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ANGELS AND ASSHOLES

Let's start with the assholes.

There are probably people in your life who just won't get in your corner. They push you in one direction when you want to go in another. They tell you to pick the safe thing, go the traditional route, be sensible, stay the course, grow up, and get serious.

Meanwhile, your soul is screaming at you to do something different.

You've tried explaining it to these people, but they just won't have it. They don't get it. They shoot down your ideas. They're not supportive. They're pushy jerks about decisions that really have nothing to do with them. In other words, assholes.

- Your colleague says, "I know you want to quit your corporate job and start your own business, but you'll never be able to make a living." That's fear mongering.
- Your dad says, "I know you want to study literature, but if you go to med school instead I'll pay for it." That's manipulative compromise.
- Your teacher says, "It's wonderful that you love music, but that's a hobby. You should study business. Then you'll have something to fall back on." That's undermining.
- Your friend says, "You shouldn't do that. It's a stupid idea." That's psychological bullying.

Why can't these people just be supportive and stop acting like assholes, already?! I have a theory about these people, and it's this...

They're not assholes. They're scared humans.

SCARED HUMANS

Your dad.
Your sister.
Your best friend.
Your partner.
Teachers.
Colleagues.
Mentors.

Maybe you're getting pushback from people like this – the people you care about most. Of course your father and your sister and your best friend and your partner want what's best for you. Here's what they're really saying when they're acting like unsupportive assholes.

I don't want you to fail.

I want to protect you.

I don't want you to get hurt.

I want you to be okay.

These are scared human thoughts. These people are scared for you. They care about you and want the very best for you. Unfortunately, this does not mean that they will provide you with good advice.

Good intentions. Bad advice.

The people who love you want you to be happy, but people only know what their own version of happiness looks like. Here's an example...

I do not want to have children. I've encountered a lot of pushback on this. I felt pressure from friends, family, and at times the whole universe, it seemed, to have babies. The people who pressured me most were women with their own children – children who they love infinitely.

Their version of happiness involves children. My own mother had a hard time with my decision. Her life's work was raising five children. There's nothing she would have rather done. She's supportive about my decision now, but it took a while to get there. I felt like I was letting her and everybody else down by being myself and doing my own thing. But you have to live your own life, whether it's kids, career, or any other decision.

Every human being on earth collects a unique set of biases based on his or her own experience.

Perhaps your best friend is a jump first, ask later, adventure seeker who thinks you should stop thinking and start doing, already. This perspective is no good to you if you're prudent and need to do research before taking a career risk.

Perhaps your father grew up in an environment of fear and scarcity, and wants you to get the most stable, best paying job possible when you're done school. This perspective is no good to you if you want to do a series of internships to see where your passions lead you.

I have a friend who was pressured to go to law school by her father. She dealt with massive, debilitating anxiety all the way through law school. She finished, but (big surprise) she hates working as a lawyer. Her father only wanted her to be safe and happy, and in his mind a career in law was the way to get there. His intentions were good, but the advice was bad.

You have the right – hell, you have the *responsibility* – to respectfully disregard bad advice, even if the person dishing it out has the best of intentions. As they say, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

You may have other people in your life who project their own fears onto you. These are also people with scared human thoughts, but they're not scared for you; they're scared for themselves. They feel threatened.

One of my harshest critics when I left my PhD was a fellow student. She

was one of the last people I told about my decision because I knew she would give me a hard time. “But you’ve put in so much time already,” she said. “Are you really going to quit? Can’t you just push through and finish? What if you change your mind? All that work for nothing.” She really pushed me on the issue. Eventually, I learned that she also left the program a few months after I did. I can’t be sure, but I suspect that she was projecting her own fears onto my decision. Probably because she was battling her own demons.

Important life decisions will come with all kinds of pressure and unsolicited advice from the people around you. It’s your job to determine which advice is good and which advice is bad.

Whose advice do you need to ignore?

STOP RECRUITING

Maybe your biggest problem isn’t unsupportive naysayers. Maybe it’s you. We are often our own worst enemies. Are you hung up on getting everyone’s approval for your decisions?

Stop recruiting. The only person who has to get behind your decision is you. I’m not saying ignore your obligations. Involve your spouse in your decisions. Feed your kids. Pay your bills. But don’t wait for an endorsement, a seal of approval, a pat on the back from everyone in your life. Because, honey, it ain’t gonna happen. Some people just aren’t going to get it...and that’s okay.

I had a client – I’ll call her April – who was jazzed about finance. She happily envisioned her future career in finance – her office, her colleagues, and even what shoes she would wear. I would rather eat a solid diet of cat food than work in finance. It’s just not for me. Had I tried to talk April out of pursuing this career (which obviously I didn’t do), she would have been

right to totally disregard my opinion and keep on truckin’.

Another client of mine, Adam, was hung up on what his two sets of friends would think about his career decisions. He had a set of hippie friends and a set of yuppie friends. If he worked in business, he’d get flack from his hippie friends. If he worked in the arts, his yuppie friends would look down on him. By worrying about what everyone else thought, he was giving away all of his power.

If you’re trying to seek someone’s approval or endorsement for your choices, stop. Stop externalizing your decision-making. Stop giving away your power.

Imagine, for a moment, a world in which every single person you knew was supportive of your decisions, no matter what you did. Imagine that you didn’t have to take flack from anyone, disappoint anyone, or impress anyone. Or pretend that everyone was so concerned with his or her own business that they wouldn’t pay any notice to your own career choices.

What would you choose if nobody was looking?

Psst. That’s the thing you should be doing.

YOU’RE THE CAPTAIN

Remember gym class? Sometimes there would be team sports – basketball, soccer, flag football – and occasionally you got to be the team captain. You and some other kid each got to pick a team, member by member. You made careful decisions about who you picked for your team because you wanted to win the game. You chose people who you thought would help you do that.

Life is like that too. You're the captain and you get to pick your team.

Choosing who to surround yourself with is especially important when you're making big life decisions or trying to make a significant shift. If some of the people around you right now are bringing you down, put some distance between yourself and those people. You don't have to cut ties completely (especially if it's someone who you care deeply about), but give yourself some time and space away from negative energy.

Similarly, don't spend time with people who bring out the worst in you. For example, I've struggled with excessive striving, so hanging out with other frantic strivers is a big no-no for me. Crazy striving is a habit I've worked really hard to break, and hanging out with people who do that triggers all kinds of approval-seeking crap for me. No, thank-you. Some people have built entire social circles of people who bring out their worst. If that sounds like you, pull back. Make room to grow.

But don't just pull back from negative energy. Lean in to good energy wherever you find it.

You want a team of people who are going to lift you up, people who will be supportive, guiding influencers. You want a team of people who are in your corner, people who inspire and support you. **You want a team of angels – benevolent beings who are going to help you get from where you are to where you want to be.**

These angels might be friends, family members, colleagues, mentors, and acquaintances. Some of them might be people you don't even know yet, like someone you contact out of the blue to ask for advice or guidance. Or they might be people you'll never actually meet – people who've written books or blogs. Angels come in many shapes and sizes. Your team of angels won't be the same as mine or as the guy who lives next door. Seek out whoever you sense is going to lift you up and help you move forward. **Who inspires you? Who challenges you to grow? Who makes you feel strong? Those are the people you should have on your team.**

Create your team now.

My team:

People I know

People I don't know (yet)
(i.e., people I'm going to reach out to)

People I'll likely never meet, but I feel a connection with
(i.e., people who've written books, blogs, created videos, etc.)

Assemble your team. Learn from them and lean on them to help you get where you want to go.