

Aunt Bossy: The Life Coach Your Mother Never Was

Written by Susan Murphy
Monday, 11 February 2013 14:21



Dangerous Liaisons

Dear Aunt Bossy,

Someone recently told me that another friend says bad things about my husband, my friends and me. I was surprised because she is always so nice to me and has really put herself out to help me when I needed help.

The person who told me this is my very dearest friend and companion who has a vicious and very witty tongue and says horrible things about everyone we know, but doesn't usually make things up from scratch.

The friend accused of saying dreadful things about me and my husband has never told me anything horrible about anyone else. She gossips like everyone does, but she doesn't say really dreadful things and, in fact, says nice things about people I know she has had problems with. She is also friendly with my oldest friend and has never said anything bad about me to her. Here is my question. Who should I believe? None of this makes sense to me.

Friends or Foes

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Dear FOF,

This is downright labyrinthine. It doesn't sound like it makes sense to anyone, including the person who is trying to turn you against your other friend. Since your "dear companion" has a history of vicious gossip, and you accept that, you have only one decision to make: do you or do you not want to be friends with the person who has supposedly said awful things about you?

If you do, go ahead. If not, cut her off.

Here is what I don't understand. If you know your "dearest friend and companion" is a vicious gossip, you surely must know that you are not exempted from the commentary. Why would you object to a person who isn't as close to you, doesn't have as much intimate information about you, and does not have a history of viciousness, talking about you?

Maybe your one friend is enough for you. If so, there is your answer. If not, just see them separately.

Down The Rabbit Hole

Dear Aunt Bossy,

Stick with me. This is complicated.

One night I was invited for dinner by a friend, Holly, and met another couple, Pete and Susan, there.

We really liked each other, but did not exchange contact information.

Shortly thereafter, a dinner invitation from Pete and Susan was sent to me and my husband and Holly. The woman who sent the invite, Betty Lou, mentioned that the Pete and Susan had asked her to get the message out, as they didn't have our emails. She was the one who originally introduced Holly to Pete and Susan. I know Betty Lou, but she was not at Holly's the night I met them.

I responded to Betty Lou and said my husband and I would love to come, and to please accept for us. She wrote back, saying that she had not heard back from Holly, so she, the one coordinating the invite, had sent our regrets.

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A few weeks later, we all got another invitation, this time through our individual emails. Holly and Betty Lou said they couldn't make it, but Pete told me we should come anyway. My husband and I went, had a fabulous time with the hosts and their other four guests.

Since then, we have entertained Pete and Susan and their four friends, and included Holly, who initially introduced us. We have also been invited separately to dinner at their places. Betty Lou has not been included when we were there. I know she knows them, but have never seen her in the same room with them, and they have never mentioned her to us, so I have no idea if they are close friends.

I have since heard that Betty Lou is on the warpath because we have seen Pete and Susan without going through her.

Got that? In other words, if one person introduces people to someone who introduces them to you, what is your responsibility to the person who "discovered" them in the first place?

Alice in Bizarreland

Dear Alice,

Huh? Even Downton Abbey isn't bound by such a constricted social order. Don't even think about it. This woman is too bourgeois to ponder. Leticia Baldridge is spinning in her grave, and Dowager Crowley is rolling her eyes saying, "It is all so middle class."

Here is how it works. If a friend introduces you, it is very bad form to move in on your new acquaintances and invite them without the person who introduced you. However, if your new acquaintances invite you, it is not your business who else is invited. Just as you don't ask who else will be there or what they are serving. Holly is the only one who could justifiably be upset if they initially invited you without her or if you invited them without her, which you haven't done. Besides, once people are friends, the whole thing becomes looser and you can invite some or all, all or never.

Betty Lou is striving to cling to rules she doesn't really understand. Social rules are created to give structure to social relationships. However, they are not jail sentences.

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