

Ep #401: Take Me at My Word (Part 2): When Helping Becomes Pushing



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Búa Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach Béa Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So last week, here on the *Feminist Wellness* podcast, we talked about what it costs to not be taken at your word. The cumulative toll of having your stated preferences, wants, needs, desires, questions, your no's relitigated, your inner experience treated like a first draft, like something negotiable. Maybe, maybe you don't actually know what you want, kiddo. Maybe I know better. Maybe. How's that feel, huh? Not great. That's the conclusion we came to. That's a conclusion. Herein, you heard it here first. It doesn't feel great.

If you missed it, if this is your first episode, welcome. I'm so glad you're here. We have a lot of fun. We laugh, we cry. It's better than cats. But listen, don't start here. Go back to the episode just one before. You're going to have a much more better time if you do that. I'll keep this one warm for you till you come back. All right.

So today we're looking at the role of the pusher, noting, of course, that a lot of us occupy both positions in different moments, different times in our lives, different relationships, and remembering, as always, that we are here looking together at these habits, these survival skills, these patterns for moving through life with compassion, curiosity, and care. Never judging us, never meanie pants, because we don't rock that way around here. Right, mi amor? That's not what we do.

So let's talk about the pusher. The gentle steerer, the person offering the orange juice with the warmest possible intentions when you very clearly said, I'd like a glass of tomato. Generally speaking, that move is also an emotional outsourcing pattern, which is—emotional outsourcing is the habitual pattern of sourcing safety, belonging, and worth from outside of ourselves, which shows up as codependent, perfectionist, and people-

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pleasing habits. And it is subtle enough that most people who do it, and I was one of them, have no idea it's happening, and especially not that it's a problem, because why would it be a problem? I'm just trying to be nice. I'm just trying to be caring. I'm just trying to share and make sure that you have the best outcome, and it's just like, I'm really just trying to be loving, right?

And it shows up everywhere, like in the smallest moments. You say, gosh, I'm cold. And that person, that pusher says, you can't possibly be cold. It's 72 degrees in here. You say you're not hungry, and that person says, are you sure? You haven't eaten since this morning. You say, oh, I don't want dessert. And someone slides the menu back towards you and says, just look, you don't have to get anything. You say you're tired, and someone suggests, well, maybe you're just dehydrated. Like, have you had enough water today?

And listen, none of these are malicious. And one here and there in a relationship where you're generally taken at your word, generally respected, generally treated in a way that feels good, it goes unnoticed because it's irrelevant. But when this kind of thing is chronic and constant, the impact is cumulative. Because every single one of them is then a small withdrawal from the account of, I trust that you know your own body and your own experience. And that account is not bottomless.

And as always, I am out here talking about the emotional outsourcing version of this, meaning I'm not talking about the cultural version of this where this is baked into how you do. I'm also not talking about the agreements you've built with the people closest to you wherein this is not only totally fine, but it's great. So like my wife, Billey and I have a long-standing understanding, long-standing understanding. If one of us is clearly getting hangry and the other has the blessed advantage of balanced blood sugar, we say something like, you need to eat. We are direct and directive. It's not an invitation. It's, honey, calories, now, water, now. Even, I mean, we've traveled a ton together, nap, now.

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And this is agreement-based. It's not pushing. It's a consensual system built on knowing each other, being able to read each other in this deep way, and having literally had a conversation in which we agreed to this. Same goes for the grandmother's plate refills, or the Argentine family dinner where, no, thank you, is the opening position, and three more offers are baked into the script. My best friend's Persian. What's up, Dr. Sonai Kusari, MD? I love you. You're the best. And her people will push you too.

So, I'm not talking about that. I'm not, no. Everyone's in on it. There's a shared understanding, and there's usually a lot of love in it. And I'm not saying it's not exhausting to say, no, abuela, no gracias. Abuela, no gracias. Abuela, no gracias. Abuela, no gracias.

What I am talking about is the thing that I'm here to talk about, which is something really different. The dynamic where one person's stated preference genuinely isn't being received as real. Where the no's keep not landing, where there's no agreement or understanding underneath it, just one person's discomfort with the other person's stated answer. And where, in classic emotional outsourcing style, the way someone else manages their mind, their life, their choices, their energy, their everything, impacts your emotions bigly to the point where you need to control it. That's what we're talking about, okay?

So just making sure that's very clear. This is part and parcel of emotional outsourcing. Or it can be, rather. This latter thing I just explained is the emotional outsourcing experience of this experience. I think that makes English. We'll see. Let me know if it Englished.

Okay, so I love a good example. So here's a scene you might recognize if you've been living in this dynamic. So your partner says they want to skip the party. They are clear about this. They said it without hesitation. And something in you, not maliciously, probably not even consciously, doesn't quite let it land. You say, oh, are you sure? It might be fun once we get there. And they say they're sure. And you say, we don't have to stay long.

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And they say they'd really rather just stay home. And you say, okay, totally. I just thought you might enjoy seeing people. And they say, they know, they hear you. They just very firmly don't want to go.

And the tone often really matters here. The tone between, I think I just don't want to go to the party, and, Bethany, I am being very clear here. I do not want to go. I do not want to go. I do not want to go. But you're still nudging. You're still pushing. And now 10 minutes have passed, and they've said the same thing four different ways. And you've heard it, or it's passed through your auditory processing four different times, but you're not hearing it. And something in the interaction, the energy between you has shifted because they had to work for their no.

And now there's a small residue of something in the room that didn't used to be there. Something yucky and uncomfortable and fully unnecessary that is exhausting for you both and can be really dangerous for the relationship itself. I mean, it's corrosive.

Because what just happened is not about the party. What happened is that your discomfort with their preference, the mild disappointment of staying in, or the anxiety that they're not happy, or the worry that not going means something, or your reticence to go alone, you attempt to manage that through repeated checking, rather than through sitting with the feeling yourself. And so their answer became the place you put your discomfort, and they had to keep answering until your discomfort settled, which is a different thing than being asked once, believing them or being believed, and everyone managing their own feels.

And if you're sitting with that scene and you're feeling some kind of way about recognizing yourself in it, here's what's often going on underneath the pushing, and it's not what it looks like on the surface. It's also so much more understandable than, I just really have opinions about parties. I just have a lot of party-based opinions.

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So, compassion time. You ready? A lot of the time, the pushing is an attachment move. Not a conscious one. No one's sitting there thinking, I will now perform a behavior designed to confirm my continued relevance to this person so they won't abandon me to die cold and alone on a mountaintop. But rather, underneath the gentle steering, underneath the, are you sure, and the, we don't have to stay that long, there's often something that sounds more like, if I can get you to change your answer, I will thus have evidence that I matter to you. That my input, my desire, has weight in your life, that I'm not peripheral. Your no, even a perfectly neutral, has nothing to do with me, no, can land somewhere in the nervous system as a small confirmation of irrelevance, of, let's call it, not quite mattering.

And the second offer is a way of checking. Do I count or matter enough to you to shift something, even something small? And when you say, okay, fine, go to the party, what the pusher files that under is, yes, yes, I matter. We are good. Which is a very expensive piece of reassurance for you to be providing, and you didn't know that's what you were doing when you put your shoes on to go. Right?

There's also the worth piece, which is related but slightly different. If I can help you, I have a function. I have importance. So being useful is a way of being safe in a relationship, a way of earning place. And your clearly stated, completely handled preference gives me nothing to do. No puzzle to solve, no way to be the person who made things better. So the push is sometimes an attempt to insert necessity into a moment that didn't need it. To become the one who knows what you need. I know what you need. Which is a role, like a parental, parentifying role that feels a lot safer than just being the one who's there.

Underneath both of those things, often, is some version of fear. Now, this is the fear that comes from learning somewhere along the way that you have to be useful or insightful or right about someone else's needs in order to stay close and loved and safe and protected. And so that is the thing doing

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the pushing. Because it's not any feelings about the party. The party's frankly irrelevant. I mean, if you really wanted to go so much, you could go alone. But the pushing is that fear trying to get 10 toes on the ground. You know what I mean? It's that fear trying to land and to find some kind of orientation, some kind of grounding, so it's not just floating around in the clouds alone. You know what I mean?

Let's do another example. So your friend is venting about a coworker who's been taking credit for her work for six months. So she's thought about it, she wrote about it, she talked to her therapist about it, and after a lot of deliberation, she's landed on, she's going to let it go, move on, and start looking for a new job. That's her decision.

Now, you, because you love her so much and you can see how much it's still bothering her, say, I hear you. I just, I just think you'd feel better, like both now and in the long term, if you said something to her directly and really just, yeah, just cleared this up. And she says, you know what? Maybe. Maybe I might, but I'm not going to. And you say, I hear you. I just, I know you. I've known you since the second grade. And so now she's not just carrying the work situation, but she's also carrying the task of convincing you that her decision about her own life is valid, which is a thing she did not sign up for and which she should not have to do. She shouldn't have to do that.

Now, I don't want anyone walking away from this thinking the prescription is to become a person who offers nothing, shares nothing, keeps all their thoughts and feelings hermetically sealed in a little glass jar in the back of the cabinet. Come on now. My perfect narwhal horn, come on now. That's not what we're here doing. We're here for co-regulation. That's not intimacy. That's just another flavor flave of loneliness. We are here to connect. And sharing your perspective with the people you love, wow. It is one of the greatest gifts of close relationship.

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What's in question here is how you do it. Not if, not if we share opinions. I mean, gosh, actually Billey and I were talking about this the other day. We both had not-great first marriages. We saved the best for last. And we both really, really wish that a lot of our friends had been more direct and honest and forthright about what they were seeing. We wish that people had spoken up more and said like, "Hey, here's what I'm seeing here."

So it's not the speaking up that's the problem. It's not the sharing opinions. It's the how. Okay, think about it this way. We go back to our metaphora Land. So if you made an incredible chocolate cake, like you really went for it. You used the good chocolate, you did the thing with the sea salt on top, you made it specifically because you know your people. And of course you get to tell them about it. You get to say what's in it, why you made it, what you put into it. You get to offer. You get to be excited. Offering is not pushing. It's being generous, loving, kind. Do that. You can totally razzle-dazzle, sell them on it. Fantastic.

And if someone says, "No, thank you, I'm not in the mood for cake tonight," that's the whole exchange. Done. Their no is the completion of the transaction, not the opening of a negotiation. The cake information was an offering, the no is what you receive with love, and then you set it down. You can offer them a slice to go, maybe, but a no to that ends the convo. Capisce? Because the difference between pushing and poking and nudging and lovingly sharing is consent.

Can I share my thoughts with you about that? Is a fundamentally different move than just declaring it. Because it gives the other person the chance to say, "Yeah, actually, I'd love your take." Or, "No, thanks, I just need to be heard right now. I'm not looking for input." And both of those answers are valid, and neither one of them is a referendum on you at all. And both deserve to be received as what they are rather than overridden by your need to give the thing you came to give.

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"Do you want my honest take? Do you want advice? Or do you just want me to listen?" I think that is one of the most loving questions you can ask someone you care about because it puts their needs at the center of the exchange rather than your impulse to help, wherein you're defining help. And it means that when they say, "Yes, give me your honest take," your honest take actually lands. Right? Because they asked for it. They're ready to receive it. They want it. You're not delivering unsolicited cargo to someone who didn't order it and now has to figure out what to do with it while also managing their own feelings about the situation that they came to you about in the first place.

And then, when you do share, you share once. One time. You put the thing on the table. You say what you see. You say what you think. You say what you feel, and then you let it be theirs. You don't pick it back up and hand it to them again. You don't repackage it in slightly different words and try again. You don't bring it up three days later, three weeks later, three months later as a gentle follow-up. You said it. It lives with them now. What they do with your opinion is their business.

Here's an integral part of the move from codependent relating to interdependent relating. Trusting them to do something with it or not is the actual act of respect. That's the actual moment of true, "I love you." True, "I love you." I trust you as an autonomous adult to do what you think and feel is best vis-a-vis the advice I just gave you when you consented to advice. That's the love. That's the true gift. Because when you give a gift, you give it with open hands, open heart. Right? It's not like, oh, I'm giving you this TV, but please don't watch Fox News on it. That's not for me to say.

It's not, it's not mine anymore. And so too with my opinion, I give it as a gift. And you get to do what you want with it. That's yours, my love, mi amor. That's yours. It's not mine anymore because I don't manage your life. I get to lovingly share my opinion when you consent, and that's where it ends.

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Because the not-so-sneaky thing underneath both of these scenes is, I think I know something about your inner experience and your life that you don't. Or, your expressed preference is provisional until it aligns with my picture, my worldview of what's good for you. And the intention is almost always love. And the impact is almost always some version of, I have to work to be believed about my own experience, and that is tiring. And it erodes trust, and after a while, I will stop telling you things because the cost of the telling keeps being higher than I expected and maybe even higher than I can handle, given my bandwidth.

And here is what happens a lot of the time because fighting for your own no is exhausting, and most of us, I don't know about you, but I'm busy. I have other things to do. The person on the receiving end of the push just gives in. Not because they changed their mind, not because you made a compelling case, but because the energy required to hold the position has exceeded the energy available. And "okay, fine" is just faster.

So you go to the party. You try the restaurant you don't want to go to. You accept the gift you didn't want. You say, "Okay, fine." And you mean absolutely none of it. And the other person has no idea because to them, wrapped up in them wanting you to say yes, "okay, fine" sounds like consent. They think they got through to you. They think you'll be glad you went. They are already looking forward to how right they were, maybe getting a thank you card.

And then you're at the restaurant, and it's exactly as mediocre as you knew it would be. And you're tired in a way that has nothing to do with the hour, and there's a low-grade flatness to the evening that neither of you can quite name. The insister is confused because you seem off, and you are off. You're sitting inside an evening you didn't choose, that you actually said quite clearly you did not want, that you were talked into anyway. And the fact that it was done with love does not make the chair more comfortable or

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the food less previously frozen and recently microwaved. You didn't want to go to that restaurant, and you were clear, and there you are, not enjoying it.

We talked in episode 355 on burnout and chronic self-abandonment about how resentment is almost always the invoice for a yes that should have been a no. And this is exactly that. Served at a table you didn't pick at a restaurant that was someone else's insisted-upon idea. And the insister, for their part, often genuinely does not know this happened. They experienced a no that became a yes, and they filed it away as persuasion, as evidence that you just needed a little nudge, as confirmation that they do in fact know what's good for you.

So the next time you say no, they nudge again, because it worked last time, except it didn't work. You just ran out of fight. And so now you're slightly more depleted than before and slightly less likely to say what you actually want next time because, I mean, come on, what's the point? And this is how relationships, *sottovoce*, accumulate distance without anyone being able to point to the specific moment that it started and the real relating ended.

Now, if you're someone who recognizes themselves as the one who keeps saying, "Okay, fine," that exhausted capitulation is completely understandable, and it's also costing you. Holding a firm, clear, warm no when someone you love is gently persistent, it's genuinely hard. It takes more out of you than it looks like it should. I get that. And it's worth practicing anyway. Not to be rigid, not to win. Come on. But because the alternative is a slow accumulation of evenings and restaurants and gifts and events that weren't yours. And a version of yourself in that relationship who has learned that stating a preference is just the opening move in a negotiation.

"No, thank you." And "I mean it, we're done discussing this." "I love you, and it is a solid, hard no from me." That is a beautiful and loving sentence. And I would posit that it's an act of care and love for the relationship, even

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when, especially when, it disappoints someone in the moment. The invitation in all of this is simple, and it's not easy, and it is this. When someone tells you what they want, take them at their word on their first pass. Not, are you sure? Not, but have you considered? Just, okay. You want to stay home? Okay. You want the tomato juice? Okay. You're not going to say something to the coworker? Cool, cool, cool. Okay, okay. Full stop. No editorial, no second pass.

And in the doing of it, in this very small and ordinary act of receiving someone's stated preference as their actual preference, their actual want, their actual desire, you're giving them something so vital. You're telling their nervous system, I don't need to audit what you just said. I trust that you know what you want. You don't have to build a case here. Not with me. I respect you in the realest, deepest way. And that is a gift. And it's a small gift over and over, and those are the ones that make relationships feel safer and safer and safer.

If you're the one who's been chronically on the other end, whose preferences keep getting met with a gentle second opinion, whose humor keeps looking for a floor that isn't there, whose expressed reality keeps getting offered a revision, please be gentle with yourself about how sensitized you may have become. The rawness is important information. In reactivity to small moments, it's your nervous system accurately reporting the accumulated cost of having had to over-explain your own inner life. It is pattern recognition. It is not overreaction.

And at some point, not all at once, not necessarily in a confrontation, but incrementally, it's worth starting to name it. To the person doing it, if that feels possible because that's what's actually helpful. It can sound like this. "I notice that when I say what I want, we often end up in a conversation about whether I really want it. I'd love for my first answer to be taken as my truth." That's it. No indictment, no history, no case built from seven years of

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evidence, nothing about them, even at all. Just a clear, specific, direct ask about how you want to be received.

Some people will hear that and will shift. Some will need to hear it a few times, and some will keep going, keep insisting, keep pushing. In which case, you have more information than you had before about what this relationship can hold and what it can't. And that information, I find it really useful to have. Really useful to have, not necessarily to pull away from the relationship, but to know what I'm getting going in. To know what's likely going in. Right? My work is about recognizing that we cannot always change other, well, we can't really change other people. We can ask for change, but whether they'll enact it, stick to it, I can't change that, but I can change how I go in. I can change how resourced, how grounded, how oriented I am going into a conversation.

And that's this work. And if someone is like, "No, you don't mean it, no," or whatever, they probably will just say like, "Oh, okay," but then keep doing it. Pulling away isn't the thing that leads to our growth. It doesn't widen our window of tolerance. It, in fact, reifies within our system, like, I can't handle that, right? And maybe for a while, you need to pull away while you're in this process of self-strengthening. Great. Awesome. But the work really is to be able to sit with the person who negates your reality and not let it negate your reality. You know what I'm saying? Like that's the realest of the real, real work is to be like, oh, okay, so when I said, no, thank you, I don't want cheesecake, what did you hear me say? And then just like, leave it open. Right? Okay, well, I actually meant I don't want cheesecake. Thank you. And that's that work, not of being like cold or shut off or shut down, but just staying so present with yourself that they can have their opinion and their thought and can hear what they want to hear and hear what they're available to hear, and you get to know your own truth and stay grounded and centered in that.

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And it's a practice. It is a practice. And the practice of being taken at your word starts with you taking yourself at your word. Trusting that what you said the first time was the real thing because you said it. And so not softening it in anticipation of the pushback. Not pre-apologizing for the inconvenience of your want, desire, or preference. But rather saying the thing, meaning it, and letting it stand. Even when someone you love looks at you with that, you know that expression that means they're about to offer a gentle alternative, but also again, especially then, especially then. Yeah?

So my beauty, in closing, if you are the one who has the habit of pushing, I recommend working with a therapist, a coach, starting to journal, do some work around attachment, get really curious about why the pushing happens, why the insistence is coming up for you. Do some thought work, some somatic practice around it. Take it to breath work, take it to your medicine, and really get curious. That cigar could also just be a cigar. Your parents were pushers, and so you learned that's how love is shown, and you keep doing it because you never really realized, oh, that might be a problem. It might be just that simple. You just might need a linguistic flip and bada boom, it's not that deep.

But we won't know till we know, so get curious. Take a look. See what's under there. And if you're the person who's always getting pushed, you know what to do. You've got a lot of great advice and great thoughts in this episode. Go gently. Be sweet with yourself. Be compassionate. You're just a tender little wombat. Just a sweet little baby wombat. Be nice to you, okay?

All right. I mean, in keeping with the show, if you don't want to be nice to you, don't be. I mean, who am I to tell you to be nice to you? If you're like, no, I shan't be nice to me. I'm like, all right, that's up to you. Me? I'm going to be nice to you. Me, I'm going to love you. I'm going to love up on all of you. I don't know you, but I love you. It's true.

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If you want to work with me, if you like what you're learning here on the show, in my work, on my Instagrams, and in the book, let's work together. I'm available. I'm not too busy. Here's how. Anchored is my deep-dive intense coaching community. It is a six-month program. It is a cohort, containers wicked important. So details about that are at BeatrizAlbina.com/anchored. We offer that once a year, sometimes more. We'll see. We play it by the ears.

I also have a number of 12-week courses that are more self-paced and don't have coaching, but they do, drum roll, please, have an ask B  a anything thingy where you can ask me anything about the material, about the show, about how to apply all this, and I reply to you, yes, you, in a private podcast, which you get to download and keep forever and is only for the people in my 12-week program. So I think that's really special and really cool. You also get access to breath work, meditation with me. I mean, it's really a blast. You can learn more and sign up now at BeatrizAlbina.com/courses.

All right, my love. Thanks for listening to this two-parter. I hope it was helpful. I hope it was supportive. I hope it cast a light upon this issue of being taken at our word because it's a really deep one for us. So I'm sending you love. I'm sending you care. I'm so glad you're here, teddy bear. I didn't mean to rhyme, but then I did, and it was pretty great for me. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved.

And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. Ciao, ciao. Cu  date. Talk to you soon.