

There are multiple underlying reasons for this, ranging from early family dynamics, conditioning and learning to later experiences, fear, shame, self-doubt and the prevailing underlying schemas that get wired in our brains. Holding a caretaker role as a child or adolescence increases one's focus on others. The more one engages in this type of behaviour the more entrenched it becomes and over time this type of almost automatic reaction or behaviour becomes sort of second nature. It may not be difficult for us to discern this type of behaviour, but it is not easy to connect the dots and explore the underlying causality. Instead we often rely on surface explanations and we rationalize and minimize the toll this kind of social exchange and interaction eventually takes on one's life, as exhaustion, depletion and losses create a cumulative effect over time. So, initially, we need to look at why we seem to find ourselves in this type of situations more often than others, and why we tend to say 'Yes' when we actually need to say 'No'. We may need to listen for recurring themes and stories or triggers that elicit responses and behaviours, which may go back to early learning. We may, for instance, recognise that when others raise their voice and put pressure on us we tend to feel intimidated or we cave in. Recognising the origins of this can make it easier for us to break our habitual ways of responding. We may need to become more mindful of our relationships and the reason why we tend to attract more 'energy vampires' than we can deal with and we may also need to re-examine the dynamics in our relationships, whether familial, friendships or colleagues. 'Energy vampires' is a term I have recently become acquainted with, and I think I first heard it been used by the psychiatrist and writer, Judith Orloff. It is definitely very descriptive, because inability to say 'No' when needed, to set boundaries or to move away from toxic people may literally leave us feeling as if our energy is being sucked. We might be left feeling drained and with a sense of heaviness, disempowerment and depletion. In the past I have drawn images of me and a vacuum cleaner sucking oxygen or energy from the centre of my chest. Judith Orloff says that 'if someone asks too much of you, politely tell them "no." It's not necessary to explain why. As the saying goes, "No is a complete sentence' (2014, psychologytoday.com). Brené Brown believes that 'for women, there's a myth that we're supposed to do it all – and do it perfectly. Saying no triggers a chorus of built-in shame gremlins: "Who do you think are?" and "Well, you're not a very caring mother/wife/friend/colleague." But setting boundaries is really about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing those around us. We can't base our sense of worth on others' approval – and this is coming from

someone who spent years trying to please everyone. Only when we truly believe that we are enough can we say, "Enough!" (<http://www.oprahmag.co.za/live-your-best-life/self-development/bren%C3%A9-brown%27s-challenge-dare-to-set-boundaries2>). I would like at this point to make it clear that what I am referring to is not acts of kindness, doing good or helping others when in true need, this is about caving in and pleasing people, disregarding personal desires, needs and stamina.

I will share my 'translation story or saga', which for me represents how this type of behaviour may manifest over and over, as if the act of failing to set healthy boundaries spawns similar experiences in various contexts making it a vicious cycle. Over the years I have been paid for translation work, but I have also been asked for a lot of favours, and I do not mean a page or two or the translation of a document in an emergency or for someone who cannot afford it. I mean been pestered to do translation work for a magazine, someone's book, degree assignments, a project to get them a promotion, divorce papers, etc. During these exchanges and under the right amount of pressure I would get flushed, resort to providing excuses and explanations and then I would usually end up accepting, which could then elicit feelings of irritation and indignation or my becoming judgmental, resentful and angry; however, simply complaining, feeling resentful, judgmental and angry can fireback. What could be more effective would be to understand why we allow others to manipulate us or use us in the first place, and secondly, to move out of this type of mode of responding. There are two stories that stand out, both to do with translation work: an instance of not saying 'No' and an event when I failed to be mindfully alert and to protect myself. So, the first incident took place while I owned a school and worked as a teacher. It was normal back then for me to work about 60 hours a week, but during exams at the end of May or June I literally worked non-stop Saturdays and Sundays. These extra lessons with the groups sitting formal/official exams involved intensive revision and preparation work and I never requested any extra tuition. Sometimes the lessons took place at my home on Sundays since there was no other time to schedule them. So one of these Sunday evenings when I was looking forward to eating and collapsing on the sofa two clients came by to pick up their children. After chatting for a while, they

asked me to do translation work for a school project on multiculturalism or something (they were both principals). They needed the translation during the next several days. Then a conversation took place which involved my almost pleading and their adamant insistence. They left leaving the 20 page document on the kitchen work top. That night after the others had gone to bed I set about reading the text, feeling more and more frustrated, irritated and resentful with each page. I felt tired, sleepy, hostility towards them for disregarding my wish and not respecting the fact that I had no time or energy to do it. I judged them as impolite and ungrateful and perceived it as a type of bullying and by the time I finally got to bed I had decided to return it to them the next day with a note, but as it turned out I ploughed through it depriving myself of sleep and any free moment for the next several days. Had I been able to be more respectful of my desires and intentions, and had I been able to evaluate the situation from a more mindful, less distracted and exhausted state, I might have chosen differently and also noticed that it was not a one time incident. If I had paused and explored the experience at a deeper level I might have noticed a thread going back to childhood or adolescence and this might have facilitated the understanding of the deeper roots and causes.

The other story I will share concerning translation work is mostly about setting boundaries, being mindfully alert and discerning when deciding to trust others. Many years ago I got interested in drawing toys and old dolls in my free time and at some point I felt I would like to translate and/or illustrate a children's story, so I discussed this with a friend whose friend was a book publisher. He suggested we visit him and see how it goes. My meeting with this publisher went quite well and he said I could go ahead with the translation of *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, that was the book I was thinking of working on, on the condition that it had not already been translated into Greek. We decided that he was in a better situation to investigate the market and I left it at that. After a couple of weeks he said I could start and since I had met him through close friend and best man at our wedding I thought I could trust him, ignoring a gnawing feeling of unease. After I had worked on almost one third of this, not especially easy to translate book, he phoned and said that unfortunately the book had already been translated and published in Greece, by a major publisher as I was to soon find out.

Had I been mindfully alert, paying attention and had I asked for some sort of confirmation before embarking on the project it would have saved me both the work and the disappointment.

I am now convinced that to some extent it is our attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that often facilitate others in behaving without integrity or respect or in displaying manipulative or cruel behaviours. As someone said to me *they do it just because they can*. I do not wish to underestimate the role that societal context plays in our lives or overestimate the degree of agency we can display at any given moment, because this would leave people feeling that we have absolute control over our actions and experiences irrespectively of context, politics, level of democracy or freedom, financial status, health and educational level and capacity of awareness of unconscious inner experience, etc, etc; however, we do have some control and choice in many contexts. In order to deal with poor or inadequate boundary setting or to reduce the incidence of finding ourselves in disempowering contexts or in situations where our energy is being sucked, we are required to heal wounds and understand early dynamics and root causality, behaviours, limiting thoughts, and schemata that have resulted not only because of early experience and learning, but also due to later life events and conditioning that have shaped us and programmed us to behave, react or respond in less than self-serving ways. Psychoeducation and learning about ways to increase our capacity to set healthier boundaries and discern patterns is also essential. Becoming aware of the strategies we tend to use, like compartmentalizing experience, rationalizing and minimizing effects, not paying attention, or displaying unhealthy tolerance of behaviours also facilitates clarity. Mindfully exploring people's motives and our own bodily experience and desires may generate wise and useful information. Refraining from accepting or agreeing to things immediately may also be wise and can save us a lot of hustle. Mindfulness practice or meditation that involves an evaluation of our interactions or a particular exchange, perhaps at the end of the day, may also prove very helpful. Believing that everyone is worthy of respect and remaining true to our desires and needs is probably a healthy basis to start from. I have found that it may help to first think about how you feel when you are with people who drain you or create negativity, upset or physical discomfort. Mindfully, explore emotions, sensations in the body, thoughts that arise in your mind. I actually read somewhere a while ago, unfortunately cannot remember the source, that you can imagine that your body is like a car, with a dashboard full of warning lights, one of which is like your security

system that warns you whenever your personal boundaries have been crossed, your energy is being sucked or you're internalizing experience that you don't need. So one needs to be mindful for triggers or signs that signal leaks or intrusions and then find ways to ground oneself. Grounding for me at least is returning to my centre, feeling connected to the here and now, calming my sympathetic nervous system. It could be feeling connected to the earth below our feet or something bigger than us. Imagery exercises of letting go of others' stories, comments and expectations when they are toxic for us, meditation or positive affirmations could assist us in retaining our boundaries during our daily interactions or could prepare us for particular difficult or dreaded events and interactions with certain people.

Learning to set boundaries is a learning process and it is about being mindfully aware and in the moment during transactions or communication exchanges, which reduces the possibility of both experiencing violations of trust and of being pushed into doing something you don't wish. It seems that lack of healthy boundaries is like leaving all the doors open for people to come and go, as they please, into your house or sense of self. It's a bit like leaving your journal or the money to pay the bills at the end of the month on your desk or the kitchen table while people are visiting and then wondering why they disappeared. On the other hand, the capacity to set healthy boundaries opens doors to your being or becoming your true self and increases the possibility of making safer choices and decisions that are more in alignment with a better or larger version of yourself. By knowing how to set boundaries one is less likely to continuously find themselves on the receiving end of others' trespassing and toxicity, and also, less likely to end up feeling resentment, regret and/ or disempowerment. Boundaries allow us to have both vulnerability and more honesty in our relationships and also provide the soil for us to be our authentic self.