

# Getting it together

## State your needs directly

Let's face it, manipulation has gotten a lot of bad press lately. In the post-Watergate era, even politicians are trying to be honest and open. Modern ethical standards associate manipulation with sneakiness, trying to get something for nothing and a general lack of ethical principles.

Most of us see manipulators as greedy, sneaky people, as connivers, exploiters and users. No wonder, then, that it's so hard for us to admit that we actually live with manipulators. They are our parents, brothers and sisters, our lovers, friends and even ourselves.

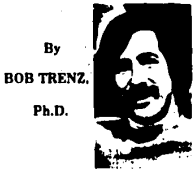
We are all manipulators. All of us hold back some of our honest feelings, put on false faces and play dishonest roles—trying to get a particular effect, trying to make a particular impression. Not only that—we do it a lot. We manipulate others daily, even hourly.

Does that mean that we are all sneaky, greedy users? Not really. The vast majority of all manipulation is not done for the sake of exploitation. It is done in self-defense. We manipulate to protect ourselves from getting hurt, to hide our inner ugliness.

We would much rather be honest and direct. We don't really want to be manipulators, but we are afraid. We are afraid that others may not accept us if they really knew about our inner feelings.

We protect our tender insides from the rejection of those around us, and we protect others from our ugly interiors. We keep our selfishness hidden behind a polite face. We cage our aggressiveness to keep it from hurting others and getting us in trouble.

Even though we would like to shed our manipulative ways, it is very hard. They've been around for a long time. To please our parents and avoid disapproval, we learned to suppress our inner



By  
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urges. To be good, polite and to control ourselves. From parents who expressed their anger in explosive, destructive ways, we learned that anger is a harmful feeling that must be suppressed. From people who believed that being nice was more important than being honest, we learned that basic childhood selfishness was unacceptable—something to be hidden and stifled.

To cope with the pressures of childhood, becoming little manipulators was probably the best we could do. But now, even as adults, we find that the manipulative habit is hard to give up.

Instead of manipulating people in indirect, short-cut and defensive ways, we need to learn the art of directly stating our needs and considering the needs of others. This requires constructive self-esteem—gently expressed desires and looking for mutually beneficial ways to attain them. But the defenses and manipulative plays of our childhood have been with us for so long that they are old friends. They feel like the natural response to situations that frighten us, while non-manipulative responses seem weak, and even wrong.

When I admit: "I am a manipulator, and I don't want to be," our next thought is about our husband who would never ac-

cept an honestly aggressive mate and our teenager who refuses to communicate openly about anything. It's why it seems a lot easier to just let it rush the boat.

Surrounded by similarly defensive people, we see openness as potentially exhausting, frustrating and darned risky. We are not so sure we even know how to be truly open if we try. After all, we have had a lot more training in the manipulative arts than in the skills of honesty and directness.

Of course, the curious self-improvement fad has made it relatively easy to learn these skills. A trip to the local book store would provide an art-load of pocket books telling you how to be more honest, more considerate, more if needed and more direct in your communications. Workshops and classes have sprung up like weeds lately, each one promising to make you a happier, more honest person.

Unfortunately, as appealing as it may seem, simply being trained in the skills of non-manipulative communication is not enough. Some of the most manipulative people I know have learned the art of the "new honesty." They have learned to hide their real feelings behind seemingly open phrases like "I'm just telling it like it is."

There aren't any short-cuts to changing deeply ingrained personal habits. We learned to manipulate as children because we needed to protect ourselves. We continue to manipulate because it still serves our adult needs. It is a handy functional portion of our personality.

We can't just throw out habits that are currently serving a important function—no matter how much we wish we could. Instead, we must find other ways to alleviate the needs that manipulative habits are serving.

For most people, this can be a long and demanding task. It requires that you adopt

an attitude of kindness toward human frailty—yours and others. It means taking the time to understand yourself, learning the current purposes of your manipulations.

Finally, becoming a non-manipulative person means changing your behavior. Finding new ways to take care of your needs without being so defensive. This is the hardest part. It requires that a person do things which don't feel natural and comfortable at first. It means being clumsy, saying "dumb" things, and a lot of experimenting. All of which can be very discouraging to the non-manipulative beginner, but it is a necessary, unavoidable phase. The best thing that can be said about it is that it is temporary, and the other side of that phase is a very nice place to be.

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## Equal rights don't extend to intoxication, prof says

At cocktail parties, business lunches and singles bars, women have achieved the equal right to drink.

But not the equal right to be drunk. While an intoxicated man is viewed with humor and indifference, an intoxicated woman is looked at with disapproval, said Edith S. Gomborg, University of Michigan professor of sociology and a national authority on women and alcoholism.

This disapproval, which is universal, is one of many factors which discourage the female alcoholic from her male counterpart, Ms. Gomborg noted.

We can mix men and women in treatment programs," Gomborg said, "but in research. Physiologically, psychologically and socially, we think female alcoholism has a different set of causes and effects.

"Virtually all psychological and sociological theory about alcoholism has been about men," she explained. "Theory and practice have been derived from men's lives and men's experiences, and then generalized to women."

"The problem in female alcoholism, as with other psychological disorders, is too much of a single standard rather than a double standard."

THE PATTERN she found frequently among women patients was a history of an unhappy childhood. Death, psychiatric illness, or alcoholism in the family apparently produce a vulnerable young woman with difficulty learning to trust other people.

"On the surface, she appears very feminine but she is quite conflicted about the female sex role," Ms. Gomborg said. "Marriage, children and the inevitable frustrations and stresses lead this vulnerable woman toward problem drinking."

Some women living alone, never married or divorced, may drink out of loneliness and desperation. "We have no evi-

dence," added Ms. Gomborg, "that working outside the home gives automatic protection. 'Troubled' employees in industry turn up a fair share of women with drinking problems."

A DEBATE goes on in which sides are drawn—has "emancipation of women" lessened or heightened alcohol problems among women? Ms. Gomborg's view is that it has worked both ways, minimizing frustration for some women and maximizing stress for others.

The social environment is of critical importance, she noted. Past studies have indicated that a woman is more likely to develop an alcohol problem if there is a significant other person in her life (parent, brother, sister, or husband) who has a drinking problem. They are, so to speak, models.

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### Families topic for lecture

Families at the Crossroads, a lecture dealing with some of the English, hard decisions and ending factors of family life today, is scheduled at 8 p.m. Friday, May 11, in Veterans Memorial Building, Detroit.

British teacher, lecturer and author Rosemary Haughton will lecture for the first hour and answer questions for the second. This program is the third in the season's Signs Series of this season, sponsored by the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit's Institute for Continuing Education.

Tickets are \$3.50 and may be purchased at the door. Parking is available at nearby Cobo Hall Area Garage or Ford Auditorium.

Mrs. Haughton, who lives with her husband, a large family and friends on a communal farm near Dumfries, Scotland, has received several honorary doctorates for her fresh theological approach to everyday experience.

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