

► **Ask for Everything, Say Your Truth** by Maureen McCarthy
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I come from a long line of women who wipe up sinks. Even in public restrooms. Noticing a dirty, water-splashed sink is an obsession at times that I would like to release, but it's come down through many generations of DNA, so it's probably here to stay.

When my husband, Zelle, and I first moved in together I couldn't help but notice the whirling dervish of a cyclone he would leave in his wake. I was stunned that taking out contacts and brushing teeth could create such water carnage. So I asked him if he would be so kind as to clean up the sink after he used it. He said, "Um...no, I don't want to. Cleaning the sink once a week or so is more than good enough for me."

And you know what, I absolutely loved that he said "No!"

I loved it because we made an agreement, very early in our relationship, to ask for everything we wanted from one another, without censoring ourselves. So we don't filter what we ask for through any assumptions of what the other might think or say. But on the flip side, it would only work if each of us would commit to saying our truth when the other asks. In essence, we wanted to be sure the other wasn't "giving" out of obligation, because we felt obligation was weighty and extraordinarily dull. We wanted the other to give only if they were truly interested in doing so, yet each of us didn't want to be the one to determine the other's genuineness. This agreement was born out of the fact that I have a fatal lung disease and spent years rationing the favors I asked of others for fear I might run out of them before I really needed someone. Asking for what I wanted became a tiresome game of assumptions and obligation. When Zelle and I got together I decided to throw that game out and start a new one that would give me more energy to live with lessening oxygen in my lungs.

We do a lot of things in our society out of obligation, and even as we're dreading it, we do it anyway. Why is that? Because we don't want to be disagreeable? Because people won't like us? In essence, Zelle and I agree to disagree. Me wanting him to clean the sink and him not wanting to is the disagreement, the agreement comes when I not only accept his answer, but love it. I can embrace our opposing desires because every time he says "no," I rest assured that his "yes" is for real. According to Wikipedia "agreeing to disagree" refers to the resolution of a conflict whereby all parties tolerate but do not accept the opposing position. But I say let's take that one step further. I don't want to tolerate other people's truths, I want to embrace them. When I agree to ask for everything and say my own truth, I look forward to agreeing to disagree. I could have merely tolerated his "no" and felt frustrated by him every time I looked at a sink for years on end. But I want him to disagree with me when he does, because I get to fully know who he is without any of my own filters.

What stunned me about this unusual way of being in relationship with someone was how often he said yes to things I would have bet my life he didn't want to do, but did them anyway because he thought he should. Here's a quirky example; my family grew up on English muffins and as you know there's a fluffy and a dense side of an English muffin. I spent my life secretly wanting the whole package to be fluffy sides because I hated the dense side. But after Zelle and I committed to asking for everything, I was bold enough to ask him something my mannerly side would have previously appalled. I asked if I could have all the fluffy (read "better") sides of the English muffins every time we ate them from now on. Doesn't that sound rude? Asking someone else to eat the "crummy" side? I expected a "Hell no!" But instead I got, "Are you kidding? I hate the fluffy side of an English muffin and growing up I always wanted to only eat the dense side!" So Zelle and I

have spent the last ten years in English muffin heaven, each eating only the side we like best. Yet if we weren't willing to agree to disagree about our no's, we each could have spent our whole marriage believing we were the martyr giving them the "good" side of the muffin. I could tell you a hundred more instances where we found that fulfilling the obligation to be "kind" was actually helping no one.



After years of being together, Zelle and I truly know that every time we do something for each other, we're doing it because we want to. We can't tell you how freeing and invigorating this is! We realized that censoring ourselves with other people all those years was exhausting. Now we ask for absolutely everything we want, and we're actually thrilled when the other says no because it means they are being genuine.

Without the commitment to ask for everything and say our truth, we would have found ourselves in many disagreements that could have taken our relationship down a rocky path. Instead we have learned so much more about each other than we ever could have imagined. Creating a home where we don't filter what we ask for has given me the courage to branch out and do this everywhere in my life. Whether it's friends or family or clients, I encourage their opposition when they feel it because it creates an atmosphere of acceptance and trust and they don't filter what they tell me. In extending our practice of asking for everything, I'm closer than I ever thought possible not only to our friends and clients, but to everyone I encounter. My discussions with friends and even strangers are deeper and more meaningful because we're not afraid to get to the heart of what the other person is thinking or feeling. I don't look for agreement, I look for who this person really is.

I've been told by many people that there is a level of safety with Zelle and I that they don't feel anywhere else. People say they don't feel judged or have an expectation that they should be different when they're with us. I believe this stems from our decision to ask for everything and say our truth. It's become not only my path to freedom, but one we love sharing with others.

We're taught that it's best to get agreement from others or keep our mouths shut, but I find it far more energizing when I can agree to disagree and question my story of how I think the other person should show up. I find that I step out of my judgment when I welcome the opposite opinion. In this space of discovery we're more inclined to really know each other even if our opinions differ, and from this space we have the opportunity to understand the other's point of view. When I give other people the space to speak freely, I often receive the gift of connection, even if we ultimately agree to disagree.

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