



**D.C. Bar Lawyer Assistance Program  
Presents**

**People Pleasing!**

**A Slippery Slope of Good Intentions**

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# Objectives

After attending this presentation you should be able to answer:

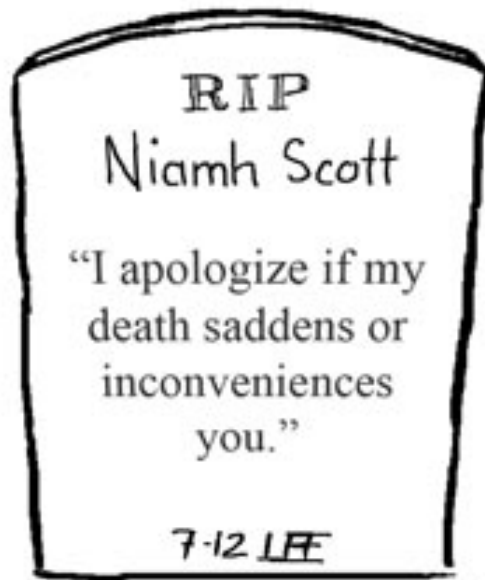
- What is people pleasing?
- Why does this pattern of behavior develop?
- How does it affect law practice?
- How can we begin to change it?



# People Pleasing

A pattern of behavior and thinking that focuses almost exclusively on other people's feelings and happiness, often to the neglect of self.





THEY SAY SHE  
WAS A  
CHRONIC  
PEOPLE  
PLEASER





# Are you a people pleaser?

- You struggle to say “no.”
- You often suffer at the expense of doing a favor for others.
- You’re excessively altruistic/philanthropic.
- You don’t practice good self-care.
- You find it hard to be assertive and voice your opinions.
- You constantly seek approval and are hyper-vigilant about perceived rejection from others.
- You’re an *emotophobe* (you fear negative emotions.)



## Are you a people pleaser?

- You act based on what “other people think” of you.
- You always put yourself in other’s shoes, but you rarely show compassion towards yourself.
- You blindly believe in other people’s “goodness” even if they are clearly abusive towards you.
- You fear losing control of yourself because you repress so much anger.
- You have a weak sense of self and poor interpersonal boundaries.



*Service • Integrity • Leadership*

# Case Study: Julie





## What is behind this behavior?

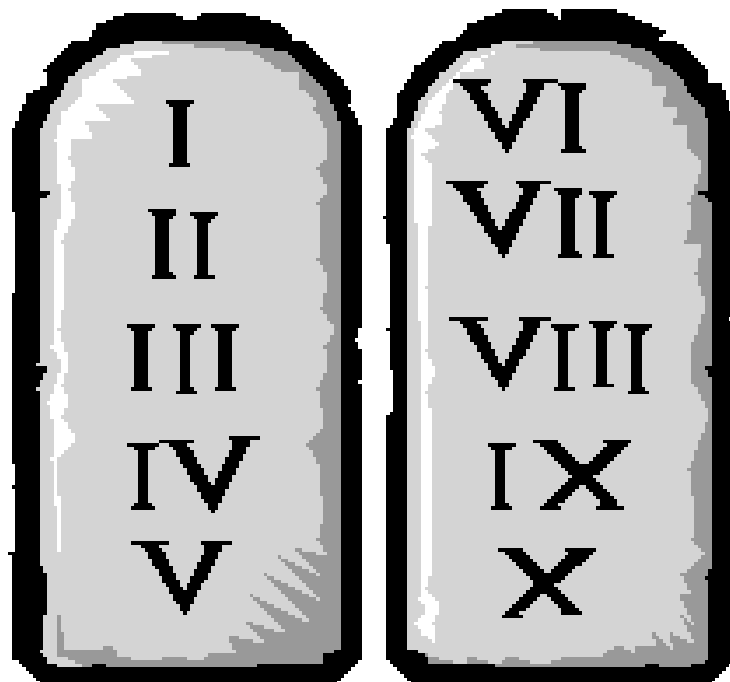
- Low self-worth.
- Intense need to please others or make them happy.
- High levels of anxiety when other people are unhappy/angry.
- Fear of conflict with others.
- Intense desire to be liked/loved.
- Fear of rejection. Fear of not being loved.
- Still seeking approval from loved ones and important figures (i.e. parents, teachers, bosses.)





## What causes this behavior?

- Being raised in a home where love and approval was conditional or inconsistent.
- Being excessively praised or adored by parents, so that as an adult other approval pales in comparison.
  - Creates need to conform to parents' expectations as a way to hold onto their unequivocal approval.
- Being raised by demanding, perfectionistic parents whose love was doled out sparingly or only when you met expectations.





# The Ten Commandments of People-Pleasing

1. I should always do what others want, expect or need from me.
2. I should take care of everyone around me whether they ask for help or not.
3. I should always listen to everyone's problems and try my best to solve them.
4. I should always be nice and never hurt anyone's feelings.
5. I should always put other people first, before me.



## The Ten Commandments of People-Pleasing

6. I should never say “no” to anyone who needs or requests something of me.
7. I should never disappoint anyone or let others down in any way.
8. I should always be happy and upbeat and never show any negative feelings to others.
9. I should always try to please other people and make them happy.
10. I should never try to burden others with my own needs or problems.



## The Seven Deadly Shoulds

1. Other people should appreciate and love me because of all the things I do for them.
2. Other people should always like and approve of me because of how hard I work to please them.
3. Other people should never reject or criticize me because I always try to live up to their desires and expectations.
4. Other people should be kind and caring to me in return because of how well I treat them.



Our People Pleasing minds are like computers with a virus: our thoughts get infiltrated with *shoulds*, *musts*, *oughts* and *have-to's*.



This distorted thinking sabotages our capacity to feel satisfied, successful and happy.



# The Seven Deadly Shoulds

5. Other people should never hurt me or treat me unfairly because I am so *nice* to them.
6. Other people should never leave or abandon me because of how much I make them need me.
7. Other people should never be angry with me because I would go to any length to avoid conflict, anger, or confrontation with them.



# The Repercussions of People-Pleasing (i.e. Why should I change?)

- People-pleasers often feel:
  - Resentful
  - Frustrated
  - Anxious
  - Overwhelmed
  - Depressed
  - Burned Out
- Professional consequences:
  - Decrease in quality of work
  - Avoidance behavior
  - Missed deadlines
  - Client complaints
  - Ethics violations
  - Disciplinary consequences





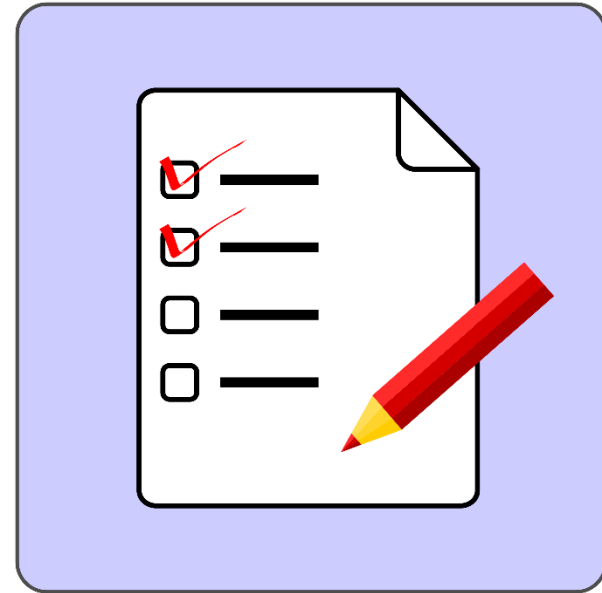
# How can a People Pleaser change?

- Begin by raising your self-awareness.
  - What am I feeling right now? ”
  - Do I want to do this?
  - Am I taking care of someone else?
- Work on accepting two new beliefs: “It is impossible to gain everyone’s approval” and “What **is** necessary is that I approve of myself.”
- Start saying “no.” Start small, low stakes. Increase gradually and practice, practice, practice.



# Who is on your tiny card?

(Your name needs to be first)





# How can a People Pleaser change?

- Learn to identify and tolerate uncomfortable feelings. They won't kill you (even if it feels like they might).
  - Fear – that someone won't approve of me.
    - Remember new belief: it is impossible to gain everyone's approval.
  - Sadness – that someone is disappointed or upset
    - Sometimes people will be disappointed, but they will be ok and will solve their problem some other way.
- Feel the feeling, make room for it. Just don't change course to get around it.
- Work on setting firmer boundaries.



**It will feel  
uncomfortable.**

**The more you practice  
the easier it will become.**



**“Daring to set boundaries  
is about having the  
courage to love ourselves,  
even when we risk  
disappointing others.”**

**-Brene Brown**



# Services of the Lawyer Assistance Program

- Assessment, evaluation, referral, short term counseling and support/follow up, monitoring.
- Access to a LAP volunteer who is trained and understands what a person is experiencing.
- Consultation with firms or other concerned parties about possible interventions.
- These services are free and confidential to D.C. Bar members, Judges and Law Students in the District of Columbia.

**Call 202-347-3131.**



# Sources

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The Disease to Please: Curing the People-Pleasing Syndrome. Harriet Braiker, Ph.D. 2001.

“Setting Boundaries at Work”. PENN Behavioral Health Management Assistance Program, 2008.

“Setting and Maintaining Healthy Personal Boundaries in the Workplace.” Australian Businesswomen's Network, 2012.