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The Chocolate Cake Syndrome

Honesty is the best policy

This is based on a bit of advice I used to give the kids when they were younger; but it applies equally to adults. Most of us try to be polite, not wishing to offend others; so we tend to veil the truth on occasions. My advice was: "When you are visiting someone and they ask if you would like a piece of chocolate cake, saying yes please is fine, provided you like chocolate cake. You might not, but you eat it anyway, and probably even say how you enjoyed it. You have then set yourself up for the same offering every time you visit in future. The best way is to be honest and save yourself the grief."

Not all of life is about eating, although the occasional visit to a restaurant might be on the cards. A number of aspects can make this a good time, or turn it into an experience never to be repeated. Depending on the size of the place, service is usually down to the employed staff, particularly those who wait on table and tend the bar. Then, of course, the quality of the food has to be at least up to standard. Should the steak not be cooked to your liking you have a choice – ask for it to be taken back to the kitchen for a bit of extra frying; or, if it seems to be inedible, then replaced with a better cut. Some people, however, prefer not to make a fuss and either eat what they can of it without complaint, or leave it and make do with the vegies. Chances are they may never return to that restaurant; but, having said nothing about the disappointing service, the management is possibly in the dark and unaware that their customers aren't being treated as they should. All the owner knows is that, for some unfathomable reason, bookings are dropping. A quiet word, or even a letter of complaint would put them in the picture. It is then up to them to do something about it. Saying nothing is bad for their business, and you have one less venue for dining out.

Relationships can be affected by the same syndrome. Two or more people living in a household works well, provided mutual respect and honesty are observed. The odd irritating habit may be tolerated if it is only minor, as long as ignoring it and saying nothing doesn't start to build tension and growing resentment. Requesting early in the piece, and nicely, that maybe the cap could be replaced on the toothpaste once in a while is hardly likely to result in a slanging match. Left to fester, however, that might well be the case when broached at a later date. The one at fault will, no doubt, have had issues with the accuser's annoying idiosyncrasies, but have said nothing about them before. Suddenly on the defensive it all comes out and the battle of the fault-finders is waged. So much for keeping quiet. It does pay on occasions, but not always. My best advice is to say something up front, rather than waiting until the bridge is burning.

During the current Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions have placed a great deal of strain on households; more so than under normal circumstances. Those annoying habits of others were probably okay when people were only together for a short time each day; but having to suffer them constantly week after week can prove to be eventually unbearable. In these cases, grievances and differing opinions need bringing out in the open. Failing to at least talk about them is a recipe for ensuing disaster.

As social animals, humans enjoy being in company, quite often in groups both large and small. Common interests tend to be the binding factor, and most members benefit from

the association. Some, however, might only be joining on a whim because it seems like a good idea; discovering only later that whatever the majority take pleasure in isn't really their cup of tea. And, of course, there is usually at least one who has a need to control; and they can be a real pain. Feeling uncomfortable or bullied, few will stand up to the arrogant, self-confessed leader. The easy solution would be to pull out of the group; but many stay, frequently biting their tongue to avoid challenging decisions made by others with which they disagree. Needless to say, by doing this they are setting themselves up for more and more of the chocolate cake that they truly can't stomach.

Once again, it's really just a matter of parting company to be free of the aggravation; but there are circumstances that may preclude this. The schoolyard can be a lonely, perhaps frightening place for the new boy or girl; until they make a friend or two. Then comes the day they are invited to join a group of like-minded individuals. It's good to at last feel a part of something, to be fitting in; but we all know it isn't always that simple, and there may be a price to pay. Despite the risk of being shunned from the outset, the best policy is to make likes and dislikes known from the beginning; rather than leaving it to the time when the decisions of their adopted group result in serious consequences. Going along for the ride instead of opting out could see an otherwise decent, reluctant participant hauled up before the principle, even the police, to answer for actions that were wholly instigated by others. In this instance, hiding the truth would really come back to bite.

From the seat of learning to the school of life, there are those who will befriend and coax, drawing relative innocents into their world by exploiting weaknesses. It can be hard to walk away, especially if the initial offer of companionship is appealing; but bear in mind this could prove to be merely a once-only opening special. As the relationship develops, in the cold light of day the truth will eventually be revealed; and if to stay means eating that dreaded chocolate cake forever after, better to say: "Thanks, but no thanks." Then go and cultivate a new friendship that you are less likely to regret having.

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