta.com today!