

MEN'S LIFE TODAY

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Expert Q+A

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The Grudge Report

By Caroline Kinneberg



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Ever hear that saying, "Holding a grudge is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die"? It's harsh, but spot-on. Harboring resentment, no matter at whom it's aimed, simply drains your *own* emotional reserves. "A lot of times a grudge is one-sided," says Jordan Harbinger, a relationship expert and talk show host on SiriusXM radio. "The other person isn't necessarily even

thinking about the problem."

The Damage

Even so, says Harbinger, a grudge can wreak havoc on relationships. Say you're pissed at your girlfriend because she didn't seem to appreciate the IKEA armoire you spent an entire day slaving over. You decide not to say anything. But when she comes home from the grocery store the next day without the item you asked her to buy, you flip. "She's thinking, 'My boyfriend is crazy! I buy rigatoni instead of ravioli, and now I'm sleeping on the couch! What's going on here?'" says Harbinger. "You just cannot have a healthy relationship if you have a grudge."

Furthermore, the poisonous effects of a grudge can often spread beyond the two people concerned. If, for instance, you're not talking to one of

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Quiz

Which of these drinks can help you lose weight?

your pals, your mutual friends are hardly going to feel inclined to invite both of you to the same dinner party. Says San Diego-based therapist Jeff Palitz: “If you choose to hold on to a grudge, those negative feelings stewing inside of you are bound to affect other relationships you have in your life.” In other words, by harboring a grudge, you end up alienating yourself. The same logic can be applied to families, where grudges can get to the point that no one even remembers what the original problem was, and relatives miss out on decades together without knowing why.

Moving on ...

OK, so it's clear that grudges cause a lot of damage. But getting over hurt feelings ... easier said than done, right? And yet, says Palitz, “Regardless of the circumstances, there comes a point where you have to decide: I either have to let this go, or I have to do something about it.” Choosing which path to take boils down to one thing: whether you want to maintain a relationship with the other person.

“If the idea of taking the high road is instinctively unappealing to you, maybe that's a sign you're not that invested in the relationship,” says Palitz. Just be sure to let the grudge go along with the relationship. To get the feelings out of your system, talk to your friends or family or write in a journal, and keep reminding yourself that holding a grudge against someone with whom you have no intention of resuming a relationship makes absolutely no sense. It will only hurt you, not them.

... Or making up

If, on the other hand, you care about the relationship too much to let it go, you're going to have to confront the other person. But do so only after you've had time to cool down -- which could take 20 minutes or 20 days, depending on the situation. Before approaching the person, Palitz suggests writing a letter to him or her, whether or not you intend to deliver it. In the first draft, let out all the vile, nasty, name-calling things you want. Let it sit for several hours (or days), and then write an edited second draft. It will help you process your emotions and give you a dress rehearsal for talking to the person.

Once you're ready to talk, be honest. Let's say one of your friends applied for a job you'd told him about. Because *you* really wanted it -- and *he* ended up applying for and landing it -- you immediately stopped talking to him, despite his repeated tries to get in touch with you. Now you've got a great new job and you're kind of missing the old ritual of watching the Patriots together every Sunday. How to break the silence? Pick up your phone and try starting off with: “Listen. It's been a while since this happened. I don't even know if you're still thinking about it, but

- Orange juice
- Coca-Cola Zero
- Skim milk
- None of the above

Answer

Poll

How often do you replace your shaving cartridge?

- Every four or five uses
- Every week or two
- When the strip fades
- Whenever I remember, which isn't often

See Results

I want to get it off my chest.” Despite being shocked to hear your voice, he’ll most probably be relieved that you’ve called, and apologetic for what he did. Keep things short on the phone, but make a plan to meet up for the next game. “Guys are often willing to let things roll off their back, particularly with their male friends,” says Palitz. Odds are any awkwardness will be momentary and you’ll soon be rooting for the Pats together like old times.

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Caroline Kinneberg is a freelance writer and editor who has written for such publications as the Boston Globe, Travel + Leisure, and Vice.

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