



Where Do I Stop and You Begin

By Dr. Linda Hancock

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled "All Psyched Up" for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of "Life is An Adventure...every step of the way" and "Open for Business Success" is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email office@drlindahancock.com

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Often people talk with me about how upset they are because of the actions of others. They don't like the choices that their children make, are unhappy with the fact that their spouse continues to smoke or drink despite the risks or are frustrated that their co-workers have horrible (or non-existent) work habits. Most of all, they are confused and worn out trying to get the other person to do the things that would help improve their situation.

Here's the sad news. You can't change other people!

I know that this might be a new idea for many people. I was thirty-eight years old before I ever even heard about such a notion. I truly thought that the things that I did would directly lead to change in the lives of others.

It was the summer and I was at the family reunion of the French branch of the family. Another "in-law" and I were the weakest in that language and tended to carry on conversations in English when we couldn't keep up! I turned to him and with a smile said "What do you know, Mike" His reply shocked me. He said "My employer had a workshop and I learned at it that you can't change other people".

It is somewhat amazing to me now that I think back as to how I could get through almost four decades without knowing that. But, on the other hand, if Mike's employer thought that it was important enough to have a workshop for staff on that topic, I guess I wasn't alone!

Over the years I have had so many moments when I wished that I could convince others to make better choices and follow through with them. I would like some of my grandchildren to focus more on academics and less on technology. I would like my children to take better care of their health. I would like some of my clients to improve their relationships with others and some to spend less money and some to beat the addictions.

I would also like world peace and to be able to go to bed at night knowing that there isn't one hungry or homeless person in the world.

Well, it's not all bad news. There are things that we can do to help others:

1. Be a great example for them
2. Stop enabling their negative behaviours (set healthy boundaries)
3. Offer advice once (no one likes a nag)
4. Live with an attitude of forgiveness
5. Let go
6. Focus on the things that you need to change in your own life

This can be difficult. If you need help, book an appointment with a psychologist so you have someone who will be able to help you to get on the right track.