

The Truth about Sabotage

By

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The client in front of me says she manages to stay on a diet for two weeks, then inevitably, “I sabotage myself and I find myself back to square one, she says”

There are a number of ways to respond to this statement. I could ask how she sabotages herself. Or, how long this has been going on? What she gets out of doing this? Many of these questions are useful and will provide me with information and insight on how my client copes with this phenomenon. But I am more interested in introducing the notion that not all of her is involved in the sabotage.

I respond, “So there is a part of you who sabotages.”

She gives a slow deep breath. I recognize this as a relief breath. The relief is the silent acknowledgement that she is over-identifying with the sabotage part. To the extent that she sees only her sabotage and forgets about the other part of her, the one who stayed on the diet for two weeks.

I hear about how people sabotage themselves a lot in my private practice. How they succeed in walking along the path towards their health goal, then something derails them. The focus stays with the sabotage at the expense of all other achievements in life. The person I am working with is typical of this. She gives little time to her success. Yet her success is clear: she stayed on a diet for two weeks. Instead, she is deflated, her self-confidence is at a low and she has little belief in herself because, as she says, “she sabotaged herself.”

Although there are numerous ways and means to self-sabotage it seems to be a human trait to hate how we sabotage ourselves. If sabotage was a person, he or she would be receiving a lot of hate mail. How many times have you declared in all consuming anguish: “I hate how I keep doing that to myself?” Our response to how we sabotage usually results in us turning our anger in against ourselves. There are two possible extremes here: that sabotaging ourselves may be an excuse to demean ourselves and continually foster the notion that we really aren’t capable and worthy to make a success of our lives. On the other hand, sabotage may simply reflect a discomfort with change.

Sabotage, as a force within us, tends to only spring into action when change is on the horizon. Looked from this angle, an act of inner sabotage could be interpreted as a positive indicator that we may be ready for change and have the resources in place to carry it out.

We tend to think of sabotage as an internal process, but sabotage exists externally also. I am fortunate to be in a business where I witness change in people. However, I would be naive were I to think that people would leave my session room or my classroom having experienced change in a personal way and then all would be well. It doesn't work that way. A certain amount of my professional time is spent helping people figure out how to cope with those in their lives who will resist their changes. A typical example of this could be a mother and a wife who takes care of 80% of all of the daily chores in the household. Given this amount of support why should the husband and three kids want her to change? If mom starts emerging from the session room realizing that the exhaustion she feels is due to a giving out of too much of her energy and that she is angry about this and is now determined on containing her precious energy, we can expect the rest of the family to prefer the good life to stay. And so they resist the change. In these circumstances it is unlikely that the following conversation will take place:

Husband: "Ever since you have been having these ARC sessions I have noticed you doing less chores. The house is becoming messy. I am feeling afraid because I am used to you being a certain way and I find myself feeling abandoned because you are not there for my needs as much. Both you and my mother have always met my every need and I haven't known anything different and I am scared of that unknown..."

It is more likely both the husband and the three kids will regress and adopt tantrums as the main tool to get things back to "normal." Thus the husband resorts to habits he used as teenager: he stays out with the boys a little longer on his nights out (in the secret but unexpressed hope that she will worry about him and appreciate his value). Or, being reluctant to fill the dish washer because he has had a hard day work (being unwilling to cooperate like the belligerent little boy). Meanwhile the kids refuse to eat the meal because it doesn't taste the same when both mom and dad make it. Or, start fighting amongst themselves just as mom is going out to have coffee at Starbucks with her friend (something she never did before.) These are creative though desperate strategies in an attempt to prevent mother and wife from changing.

Time is spent in the session bringing consciousness to these forms of resistance so that the person can name the behaviour or family strategy for what it truly is so that when it happens she or he is better able to stay above it, rather than capitulating to those forces who have a vested interested in keeping the situation the same.

In The ARC Institute we teach that just as we have family and friends in our outer world, we have the same arrangement within ourselves. If we decide to change ourselves or a portion of our lives there will be forces within us who will contest this. It is important to remember that every action will produce a reaction. If we

forget this we may focus more on the reaction and forget the action taken. Then we may become disheartened and pulls back from our intent to change.

This brings us back to the lady on a diet who has a part that sabotages. Notice that by looking at the sabotage as a part she automatically creates another part with the ability to stand back and observe the part who sabotages. By virtue of this distance I am now less invested in the process. I am not so identified with the act of sabotage.

To return to the plot. I ask the lady whose diet has been sabotaged: *“What do you notice about this part (the part who sabotages)?”*

She replies: *“It’s not so big and formidable.”*

I respond with: *“What’s in it for the part to serve you in this way?”*

Now I know she has never thought about it in this way before, because her head gives a little jolt as if she has been impacted. She pauses for a minute, though it seems a lot longer, during which time she contemplates the floor.

“To protect me,” she finally says.

There are other advantages to observing ourselves as the sum of parts. In ARC-work we regularly invite our clients to call a particular behaviour or emotion a part. To do so reveals a myriad of experiences all of which can be observed. Thus there may be a part of me who is calm and another who feels frustrated at the same time. A part of you might want to be active and wash the car, yet there is another who wants to kick back and watch TV. A part is confused, another is tired that I am confused. It is like having a large family inside and I, as observer of it all, get to choose which one I want to associate with at this time.

Something interesting can happen when you view yourself in this way. You start *appreciating* how the resisting part. We may see it less than a part that holds us back in some aspect of our lives and more as a part of ourselves that is attempting to protect us in a way that is no longer functional for our needs. This is a whole different way of relating to our sabotage that goes beyond hating it for getting in our way. It is an interesting exercise to focus less on the act of sabotage and more on the creativity behind the act. If we were to again personify the part, just imagine how this might feel for sabotage. Instead of hate and anger, the part experiences appreciation from you. Might Sabotage respond differently to this?

The truth is that our sabotage parts usually fear change and attempt to protect us in some creative way from change. They do not trust change. They may not trust because of past traumas, or fears of the consequences of change. Sabotage may believe that unless change is prevented you may not even survive. All of

these beliefs are invariably irrational and do not take into account the resources you may have as a grown adult. Sabotage tends to regard you as a child with few resources. And therefore its intervention is not only needed, but imperative.

“Do you still wish to be protected in this way?” I ask.
She replies, *“No, I do not”*

I tend to have a reverse view on sabotage. If a client talks to me about how she sabotages herself it tells me there is a significant momentum for inner change going on. One that is important enough to cause her system to be nervous. Nervous enough for her defenses to call out the sabotage parts. I see the sabotage parts as one of a line of desperate attempts to thwart change. This being true then, the need, desire or implementation for sabotage is a sign of inner growth.

I ask her, *“If you were to make a choice, rather than Sabotage making the choice around eating for you, what would you choose?”*

“I would stay on my diet,” She says, emphasizing the “I.”

In fact, in ARC-Work, the emergence of a sabotage part can often be predictable. They tend to emerge when someone has completed a significant stage of their growth, such as a big realization about how they are conducting themselves in a certain part of life, or the decision to implement change. There are many examples. Typically, after the session they leave feeling strong, resolute and heartfelt. Between sessions, they may or may not make the changes that reflect the change within. It depends upon when the final sabotage part arrives.

I know that the sabotage part has taken over when the person enters the door of my session room. She may seem depressed and dejected especially since the last session when she experienced a breakthrough. When she sits down she tells me that she feels she has gone back to square one in her growth. This is a typical response to this form of sabotage. I let her know that when someone has decided on significant change Sabotage often makes one last desperate and strong attempt to re-take control and prevent the change from being implemented. This desperation is reflected of her growth. It is a last gap effort. She brightens up, because she knows this to be true. You can see the depression starting to lift like a cloud.

I ask her: *“The place in you who is attempting to sabotage change, how would you wish to respond to this part?”*

“I would like to tell this part that I am now in charge, that I appreciate its help, but that I no longer need it. That I will call upon it if ever I need it and I no longer will tolerate its intervention in this way.”

“How would it be to tell this directly to the part?” I respond

She does so, as if speaking to another person. And I know, her goal to lose weight will soon be realized.

Some Everyday Examples of Sabotage

Career Sabotage

You finally have an opportunity to get the job you wanted. The Sabotage: Your habit of being late and forgetting to follow up on a phone call causes the employers to pass you by.

Relationship Sabotage

You really want a relationship. The Sabotage: Whenever you get close to someone a part of you starts telling you that this person is not “Mr/Mrs. Right.

Vacation Sabotage

Around Christmas every year you plan your summer vacation. The Sabotage: You never end up leaving home because you end up taking on so many projects that by summer you are swamped.