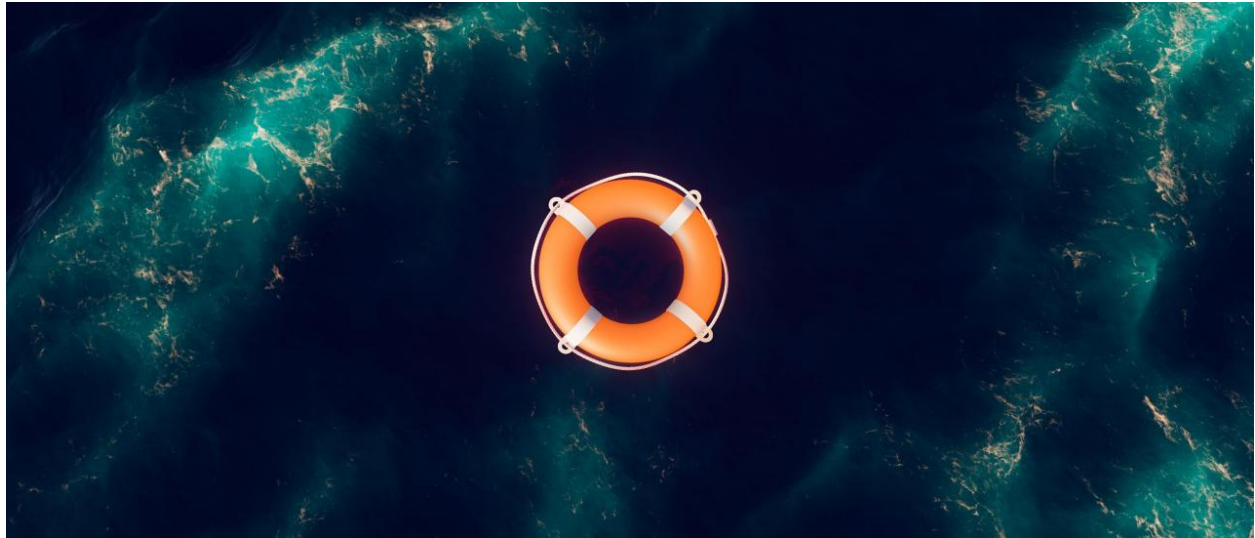

Escaping the Saviour Complex: Letting Go of the Urge to Rescue



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Exploring the motivations behind our need to help others and embracing a balanced approach to offering assistance.

A woman was driving on a mountainous road in deep winter. Her car hit a patch of ice and slid over the edge. As the woman tried to stop the car from crashing into a ditch, someone else's life flashed before her eyes.

The woman, as it happens, was suffering from a phenomenon known as the rescuer syndrome or saviour complex. Individuals affected by this syndrome have an inherent desire to help people in need. They become enmeshed in people's problems, unable to stop talking, thinking and worrying about them. They find it difficult to set boundaries, are uncomfortable receiving help from others and find it hard to simply say no.

There is a stark difference, however, between a willingness to help people and a compulsive need to save them. If the act of rescuing others becomes more like an addiction or a pervasive pattern, it is worth asking if there are selfish motivations underlying what appears to be selfless behaviour. Are these altruistic acts motivated by empathy without the direct expectation of

a reward?

Often, altruistic behaviour is motivated by egotistical instincts. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people derive personal benefits such as higher self-esteem from aiding others. But in the eagerness to help, it is easy to get carried away and see problems where none exist. In fact, you may not realise that the people you're trying to save aren't actually asking for assistance; they simply want someone to listen to and understand them.

If you're over-nurturing others, it can negatively affect not only the quality of your relationships but also your own life. Your compulsive need to rescue may lead to physical and mental exhaustion as you forget to take care of your own needs. Over time, you may end up burning out and blaming the people you're trying to help.

In addition to self-imposed stress, your rescue efforts may create unhealthy dependency in your relationships. By excessively helping others, you prevent them from becoming self-sufficient, resulting in imbalanced relationships. The people you're supporting might come to expect that you will always be there to solve their problems. This prevents them from developing the necessary skills to take responsibility for their own lives. Meanwhile, if you persist in ignoring your own needs and depleting your energy, your desire to be a saviour may turn into a form of martyrdom.

Why are we compelled to rescue others?

Upon deeper reflection, you may discover that your saviour complex is rooted in a script within your inner theatre, which dictates that other people's needs are far more important than your own, and that your life's mission is to save others. Acting in this manner appears to be the only way to feel good about yourself.

You may fear rejection, abandonment or criticism for not lending a helping hand. You are reluctant to express any negative feelings towards the people you feel compelled to help, even when they become burdensome. You find it difficult to resist the urge to help them.

It's possible that your behaviour may be influenced by your upbringing, if you grew up in a family environment where your emotional needs weren't met, or the care provided was not appropriate for your age. For example, your parents might have been overcontrolling, self-centred, depressed or

even abusive.

As a result, you may have developed a belief that your own needs were unimportant. You never felt good enough and were led to regard love as conditional and something to be earned. You became highly attuned to the moods and needs of others, always striving to meet their expectations and effectively turning into an approval addict.

Your overpowering need to rescue others can therefore be seen as a highly defensive reaction. Unconsciously, you strongly identify with the person you are trying to rescue, but in reality, it's a projection of your own unmet emotional needs. It is like your guiding principle in life has become "I rescue, thus I exist."

By saving others, you derive a sense of worth, appreciation and recognition. In other words, you're really trying to help yourself. It is as if you believe that by being nice, you will gain some kind of magical protection against rejection.

How to shed the saviour complex

Of course, one might argue, what's wrong with helping people? The fact is, there is a delicate balance between being helpful to others and staying true to yourself. Rescuing others can turn into self-harm. If you wish to relate to people in a different way, there are several steps you can take to initiate a process of change and lead a more balanced life.

Dig deep to reclaim control

Be aware that you are causing self-harm by ignoring your own needs and make a conscious decision to no longer continue this pattern. To understand what's happening, delve into the dynamics of your inner world and acknowledge and modify the faulty assumptions you have made about yourself. Essentially, you need to become aware of how much you have been projecting your own problems onto others.

Prioritise interdependency

Pay attention to reciprocity in relationships. Healthy relationships involve both parties taking responsibility and recognising the interdependency of needs. Strive to create more balanced relationships instead of consistently putting others in your debt. In other words, learn to say no, manage

boundaries and practise tough love. It's essential for people to take responsibility for their actions; rescuing them can render them helpless.

Don't forget yourself

Even though it may be difficult, work on a willingness to have other people take care of you. You deserve to be energised and feel good in your skin. Taking care of yourself is the opposite of being selfish; it will strengthen you and enable you to better support the people who matter to you. When the oxygen masks are released in a plane losing pressure, put yours on first before helping others around you.

Stop being a crutch

Avoid seeking out overly needy people. Make it clear to the ones already in your life that they must take ownership of their own lives, not use you as a crutch. Encourage them to become more independent. Sometimes life's lessons are learned beyond our comfort zones, and allowing others to face their own challenges is essential for their growth.

Seeking guidance from a psychotherapist or coach can be helpful to gaining greater self-understanding and self-knowledge. They can also help you realise that the people you want to rescue should strive for greater autonomy, not perpetual dependence.

Constantly saving people who refuse to look after themselves is not a fulfilling way to live. Free yourself from the cycle and remember that it's okay to prioritise your own well-being for the greater good. After all, if you don't invest time in creating the life you desire, you may end up dealing with a life you don't want.

Find article at

<https://knowledge.insead.edu/leadership-organisations/escaping-saviour-complex-letting-go-urge-rescue>

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