

Reducing the Squid-Factor in Your Life

Do you feel squeezed by the pressures of others' demands? Do you have a hard time taking care of yourself when others need your time and attention?

One way to take care of yourself in the midst of others' needs, says Martha Beck, author of The Joy Diet, is to disconnect: "...disconnection is as necessary as connection for creating a healthy, happy life." And the first people she wants you to disconnect from are the squids. "What is a Squid?" you ask. She tells us:

Squid is my word for people who seem to be missing their backbones but possess myriad sucking tentacles of emotional need. Like many invertebrates, squid appear limp and squishy--but once they get a grip on you, they are incredibly powerful. Masters at catalyzing guilt and obligation, they operate by squeezing pity from everyone they meet. They can make you feel entwined to the point of rage, desperate to escape their clutches, unable to see a means to extricate yourself.

Getting a squid out of your life is never pretty. (Excuses don't work—tell a squid you're on your way to a colonoscopy, and they'll come along to sit beside you, complaining while your doctor performs the procedure.) Since you can't make a graceful exit, don't try. Scrape off squid anyway you can. Tell them straightforwardly that you want them to leave, yes them, to leave now, yes now. This will be unpleasant. There will be lasting hurt feelings. Don't worry. Squid love hurt feelings. They hoard them, trading them for pity points when they find another victim--er, friend. Let them go, their coffers bulging.

Getting Rid of Squids

Want to get rid of some squids? Well, there are specific techniques you can use to reduce the squid-factor in your life. Initially, you may feel very uncomfortable using them. But, if you continue to try to "*Be There* for all people all the time" (as Martha Beck says), you may find the resulting stress leaves you searching for relief with food – either by hanging out in the fridge, or by neglecting to get yourself to the kitchen. So, the next time you find a squid trying to wrap its tentacles around you, try some of these strategies from Martha Beck and others:

1. Rehearse escape lines. "Oh, there's my doorbell!" (Martha reminds us, this is technically true, the "doorbell is, in fact, there.")
2. Buy time. According to Mary Hunt, author of the newspaper column Everyday Cheapskate, "Never answer on the spot. Nothing is so urgent that you cannot take time to think about it." Apparently the best antidote for the "Disease to Please," is *time*, whether it's five minutes or five months. Never answer on the spot!
3. Say "no" and fight the urge to over-explain. You do not actually have to have some other commitment, other than just preserving space for your Self. Think in terms of Martha's tongue-in-cheek response: "That day won't work for me, I've got a lot of empty time scheduled." Try one of her other suggestions, or create and practice some of your own:

"I'm sorry, I have an appointment at that time."

"Nope. I'm booked."

"I won't be able to do that, but I hope it works out for you."

"I'm not available, but thanks for thinking of me."

Take some time today to think about how you can reduce the squid-factor in your life...
then practice, practice, practice.

