

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy
Tuesday, 23 January 2018 14:36



You Can Handle The Truth

Dear Aunt Bossy,

I was recently talking to my girlfriend about how awful it is that friends don't tell each other when they have smeared lipstick or spinach in their teeth. We agreed on that, but when I said I even thought friends should tell each other if something doesn't look good on them, she said she would never do that, which had me thinking about the times when she thought that about me and didn't say anything.

What do you think? - Paula

Dear Paula,

This is an area where, in my mind, there is no grey area. If you care about another person you do what you can to help them be their best.

As a worst-case example, let's talk bad breath.

There is nothing worse than returning home after a day of talking to others and have your spouse say, "Oh my God, your breath!" You have to live with the awful realization that you have been repulsive all day. If someone had said, "Do you have a mint or gum? We could

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both use some, "oh it might be slightly embarrassing, but not nearly as bad as finding out at the end of the day. I've trained my friends to just say, "oh mint."

If you know the person really well, you can just bite the bullet and say "oh I smell your coffee" or "oh Did you have garlic for breakfast?" If you are good friends and don't feel you can say that, you are either too self-absorbed to pay attention to others, or need to reconsider your friendship.

Now, as always, there are codicils to my bossiness. Consider your friend. If you are on the way to a party and you think what your friend is wearing doesn't look great, don't say it. If it can't be changed, don't mention it.

If you love your friend but know that he or she just can't deal with criticism, don't mention it, but don't be too quick to assume they can't deal with criticism. (Many times when we can't deal with it, we assume others can't either.)

If you can offer a positive, do that. "When you wear your hair back, it really shows off your beautiful eyes." Is much better than, "You don't look great with your hair like that."

If a friend asks, "Do you like this dress?" you are being given permission to tell the truth. "I like your grey one better. This dress isn't as flattering on you. It doesn't show off your figure."

Since I have earned - through hard work and dedication - the name "Bossy," I would probably take one look at someone who knows I love them, and say, "Go back in your room and change immediately! You are too glamorous to go out looking like that." I would also appreciate it coming my way. Tough love is a gift to the other person. You also have to be ready to tell the person offering the criticism that you disagree.

Remember that, if you don't care, you don't bother. I have an ex-friend who is handsome, smart, talented, educated, and successful. He asked me frequently for advice about women. When I told him that his vulgarity and coarseness on Facebook - with examples - was surely one of the things that made it impossible for him to attract romance, he turned on me like

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a snake. He refused to believe that I was trying to help him because I like and admire so much about him. Who has time for that?

Being forthright with others is scary sometimes, but is a fine way to show love and trust. If it backfires, you can't be responsible for that, unless you did not consider the other person at all before speaking. I admit I take some big chances, but can't recall it backfiring. (If I tell a person who asked for feedback the truth, and they reject it, I don't consider that backfiring.) Even if they react poorly, they will often consider your remarks later, in the privacy of their own mind, and accept your 'coaching.'

I was once at a party in Manhattan and there was a fellow who had obviously been seriously burned on his face. I started talking to him and asked, "What happened to you?" He responded, "Thank you so much for asking. Most people try to pretend like they don't notice." If he had said, "I don't want to talk about it," I would have said, "I'm didn't mean to be intrusive; it is just that you look so elegant and mysterious" (the truth) and then I would have changed the subject.

On the other hand, I once used the ladies' room on an airplane and made it all the way back up to my seat in row six before someone was kind enough to tell me that my skirt was tucked into my pantyhose in the back. Really!

Bottom line, if you care for people, tell the truth. Don't be reckless, but have enough confidence in your motives to take some chances. The world will be a better place for it.

Now, about that haircut . . .

Love, Aunt Bossy