

Empathy without boundaries can turn into self-neglect

Dear Topi

What you are experiencing feels frustrating, not because of one isolated incident, but because of a pattern that is reshaping your friendship. Each time your friend disappears, cancels or withdraws, she shows you where you stand in her priorities. And each time she returns expecting things to continue as before, she also shows you what she believes you will tolerate.

It is worth challenging an assumption you may be holding onto: That her behaviour is harmless, situational or driven by excitement rather than intention. That interpretation may protect the friendship, but it may not reflect reality. People reveal who they are not only through consistency, but often even more clearly through inconsistency. When someone shows up only when it suits them, that is not accidental, it is a pattern, even if unconscious.

You have approached this with empathy, which is admirable. However, empathy without boundaries can turn into self-neglect. You have tried to understand her circumstances, but have you fully acknowledged your own experience? Being sidelined, deprioritised and then expected to reconnect without acknowledgment is not neutral. It places you in a position where your time and emotional investment are treated as flexible, while hers are treated as fixed and valuable.

Another belief worth questioning is the idea that maintaining the friendship as it is reflects kindness or loyalty. Loyalty is not proven by enduring imbalance.

Continuing to accept a one-sided pattern can reinforce it. By always being available when she returns, you may be teaching her, without words, that disappearing has no real

consequences.

This does not necessarily make her a bad person. It may mean she lacks awareness, emotional consistency or the ability to balance relationships. But those limitations are hers to address. The real question is whether you continue adjusting yourself around them.

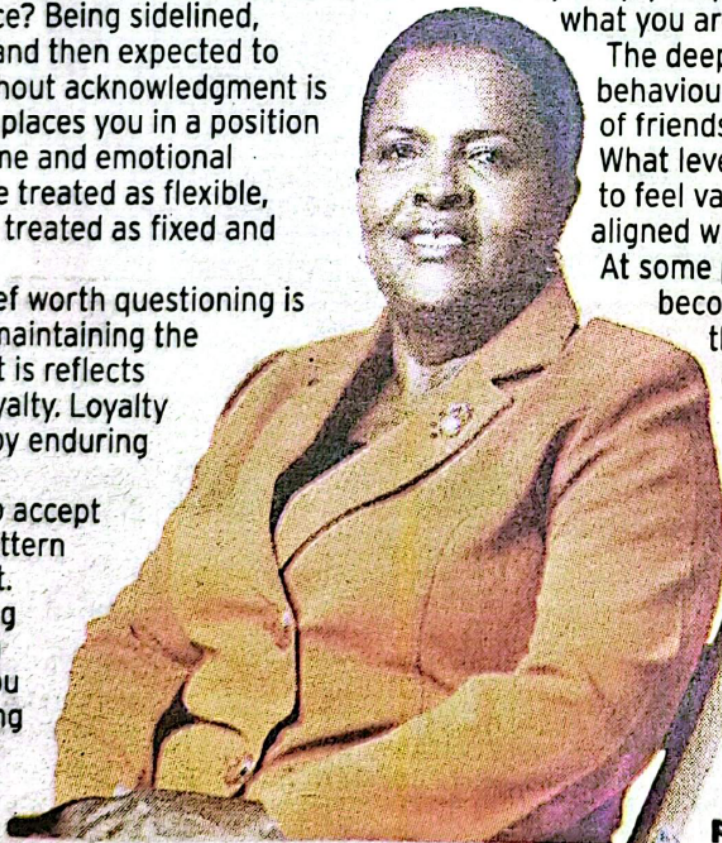
You have a few paths forward, each requiring a different kind of honesty. You can continue the friendship as it is, accepting that you are not a priority and choosing to be okay with that. You can redefine the friendship by lowering your investment, engaging more casually and no longer treating her as a dependable friend. This shifts the balance, but requires emotional discipline.

You can address the pattern directly by expressing how her behaviour affects you and seeing whether she takes responsibility. This offers the only real opportunity for change, but it also risks discomfort and distance. Or you can step away entirely, not out of anger, but out of choice.

Some connections do not need conflict to end; they simply stop aligning with who you are and what you are willing to accept.

The deeper question is not about her behaviour, but your standards. What kind of friendship feels respectful to you? What level of consistency do you need to feel valued? And are your actions aligned with those standards?

At some point, every relationship becomes less about understanding the other person and more about deciding what you are willing to continue participating in. The choice is yours. Whichever path you take, let it be a conscious one, not a continuation of habit.



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