

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

Tuesday, 23 September 2014 14:18

 Social Disease
Dear Aunt Bossy,

My best friend leads a dark life and I am trying to help her, but don't know what to do. She surrounds herself with bad news. Every day she sends me posts about poverty, slavery, injustice, and disease.

The only people she admires are sick or abused or poor or suffering from dreadful circumstances and she seems to resent those who she perceives to have easy lives. When I try to tell her that she concentrates on seeing the bad and that there is so much good in the world, she tells me I am a silly optimist with no empathy.

When I point out to her how I support, with time and money, other people who don't have it as good as I do, she says that is the least I can do and I am only doing it because I feel guilty for my privilege.

I do have a good life. It isn't perfect, but it is good. I have always made fairly decent decisions, taken responsibility for myself, and worked really, really hard. I try to assume people mean well until proven otherwise.

What can I do to get her out of her negative rut? It isn't healthy. She has been like this as long as I have known her.

Social Worker with friend

Dear Social Worker,

Probably not much, but don't give up trying. Here is the deal: We get what we subsidize in thought and deed. I don't want to get all corny and talk about the law of attraction, but think about it. If you see bad everywhere, you draw it to you. If you see good everywhere, you draw that to you.

Both of these visions are off but which do you think does the most good for the person looking and the people with whom he or she associates? If you see bad everywhere, you draw the kinds of friends who use their energy talking about how bad everyone else is and how unfair things are. If you see good everywhere, you attract happy friends and have fun. Now, which attitude do you think will help change the minds of those who aren't so sure about life?

If I see, rationally, that I am put upon by society or by friends and decide it is what it is and I can only change one person at a time, except when I am voting, I move forward. If I see, rationally, that I am dis-served by society and others and spend most of my energy thinking about that and talking about that, I will end up surrounded by negativity and unhappiness and change will happen even more slowly than human change usually takes.

We, especially in the USA, have such opportunities. We can still think independently and make decisions about our lives. It is up to us to make positive decisions, think positive, but not stupid, thoughts, and avoid wallowing in anger about things we can't control.

Does that mean we can do nothing about injustice without falling into a dark hole? Of course not. Treat every person as a valuable being, reach out to assist those who need it, take responsibility for your life and your effect on the people with whom you interact. Then, when you show or point out an injustice, people will listen up and

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might even change. No one ever changed an opinion because an angry negative person yelled at them about how wrong they are or screamed bloody murder about how unfair human society is. That attitude drives people away and down into their own black holes of negativity, and that hurts us all.

Who do you think has squelched more racism in middle class white America, Al Sharpton or Ben Carson? Who has done more for awareness of the importance of family, Angelina Jolie or Jane Fonda? Who has done more to help women become as strong as they can be, Oprah or Rosie O'Donnell? Who has come up with more effective solutions for poverty, Jesse Jackson or Senator Daniel Moynihan? And, bottom line, who influenced and inspired you, your crabby aunt or the one who was always a joy to see?

There are many very good reasons to get angry, but it is truly worthless as a tool of persuasion. When you vent that anger with people who agree with you, you merely increase their anger and help paralyze them with thoughts of injustice. When you vent that anger with people who don't see your viewpoint clearly, you push them into a corner, shut them up and encourage them to scurry away to find a happier place.

The happier and more joyful people are, the better they will treat others. Let's foster that, even if we have to do it without your friend. Maybe she will see your life and be inspired.

Good luck, and keep being positive about life. It is the only attitude that always reaps benefits.

Aunt Bossy is Susan Murphy, an internationally known Communication Skills Coach who adores spending every winter and spring in Beaufort. Ask for advice at bossymurph@mac.com

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