

Monkey Business

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"I can't take it anymore! If I don't stay on top of my partner all the time, things don't get done, but I have my own things to handle! I can't keep on living like this!"

It was clear to me that it was time to talk about monkeys.

All of us have things we need to take care of - paid work, our health, keeping up with where we live, etc. Monkeys, in a way. Some people take good care of all of their monkeys, keeping them well-managed and under control. Some people are good at giving their monkeys away for others to manage. Others are good at accumulating monkeys for others to care for - let's call them monkey wranglers.

Monkey-wranglers often find themselves in relationships with people who give away their monkeys, and it seems like they were made for each other! But there's a catch! Highly-skilled monkey wranglers may be pleased with themselves that they are able to manage so many monkeys, but they can be resentful of the people who carelessly shirk their own monkey duties. This is especially true when monkey-wranglers depend on others to handle their own share of monkeys.

And the monkey off-loaders may enjoy their extra time, but many of them never get to learn the skills it takes to manage their own monkeys - you know, be an adult- and they may worry that they won't be able to do it on their own.

My client is a very capable woman. She is a loving mother and partner, she owns her own successful business and she volunteers around town. And she can wrangle some monkeys! But the cost of managing her partners' monkeys has gotten higher than she is willing to bear. She's become exhausted and irritable at home, and she resents she's carrying more than her fair share of monkeys at home. Even though she's ready to get some of the monkeys off of her back, she believes her partner won't handle the monkeys promptly or properly enough. My client was probably right to doubt her partner. In the short term especially, things probably wouldn't get done, at least as often or as well as my client would like. And that was part of the problem.

As we were trying to sort out which monkeys were hers, not hers and shared monkeys, we kept running into a problem. She was clear that some jobs were not hers - or at least not hers alone, but she had a strong desire for them to be done in a very specific way, on a very specific time table and to her very specific standards. In a way, she didn't REALLY want to give those monkeys away, in case her partner wouldn't take care of them in the "right" way. As we worked through her dilemma, she was able to understand that she was only able to have direct control over HER monkeys, or shared monkeys when SHE cared for them. If she insisted on her own level of control over monkeys that didn't belong to her then she was in essence, declaring them to be HER monkeys, her jobs.

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This was a hard pill for her to swallow. Over time she was able to make some decisions to fully hand over certain tasks to her partner and to make peace with having them done differently and sometimes not as well as she would have done.

As she was able to get some monkey-management off her back, her partner became increasingly skilled at monkey care. This changed her outlook on their relationship.

My client began remembering what had attracted her in the first place. She still struggles not to take on her partner's monkeys sometimes. But as her resentment and stress level decreased, she was able to feel closer and more loving to her partner and to discuss their shared monkey management with greater poise. That helped everyone in the family.

So, how are you doing with your own monkey business?

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