

Another Beautiful Life

The Manual

A manual is an instruction guide we have for someone in our lives about how we would like them to behave so we can feel good and be happy. We generally don't tell the other person what's in our manual, and we usually don't even realize we have it or see the pain it causes us. We feel that the other person should just "know" what to do and how to treat us. While it may seem justified to have expectations of other people, it can be very damaging when your emotional happiness is directly tied to their behaving a certain way.

People have manuals that stem from the belief that they would be happier if someone in their life would change. This is a huge cause of suffering because they're handing over the power of how they feel to someone else. One of the most powerful things you can know is that this isn't true. Ever.

Other people's behavior has no impact on us emotionally until we think about it, interpret it, and choose to make it mean something. No matter what people do, how they act, or what they say, we don't have to give others the power to determine how we feel.

Some common manual instructions could be:

- She should call me back when I call her.
- She should remember my birthday.
- She should invite me when she has a party.
- She should write me a thank you note.
- She should be kind and understand when I am frustrated.
- She should support me.
- She should listen to me for as long as I listened to her.
- She should come to the hospital when my father is dying.
- He should tell me he loves me.
- He should buy me something special on my birthday.
- He should know what I like.
- He should be emotionally available.
- He should want to go to the movies I like.
- He should make more money.
- He should spend less time at work.
- He should spend more time with the kids.
- He shouldn't watch so much football.
- He should take out the garbage without having to be asked.

These examples are simple and brief, but the truth is that most manuals are pages upon pages thick. They are complicated, intricate, and detailed. Rather than sharing these expectations with the person they're about, people with manuals generally feel the other person should just inherently know. They are then eager to interpret this as a sign that they are really loved by this person.

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THE PROBLEM WITH MANUALS

Adults have the ability and freedom to behave however they choose. This includes you. There is nothing you ever have to do, and there is nothing anyone else has to do for you.

When you're in a relationship where you feel responsible for filling someone else's needs and they feel responsible for filling yours, there is constant manipulation and effort to control one another so that in the end, nobody wins. The truth is, you cannot control another person, and there is nothing they could possibly do that would make you as happy as you want to be. All of the power to feel happy lies within you.

Although your partner may do things that give you positive thoughts and feelings at times, they won't be able to do such things all of the time or may not want to.

If your emotional life is tied to your partner's behavior, you've given away all of your power and have set yourself up for disaster. Furthermore, being in a relationship with someone who is "needy" is exhausting and not fun. Instead, if both partners are responsible for their own happiness, they can meet in the middle and have fun together. This is how the best relationships function.

When you subscribe to manuals, you put your emotions in the hands of other people. If the people in your life don't follow the Manual (and they usually don't), you are then guaranteed to feel negative emotions. You then, unknowingly, blame the other person for your feelings. You have given control of your emotional life to someone else, cementing your own powerlessness.

HOW TO LET GO OF A MANUAL

The best first steps are to realize that these manuals are based on other people and to recognize the benefits of taking responsibility for our own rules by creating personal operating manuals for ourselves. The truth is that most of us cannot even control or manage ourselves, and yet we want to control and manage other people, which is somewhat ridiculous. Controlling our own behavior is challenging enough, but trying to control other people is inevitably frustrating for both parties and usually ineffective.

We must first acknowledge that we have manuals for the people in our lives, and to explore what it is that we want people to do differently and why. The answer is always that you think that if the other person changes their behavior, you will feel better. However, we know that another person's behavior doesn't control our feelings, ever. It's only our thinking that affects how we feel. When someone does follow your manual, you may choose thoughts such as "This person likes me and cares about me," and that is what might cause you to feel good. When someone doesn't follow your manual and you interpret it negatively, you'll feel bad. When we don't take responsibility for how we feel, we give that power away to someone else based on their behavior.

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Take responsibility for how you feel, regardless of other people's behavior. This is an empowering way to live and creates better results in your life. This does not mean that you stay in relationships that are harmful or not serving you well. You need to do what's necessary to protect yourself. Although boundaries are appropriate, trying to control and manipulate other people never works. Instead, it will make you feel and even act like a crazy person.

Most people have a manual for their significant others. We have a lot of ideas about how we would like them to behave and who we would like them to be. This comes from our idea that if they were more like we wanted them to be, we would somehow be happier as a result. It's important to remember that your happiness comes from you and it doesn't matter who your spouse is or what they do when it comes to your emotional happiness. Spouses who are compatible with us are going to make it easier for us to have positive thoughts around them, but it doesn't mean that they have to change in order for that to be true.

It is truly possible to let go of all your rules, all your regulations, and all your attempts to control people in your life. Consider letting these things go and making requests if you want to, but only with no strings attached. Genuinely notice what people do when you don't try to control them. If you focused on trying to control only yourself and your responses to how other people behave, what do you imagine your life would be like?

In our personal relationships, it's much easier to let go of our manuals because then we start letting people just be who they are. When we don't try to control others, they feel safe to be their true selves, and this is what authentic, intimate relationships are made of. We can be much calmer when we don't make others' end actions mean something negative and we can also really hear them out. We can get their perspective on things, hear their side of the story, and understand why they do or don't do what we've requested. This is so much more effective than pounding our fist on the Manual.

If you throw away your manual, you may end up doing things you don't want to do, but your relationships will improve dramatically. The truth is, you, just like other people in your life, don't have to follow your manual. You don't have to do anything you truly don't want to do either. Take some time to consider this idea. Are you willing to give up your manuals? Are you willing to let go of your expectations and focus all that time and energy on creating the best life you can? You'll find that your life is enhanced by being around people who genuinely do things they want to do, rather than doing things because you're emotionally manipulating them. If you're willing to give it a try, you'll find that this changes everything.

WORK IT OUT

Fill out The Manual worksheet