

CHAPTER ONE · FREE SAMPLE

STOP FEEDING THE SYSTEM

A field guide for narcissistic abuse recovery

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If the fight never finishes, it isn't a fight. It's a feeding schedule.

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THIS IS NOT A NORMAL ARGUMENT

If the fight never finishes, it isn't a fight. It's a feeding schedule.

You already know something is off. That's why you opened the book. You don't need anyone to tell you the last fight was bad. You need someone to tell you why it never finishes.

There is a kind of argument that ends. Two people get angry. One of them, eventually, says the sentence that lets the air out. I shouldn't have said it like that. Or I see what you mean now. Or just I'm sorry. And it lands. The body softens. The other person feels the change in the room and matches it. The fight has cost something, and both people pay. Then they go back to the kitchen, or the bed, or the car, and the day continues. It hurts. It heals.

Then there is the other kind.

The other kind does not finish. It pauses. It goes underground. It reappears two days later with a different label on the front. You think you resolved it last Tuesday. You did the work. You used the careful words. You took the share of it that was yours. And then on Thursday it surfaces again, reframed, with new evidence, and now the thing you said in the resolution is being used as proof of something else you did. The argument did not end. It went to ground and grew.

If that is the room you are in, you are inside something that does not run on conflict rules.

Ordinary conflict has one job. Repair. Two people who matter to each other accept that they hurt each other, want to stop hurting each other, and put the work in. There is heat. There are tears. There is the long flat hour afterwards where nobody quite knows what to say. But there is a destination, and both people are pointed at it.

Closed-loop conflict is doing something else.

It seeks control. It seeks superiority. It seeks exemption. It seeks supply.

Control is the argument that exists to set the rule for who decides. Where you go on

the weekend. Who you see. How loud you can speak in your own house. Whether the thing you remember last night happened. Control arguments do not have a topic. They have an outcome the other party needs. Superiority hides best. The argument seems to be about an issue, but the issue is a vehicle. The vehicle carries one passenger. The proposition that the other party is more intelligent, more rational, more honest, more loving, more correct than you. The argument ends the moment the proposition is conceded. It will not end before.

Exemption is the quieter one. It is not about being right. It is about being unaccountable. The other party did something. You named it. The argument's purpose is to relocate the conversation somewhere that does not require the other party to own the thing. By the end you are not talking about the thing they did. You are talking about how you brought it up.

Supply is the broadest of the four, and the one most readers miss. Some arguments exist to extract from you. Attention. Reaction. Reassurance. Energy. The late phone call. The five-hour text thread. The three-day silent treatment that ends with you knocking on the door of the spare room. Supply arguments run as long as you are still pouring fuel in. The moment you stop, the argument is over. Not resolved. Over.

One way to read the four. The argument is the transaction. The four jobs are the business model.

A coffee shop sells you a flat white. The transaction is the cup, the card tap, the five dollars, the thirty seconds at the counter. The business model is the answer to a different question. Why does this shop exist. It exists to sell four hundred drinks a day at a markup of eighty percent, to the same regulars walking past on the way to the train. The model decided the rent, the hours, the staff, the music. One bad transaction is annoying. The fourth bad transaction in a row is the model showing through.

The fight on Tuesday night was a transaction. You raised something small. They escalated. You explained. They reframed. You apologized. They went quiet. By Wednesday afternoon the air had cleared and you told a friend it had been a rough patch.

The fight on Tuesday night for the fourth month running is the model showing

through. Different stated topic. Different escalation. Same shape. The model is what makes the transactions repeat. The model decided the role you play, the rhythm of the weeks, the friends you stopped seeing, the money you get to spend.

You cannot fix a business model by being a better customer. The model belongs to the shop.

You have spent years trying to win all four as if they were the first kind.

That is the category error.

You will offer a careful explanation. It will be rephrased back to you, twisted half a turn, and presented as proof of your bad faith. You will apologize. The apology will be filed for later use. You will name a feeling. The feeling will be deemed disproportionate. You will withdraw. The withdrawal will be deemed cruel. You will return. The return will be deemed manipulative. Every honest gesture becomes raw material for the next round.

You are not bad at this. You are playing chess against someone who has the board set up for poker.

You go to bed late, half-relieved the argument has paused. You wake up early. You lie there going back through the conversation. You write a draft of what you should have said. You delete it. You write another. You think if I just said it more clearly, they would understand. You make coffee before it's light, you can hear them in the next room, and the body knows before the mind does that nothing is finished.

That ritual is the system feeding. You are the supply. The shape it leaves on a person is not weakness. It is adaptation. The body has been trained to scan for the next collision. Calm is short and conditional and probably means the other party is loading. The mind stops being able to leave the topic. The self gets smaller, because every time the self appears, the self is the thing the argument turns on.

Take any recent fight. Skip the fight itself. Go to the moment after.

Ask one question. What happened after harm was named? Did they acknowledge what they did, in their own words, without describing what you did to make them do it. Did they tolerate that your account differed from theirs. Did anything in their behavior change in the days that followed.

Or was there something else. A counter-charge. A re-litigation. A reframing in which your reaction has become the offense. A silence that produced more anxiety in you than the original wound. A delay long enough that the original harm could not be raised again without you looking like you were dragging it up.

You do not need a diagnosis to know which room you are in. The Repair Test, in time, will give you the structure. For now, just notice. After harm is named, in your room, what happens.

If repair happens, even slowly, you have one kind of problem, and parts of this book will help you with it, but you are not the main reader.

If repair does not happen, and the absence of repair has become so familiar that you have started to forget what repair is supposed to look like, you are the reader.

The argument is not the problem.

The argument is the delivery vehicle.

Inside the argument something is being achieved, and it is not understanding. Something is being extracted, and it is not honesty. Something is being reinforced, and it is not love. The argument is a machine that runs every few days, and you have been telling yourself that one day you will find the right combination of words to make it stop. You will not. The machine does not run on words. It runs on you.

FIELD EXERCISE: WHAT HAPPENS AFTER HARM IS NAMED?

Pick one recent rupture. Not the worst. Five days old or less, while the texture is still available. A notebook the other party cannot access. Phone notes are fine if the phone is locked and not synced anywhere they can read.

Write the rupture in three lines. What you said or did. What they said or did. The original wound in one sentence. Leave a gap. Below it, answer five questions in single sentences.

1. Did they acknowledge what they did, in their own words, without referencing what you did to provoke it?
2. Did the acknowledgement contain specifics, or general statements about being sorry you felt that way?
3. Did your account of the harm get to stand, even if they remembered it differently?
4. Did any behavior change in the

days that followed? 5. Did you find yourself, at any point, apologizing for raising it?

Read the page back. Date it. Put it where the other party will not find it.

The book begins here.

WHERE THIS GOES

You now know which kind of room you are in, or you know which question to keep asking. That was the whole job of this chapter.

Nothing that follows will ask you to confront anyone, leave anyone, or stay. It is not an indictment. It is a finding, and the finding is yours to keep private.

The first lesson of the course is free.

stopfeedingthesystem.com – no card, just an email.

The whole book, in print, Kindle and audiobook.

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