

## Whose Business Are You In?

By Janet Christensen

At some point in time, each of us encounters situations where we want to jump in and fix something in another person's life, perhaps a family member, friend or co-worker. It may be a personal situation, a work problem, a financial situation, a conflict – the opportunities to jump in and "fix it" are vast and diverse. And our desire to help out comes from a very sincere, caring motive - most of the time. Sometimes our motive can be frustration or anger when we see the "same stuff, different day", and when we are tired of hearing the same story or complaint over and over again. Then we just want to wrestle control, tell the person what to do and prove how easy it is to make their life better.

I have one particular relationship in my life with someone who, in my estimation, doesn't seem quite able to get their act together. This person is someone who I love and care about very much and I know she is capable of much more than she gives herself credit for being able to achieve. When an issue arose that I needed to address, I took the opportunity to tell this person what they were doing "wrong", how to fix it, and a few other things at the same time. To my surprise, this erupted into a huge argument and misunderstanding. Some very hurtful things were said and I was shocked that my well meant attempt to help had resulted in an attack on me.

I had been operating under the assumption that by telling her where she was going wrong and how she could fix it, I was showing her the way to improve her life. Over the course of the next few days I had time to think about my part in what had happened. This was a humbling, enlightening and, ultimately, a freeing experience.

When I stood back and looked from the other person's perspective it became clear that the message I was actually sending was far different from the one I thought it was. I thought I was conveying "I believe in you and you can do anything you set your mind to do." I was really saying "You are not good enough where you are. You need to be fixed, and I don't think you can do this by yourself." Quite a difference!

The next time that we spoke, I apologized for trying to "fix" this person and her life – for making the business of her life my business, *without being invited to do so*. I explained that I had acted out of love and concern, however I realized that my words and actions were

hurting and not helping. I was trying to force her to somewhere where she was not ready to go, and perhaps does not want to be.

My new commitment is to be there for her where she is now, and when she decides to move forward. This does not mean that I will condone staying stuck in the "same stuff, different day ". Instead, I will ask "What do you plan to do about it and how can I support you in that?" That is very different from jumping in to assess and report what is wrong and prescribe the appropriate action to fix it. Instead, by asking the question, I trust her to learn what the situation has to teach, find her own answers and solutions and I offer my support to help her do that.

As I let go of taking care of her business, our roles changed - I am no longer the Ms Fixit, and she gets to be CEO of her life. This has been freeing for both of us. She no longer feels the need to meet my expectations of her, and I have more time to spend on the business of my life.

The next time you are tempted to jump in and "fix" someone, ask yourself "whose business am I in?" If you are like me, there is likely enough business to handle in your own life without needing to take on more. There is freedom in saying "not my job!"

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