

# THE SET FREE LIFE

## Can't We All Just Get Along?

For my father, there was hardly an event in his life that he would not have described as "fine." Wedding day? "Oh, it was fine." How do I look, Daddy?" "Just fine, sweetheart!" Do you like that meatloaf? "It's fine." World crashing down around him? "Don't worry. I'll be fine."

My dad was a Peaceful Phlegmatic, one of the four personality types about which I've been writing to give you a very simple but powerful way to understand what makes people tick. "Phlegmatic" implies (as you've probably guessed) phlegm, and thousands of years ago it was thought that some people had more than others and this caused them to be stable, easygoing, and not given to enthusiasm. I like to use the Greek terms for each personality but I also use an identifying word, and "peaceful" is the identifier you might remember long after you've gotten tired of trying to say "phlegmatic" (fleg-MAT-ik).

Where Popular Sanguine would like you to lighten up and have some fun and Powerful Choleric wants you to get moving and work harder, and Perfect Melancholy wants you to put things in order and be respectful of others, Peaceful Phlegmatic doesn't really want you to do anything. He isn't out to change you. He'll be fine if you do and fine if you don't. These are not folks given to using superlatives to describe their opinions; "fine" is a very good thing.

Peaceful Phlegmatic people want peace, and they will go out of their way to make sure it is maintained. They will not engage in arguments and will go along with what others want to avoid discord. Ask a Peaceful Phlegmatic family member where he wants to go to dinner and he will frequently respond, "I don't care; wherever you want to go is fine." The fact is that Peaceful Phlegmatic really *doesn't* care; food is food, after all, and he will happily comply with someone else's decision. But a characteristic of our Peaceful friends and family

members is that even if they *do* care, they won't say so! In their view, why create a conflict over a choice of restaurants? Let someone else choose.

Peaceful Phlegmatic folks will go out of their way to be helpful. They are generous and compassionate. They are giving people who can't say no, especially when they know someone is in distress. They prefer rest and peace, and they don't function particularly well with deadlines and demands. Unlike the Powerful Choleric who have to jump on a task before it grows cold, Peaceful Phlegmatics will take their time. These are the coworkers who remind you, "That work will still be there tomorrow. Go home." They tend to maintain the same outward attitude through trials and through joys. This does not mean they don't have strong opinions or feel deeply about issues! It's just that their emotions do not quickly rise up to affect their external behavior. Phlegmatic men and women can keep their faces passive when the ground is shaking. They can be calm and collected rocks when the world is falling apart, and people gravitate to that kind of strength.

They don't have strong, expressive characteristics like the other three personalities; they are quietly present, solid, and seemingly unemotional. Because of this they can often feel they don't get any respect or that people don't see their worth. If they had a work motto, it might be, "Can't we all just get along?"

Don't assume this means Peacefuls aren't strong! Phlegmatic men and women have a will of iron. When they don't want to do something, they cannot be

continued ▶

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*Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her seminars on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused listeners at companies and business organizations throughout the country to rate her presentations as "the best seminar of the conference!" She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.*

moved. I have often heard the term "passive-aggressive" applied to Peaceful Phlegmatic, and not without reason. Instead of telling you from the beginning she'd prefer not to participate, a Peaceful will say she will and then won't show up. She's not moved by your anger. No matter how much you shout, cry, demand or give ultimatums, the Phlegmatic will retreat inwardly and refuse to come out until she feels the coast is clear.

Peacefuls, as wonderful as they are, can live in their weaknesses just like anyone else. They can be horrific procrastinators, indifferent to the problems their indecision creates for anyone else. They can seem to approach every issue with a "whatever" attitude that infuriates people whose lives may be hanging in the balance. They might slam on the breaks to save an injured rabbit by the side of the road, but they can respond to your tears or temper with a shutdown of all systems and avoid you for months.

Here's what some Peaceful Phlegmatics don't get: people need to know you care by the observable responses you make. You may say something is important but others have no way of knowing that's true unless you *act* like it's important by being engaged. Avoiding stress is an admirable desire, but you'll frequently create stress by refusing to let people know what you think.

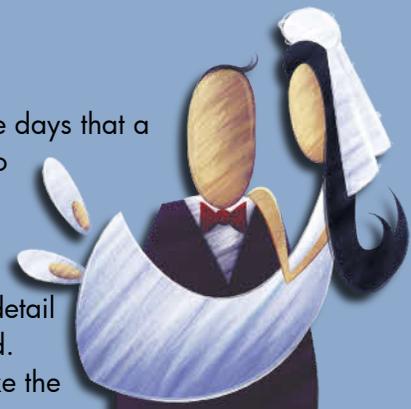
None of us should ever have to apologize for the way we are—only for the offensive behaviors we exhibit, once we are aware of them. There is beauty in every personality! We need what others bring to the table. When we can identify the strengths we see in others and recognize their value, we will be less prone to write off people who are not like us. We'll be more forgiving of the weaknesses we encounter because we'll acknowledge we all have a different way of approaching the world. There will always be challenges in relationships! Give yourself an edge by being able to spot the sources of conflict and, hopefully, prevent unintended consequences. We *can* all (mostly) get along with a little understanding of personalities! ♡

## Get Your Facts Straight

**Quick**—count the number of times you've heard this comment: "Half of all marriages end in divorce."

You can't count it, because it is quoted so often it's almost impossible to remember where you heard it last. It could have been last Sunday in church, or a month ago while in conversation with friends; perhaps you heard Dr. Phil say it, or a commentator on the evening news threw it out as part of a story on kids growing up too fast.

Divorce is so common these days that a statistic such as this seems to make intuitive sense. Here's the problem: it's erroneous. It's a "lazy" statistic, which is what I call the reporting of a detail that has not been fully grasped. Lazy statistics are picked up like the Andromeda Strain and spread as quickly. Before too long, everyone accepts them as true and never stops to think about their veracity.



*"Half of the number of marriages in a given year end in divorce."*

Let's set the record straight. The comment that "half of all marriages end in divorce" should be stated as follows: "Half of the number of marriages in a given year end in divorce." Seven little words change the whole perspective, but it's these seven words that are left out of any general statement on divorce statistics.

Each year, there are approximately 2 million marriages, give or take a few thousand, and each year, there are approximately 1 million divorces. *Within that year.* For the sake of argument, let's say there are 100 million total married couples in the United States. Let's say that this year, 2 million marriages take place and join the ranks of the 100 million, making the total number of marriages 102 million.

Now let's say this year, 1 million marriages are dissolved—half of the number of marriages performed. That's 1 million divorces that will be finalized this year out of a total of 102 million current marriages.

Those 1 million divorces this year represent a teeny-tiny fraction of *all marriages*. For half of *all marriages* to end in divorce, the courts would be clogged with greater than 50 million of them seeking dissolution!

Now the real statistics: the divorce rate *within a given year* hasn't been 50% since the 1980s! In 2005, it was about 36%—the lowest since 1970. Part of this is due to the fact that more couples live together prior to marriage. Part of it is due to those who separate but do not divorce (I've known folks who lived for years this way).



There's no disputing the enormous impact of broken homes, but this, while serious and worthy of attention, does not justify people bandying about a lazy statistic that implies divorce courts are overrun with people waiting their turn. A 36% divorce rate is nothing to cheer about, but it continues to shrink and speaks to the fact that no one should be sounding the death knell for marriage! It's still thriving, and if the wedding industry is any indication at all, people still desire it! ♡

## Teddy Bear Says..



How to eat food combines two of my favorite topics, eating and food, so this month I will address how to eat bread. (You think you don't need to be counseled regarding the proper way to eat bread? Let me give you the essentials and only you will know whether or not you found my column instructive.)

Keep in mind that I refer to the eating of

bread in a fine dining situation. I'm talking white tablecloths or beautifully appointed place settings with impressive glassware and utensils. Eating bread at your local expensive restaurant with a colleague who may have been reared by parents who sent him or her to finishing school is quite different than grabbing a chunk of a baguette with your salad at the pot luck lunch. But never fear! I'm telling you here how it's done, and you need never wonder again if you are exhibiting the manners that show you mean business.

Bread in a fine restaurant is eaten with the fingers. As the bread basket is passed to you—pass to the right—take a roll or slice and place it on your bread plate. If you prefer butter, when it is passed to you take a wrapped pat or dollop some onto your plate with your bread knife. Rest your knife across the top of the bread place.

Then tear off a small piece with your fingers, butter that one piece, and place it in your mouth. One at a time. Slowly. You see, in a fine restaurant, it's all about enjoying the food and the company and taking your time. People with very good manners do not rush through their meals as though they are famished from hard work on the farm. They have the luxury of eating for pleasure and savoring each bite, so do not slather up your bread and slice it ahead of time, readying it for quick and easy insertion into the mouth.

Tear off a piece at a time, butter each piece as needed, and place it in your mouth and chew slowly. It is perfectly acceptable to ask for the bread to be passed again—in fine restaurants,

the bread is often the most aromatic and tasty part of a meal! Just remember that you are a well-mannered, gracious person who knows how to conduct yourself in any situation and you will maintain your confidence. And while I am sad this is so, in a fine restaurant it really is inappropriate to ask for a doggy bag at the end of your meal. Unless it's for your Greyhound. (You may carry my picture in your wallet as proof.) 

## Hope for an Alzheimer's Cure?

My cousin, a physician, informed me of an astonishing study involving Alzheimer's sufferers who have been administered an anti-inflammatory agent and experienced results that seem (to me) almost as sensational as the 180-degree turnaround we saw in the 1990 movie "Awakenings," in which patients with a Parkinson's-like illness were injected with L-dopa and "woke up" after years of comatose isolation.



The January 2008 *Journal of Neuroinflammation* details one case of this volcanic new attack on the hell of Alzheimer's disease. Etanercept, a drug that goes by the brand name of Enbrel and is used for inflammatory illnesses such as rheumatoid arthritis, is injected into the spine of a man with Alzheimer's and, within two hours, improvement in his cognitive functions begins. Over a period of weeks and after repeated injections, the truly dramatic improvement in the 81 year-old gentleman's mental processes is undeniable. The authors refer to this "unexpected and largely unprecedented clinical phenomenon" of "a noticeable clinical improvement within minutes" of the injections.

Is it possible? Alzheimer's is a problem related in some inexplicable way to *inflammation*? Could this be the evidence we need to forge a new, aggressive attack on this heinous disease (to which my father succumbed last month)? You can see a testimonial view of the treatment's effects on [YouTube](#). 

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