

A Few Words About Self-Sabotage

by Debbie Lacy

A client once asked me to help her with “self-sabotaging behaviors.” She described a pattern where she’d take a couple of steps forward and then something would rise up from within her and push her back to the starting line. Here is what I told her: We never truly sabotage ourselves. We are ultimately always trying to keep ourselves safe. Even when we take risks, there is a degree of safety (faith, trust) we must hold as the first order of business. I believe that when a part of us is “sabotaging,” it is merely taking care of this other, primary need. It's self-protection.

The question, “What wants to be protected?” is a great one to ask yourself. Once you know the answer, you'll know that the part of you that is sabotaging is actually in charge of protecting those things. Then, you can get down to business and tell the “sabotaging” part something like: “I know you are trying to keep me safe, but I really want to accomplish this goal. How can we work together so there's safety *and* forward movement?”

That's just the first step, because the matter is complicated by the fact that the sabotaging part of you is attached to emotional- and body-memories. Staying in tune with your physical and emotional responses is essential. When you experience being stuck or you're not doing the things you set out to do, ask yourself what you're feeling. Try to name the emotion as well as the physical places in the body where you feel that emotion. It might be that your feelings are triggering that self-protective part of you. Try to create some safety for yourself whether it's gentle self-talk, taking some deep breaths, calling a close friend, or releasing the emotions in some way that feels right to you.

If your goal is something you truly want (and that is the first thing to get clear about -- you must decide), then this desire is what needs to be put in charge to lead the way. Nothing happens until you decide. If you're wavering, then there is no guiding force and the parts that are in charge of keeping you safe will go back to business as usual.