

Family Life... Mother's birthday & money

Situation:

I was sitting in my office at home thinking about the last phone call I had from my sister. Our Mother's 80th birthday is coming up and Susan wants all of us to chip in \$200 apiece for a big party.

Symptoms:

The problem is that not all of my sisters and brothers can afford to spend \$200. I know that for a fact. I can, and I don't mind at all. But in the past when not everyone would or could contribute, they'd expect me to take up the slack. The more I thought about the details of the lavish affair Susan was planning, the more tense I got. "I know they're going to ask me for more than \$200. I just know it! And this time I'm not going to give in, because when I do, then I find myself not able to provide for my immediate family. Susan's inviting over 100 people and she wants to get Mother a fancy new outfit when she's already got plenty of very nice dress clothes. What do they think I am? Rich?"

Solution:

The more I thought the more confused I got. I knew I had make the effort to calm myself down or else this would keep coming up. I told myself, "Look for the causes, look for the fear, and look for the anger."

The fear was that I didn't want to have to contribute more than \$200. When I examined that thought, I saw the "have to." The fact is, that I don't "have" to give more than my share – no matter what my brothers and sisters think, no matter what I've done in the past. If they're disappointed in me or my behavior, that's their disappointment they'll have to deal with.

I don't need to be all things to all people. And, I truly can't be all things to all people. It's impossible. The fact is, I do have a better job than any of them do, so they probably do think I'm rich by their standards.

I got rid of my angry attitude against Susan by saying to myself: she's not wrong, she's average. Average – not right – average. Lots of women plan grand parties for all kinds of reasons. And lots of people don't take everyone's financial situation into consideration.

I made a firm decision that I was only going to contribute the original \$200 amount and not more. If I was asked for more, I could simply say, "I'm sorry I can't." I didn't have to add a big explanation and justify my decision. It might be uncomfortable saying No, but I could do it.

I even recognized my slight anger at my siblings who really couldn't afford the \$200 for not speaking up for themselves. They're not wrong, they're average. If they have to do

without to do what Susan's planned for the birthday celebration, that's their business and not really any of mine.

I was finally able to look from their point of view – If I was in their financial positions, I would probably expect the “rich brother” to contribute more too.

In the past:

Previously I have chosen to give more than my fair share - just to keep peace, to make everyone in the family like me. And I'd resent it and blame myself for not doing what I really wanted to do. I was afraid to speak up. It's a big thing for me to start saying No.

