

# Does Action on Behalf of Another Tend Toward Abuse?

I've noticed an interesting phenomenon occurring in myself and through my actions when my wife asks me to do something concerning my children. If I desire that my children do something, or to stop doing something, I will employ peaceful means to bring about my desired state of affairs.

For example, if I want one of my children to get ready to go somewhere with me, I will express my wish and peacefully negotiate my way to my goal. I won't yell or threaten or otherwise coerce my child to do as I want them to do. My primary and secondary instincts are peaceful in response to any pushback I get (as they are very busy with accomplishing their own ends).

Now let us suppose it is my wife that wants one of our children to get ready to go somewhere with her. She's busy getting ready herself, so she asks me to ask and assist the child in getting ready. I love my wife so I do her this favor. However, while my first instinct is peaceful, my second instinct, which kicks in after pushback, tends toward being less peaceful. I feel more willing to start coercing my child to get ready.

When the goal is my own, internally motivated, I will behave according to my own values for respectful and peaceful cooperation. When the goal is not my own, externally motivated, I will at first behave according to my own values, but resistance may soon have me acting contrary to those values. Why is this?

I don't like this, and I'm finding that I have to be extra mindful and diligent in remaining respectful and peaceful when on a mission for my wife. I hope in time my second instinct in this regard mirrors my first.

What I'm very curious about, however, is what this says about behavior in larger society.

There are many types of requests given to others that are not primarily internally motivated by the requestor. Managers giving orders on behalf of department heads. Coaches giving orders on behalf of upper management. Law enforcement giving orders on behalf of superiors and legislators.

Each of these are more or less likely to meet resistance, and when they do, how are the instincts telling the requestor to behave? When a manager is on the hot seat for his job because of team performance, will his orders downward tend toward coercion? Same for a coach whose team is not performing as upper management would like it to perform to sell tickets.

And where this sort of analysis really matters, when law enforcement officers are trying to

enforce laws that they don't really believe in, but don't want to lose their jobs, how do their instincts tell them to behave?

It seems to me that having the power and ability to inflict great harm in the pursuit of your goals, and which goals are being aimed for on behalf of others, tends toward greater and greater abuse. We see this every time law enforcement use violence in response to resistance they receive while enforcing laws against nonviolent crimes. As these sorts of "criminals" are not themselves violent, the natural first instinct is to get compliance with your requests peacefully (never mind the gun in the room). That often works, but not always. Violence may sooner or later be employed by law enforcement in these cases, and it turns out that these are the sort that get national attention when the officer or officers become abusive.

I can't explain the psychology behind this. Perhaps someone with better credentials in that field can. Perhaps they already have. I don't know. But what I'm more concerned about is how we can mitigate this tendency. In myself, mindfulness and diligence. In larger society, I don't know. Maybe we train law enforcement better. Maybe we disarm law enforcement. Maybe we de-monopolize law enforcement. In any event, the first step is recognizing and accepting the problem.