

LL24- You're Not the Boss Of Me

I'm Alvean Lyons,
and I'm Doug Weiss, and this is Love Life.

Alvean, I have one thing to say to you. You're not the boss of me. We've all heard that at one time, usually somewhere in our adolescence. It is sometimes expressed towards a sibling or a parent. But levity aside, it's a very serious thing when partners in a relationship fight for control with one another. Our question today really is prompted by listeners who wanted to know why people do that, why do people fight for control?

This is probably one of the topics that I do not have a perfect answer for. But I can surmise that a lot of times when we are trying to control someone else, it is often a byproduct of our feeling that we don't have any control. Our feeling of powerlessness causes us to try to control another. We often seek to create some kind of balance, homeostasis, for ourselves through the way we interact and deal with other people. You will find that people who are struggling with their own sense of stability and predictability and control will attempt to over control someone else. When I have seen it in relationships, quite honestly very often I will see it where women are trying to control their men. And I have to be honest with you, it is one of the leading ways that I have seen men go outside of their relationship for a sense of freedom a sense of escape. They are reclaiming what they consider their male identity. Please don't misunderstand, I never find cheating an appropriate response to anything going on inside of a relationship. I am all for it's not working let's respectfully end it, and you pursue whatever your individual interests are or get the necessary support that you need, if you want to stay in the relationship in order to make it a healthier environment. But I have watched it happen too often, where women are relating to their spouses or their partners the way that they would relate to their sons, and a lot of times these are women who are struggling with their own sense of who they are and where they fit in the world. They seek to find that concrete ground by controlling everything else inside their interior world and often their husbands are one of those.

Well I think it is absolutely true that people who feel out of control will try to assert control in order to arrest that feeling I think too that there are

circumstances where people feel powerlessness in their lives. They feel victimized, either in the relationship or victimized in life in general. Victimized at work or victimized in relationship with a family member or friend, and there's a kind of sublimation. I can't take it out on the person that I really feel this about but I can on you, because I trust you, and I know that you won't hold this against me. So, it starts out at a kind of a low level, by quarreling in a little spat about something that's really a control issue, and it escalates. Sometimes it can escalate really quite quickly and quite severely over nonsense. Under normal circumstances both parties could see that this is silly, let's let this go and move on, it isn't important. If you have clear priorities in a relationship about what is important, that's a tremendous help because it can be a safeguard when these things arise, and they can arise at any time in a relationship, even a healthy relationship. Healthy relationships involve people who are very well grounded, but there are times in our lives when we are pushed off of a comfortable place and when we don't feel we're in a comfortable place that's when control becomes an issue for us. That's when we want to assert ourselves. I think it also comes about because we're not getting something else we want in the relationship.

I'm so glad that you said that because I'm going to confess. We have a teenage Son, a young man not always as motivated as I need him to be. So we're a very academic family and my expectation is that you'll really perform. My son is more artistic in the way that he likes to go about life in his mildly laissez faire way and mommy wants a three point five, we're only at a three point two I'm not pleased. But for whatever reason my lectures with him seem to fall on deaf ears so I go to Matthew and I lecture Matthew so that he will fix my son. It is my attempt to do something where I feel powerless. In trying to get this thing from my son, to your point, I will go to the person who will respond to my efforts in order to try to control what he's doing so that he can do what I can't seem to get done. So I'm pushing you to my left so you can push him to your right. Sometimes that is where I'll go when there is something unmet, and truly the thing that's unmet for me is I need a partner in fixing this particular issue. So I'm trying to control how Matthew interacts with him so that I can get the outcome but really what I want is for us is to be equal partners in this particular process.

I've seen this also occur where individuals have an issue with each other about something...say about money, about sex, about...you pick the topic. In general one

partner feels they're not getting something that they want, need or may even feel they are owed. Heaven help us. And that becomes the proximate cause for the control. If I can't win this then I'm going to win that. And the contention is a sublimation of another issue. Of course, the only way to deal with this is first to recognize that it's going on, and in the midst of those moments, which is very challenging because these are often highly charged, to step back out of it and say, why are we even fighting about this? It's not an important subject to fight about. What's really going on here, tell me what you need. Tell me what you need so that I can be a partner in meeting that need exactly. If we give you no other good piece of advice in this episode, that one piece of advice is the one you want to take, because once control issues have manifested in a relationship than they can lead to nuclear outcomes. It's almost predictable, and so it has to be diffused carefully and early, honestly and openly.

And so we come too quickly to the end of another episode of Love Life. We always have so much fun, we do we love our audience. Thank you so much for listening to us. You are such a wonderful audience and we have wonderful team members to work with, Barbara Hamm Lee, our producer, Todd Washburn, our recording engineer. We look forward to these sessions.