



## Familiar Paths

Sometimes we can go the farthest when we keep on familiar ground.

*"If all of the condiments are lined up, arranged by color, labels facing front, expiration dates highlighted, I can breathe." "I like to make perfectly straight lines with the snowblower... lawnmower...vacuum..." "No one messes with my car - it is immaculate and it stays that way." "It drives me insane when the kids leave the peanut butter knife out on the counter." "Is it really that hard to just \_\_ after you \_\_?"*

Does any of this sound familiar to you? Some may call this obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). We like to call it, preferences.

When your daily work life is mercilessly punctuated by the unknown, it is nice to be able to count on a few basic, predictable certainties. You kinda gotta know information like exactly where your essential equipment is located on the rig, how many bullets are left in your clip, that the meds you are pushing are D.I.C.C.E.d, and/or the ETA of your back-up if you are going to successfully make it through your shift. So bottom line, anything that we can take control over, we do, because so much of our day is absolutely unknown and literally out of control - that is why we are called on scene in the first place...

It is no mystery that this preference for control can follow us where ever we go, on or off duty. It is also not a mystery that in relationships with others, they may also have their own *preferences*, and this may cause some conflict from time to time. Here are some suggestions on how to deal with these potential differences: 1) **Know thyself.** Be curious and get to know what your preferences are and where they might come from. That way you will have a much better sense of your "must haves" vs. your "nice to haves." 2) **No shame allowed.** Once you have identified your "must haves," give up any shame around those preferences - it is what it is - no more, no less. Unless you are impaired, hurting yourself or others, your preferences are just fine. 3) **No blame, either.** You are a grown arse person and you can now make big boy/girl choices. If you have a preference, claim it as your own - don't make excuses or create drama about where it came from. Remember, it just is what it is. 4) **Be open and honest.** Yes, we know, if your *preferences* are discovered you may be mercilessly crammed at work; but especially when it comes to your most intimate relationships, if you don't share your truths you run the risk of feeling run over, insignificant, resentful, ashamed, furious, like an idiot, and/or a whole host of other less than pleasant feelings - all because you didn't have the guts to be vulnerable and openly share your what you feel is important.

Wanting/needing a certain level of control makes absolute sense given the chosen work that we do. Hiding, judging, shaming, blaming, labeling, etc. these preferences - especially within our intimate relationships - is rarely, if ever, productive. Rather it is best to be accepting, understanding, and respectful towards ourselves and others when it comes to these personal choices. If organizing the sock drawer just so, or eating the same food every Friday night, or needing the volume on the radio to be set on only even numbers makes your world a safer place, **that is just fine**. Truly, sometimes sticking to the familiar paths that we know give us a sense of comfort and predictability can help us be our most productive, safe, happy, and healthy self - on and off the job.

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