



How do you feel about other people telling you what to do, or ordering you around?

Most of us react with irritation, on the mild end, to outrage at the extreme, and all else in between. But the overriding narrative is, “Who do you think you are to tell me what to do?”

Are there exceptions? Sure. Some people feel more comfortable with another person, hopefully a competent and trustworthy one, in the lead. Provided the other party is respectful while being in charge, it can work with the right pairing of individuals.

And, there are situations that make order taking more palatable. When a police officer pulls me over, I make no mistake in knowing who is in charge. If my life hangs in the balance, and a more knowledgeable or capable person knows how to save it, I’m all ears. If you’re military or a first responder, accepting and executing orders is part of what you signed up for. If you’re a kid or student, anticipate orders, instructions and rules.

But when someone who doesn’t have your permission to do so begins preaching about how you should do this or think that or feel this way, resistance in one form or another is the likely reaction. Something inside us rises up and says, “No, I won’t, and you can’t make me.” I remember hearing those exact words spill from my mouth a time or two, particularly as a youngster.

Part of becoming one's own person involves asserting autonomy. Often, doing that requires someone to resist. In that sense, the individual lording over you represents an opportunity to inhabit what Mahatma Gandhi called "firmness in truth." One's own truth expressed with resolve.

When I was in high school, my father, bless his soul, badly wanted me to be a football standout. So, I hit the gridiron, even though knocking hell out of people isn't my preferred mode of interaction. I started on both sides of the ball, but after two years of playing scared, I decided to call it quits and put my energies elsewhere. That was my truth.

I realized that the truth my father wanted for me was far different and would stand in the way. What's more, he had a cheerleading squad composed of my mother, brothers, coaches and teammates. My only confidant was an older neighbor boy on his way to the seminary. His counsel was simple and left the ball in the court where it belonged . . . mine. He said, "Do what your heart tells you is right."

So, I did, and, as you'd expect, there was hell to pay. But I stood my ground, the hue and cry gradually abated, and I rested in knowing I had asserted to my social circle, and myself, the right to follow my intuition, not someone else's agenda.

High school football is one thing. The real challenge comes when there is much more to lose in doing it your way, in asserting your innate resistance to being handled. That's when "firmness in truth" is more than an inspiring

quotation, but also a sobering heads-up. Standing in one's truth requires grit. Others will test you. I've failed some of these and passed others.

Sure, resistance can be ill-targeted or over the top. Stubbornness for its own sake is no virtue, and resisting by harming or denigrating others is not strength. But, as for becoming your true self, life challenges each of us to stand in our own truth when others are cajoling or admonishing us to go their way.

As Stephanie Klein so aptly put it: "Tell your truth, or someone will tell it for you."

