

# Pleasing everyone, except yourself

Overcoming people-pleasing tendencies to become a stronger engineering leader







*When we suppress and repress our own needs, desires, expectations, feelings and opinions to put others ahead of ourselves so that we can gain attention, affection, validation, approval and love. Or we do it to avoid conflict, criticism, additional stress, disappointments, loss, rejection and ... abandonment*

*Natalie Lue - Author, Joy of Saying No*

# 10 Things I Hate About Myself

Know  
10 Things I ~~Hate~~ About Myself

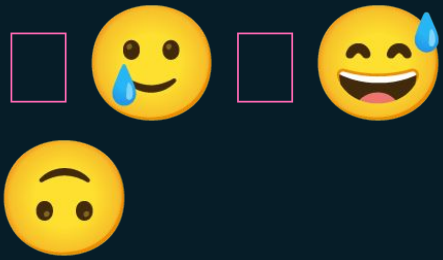
- I feel the need to make sure everyone is doing okay
- I am sometimes willing to sacrifice my own needs for others
- I apologize excessively
- I avoid conflict as much as I can
- I hate saying “NO”

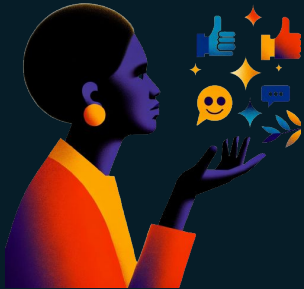
- I overcommit
- I find it hard to delegate
- I have a strong need for social approval
- I rarely accept credit or praise
- I have a strong urge to add an emoji to this sentence and tell you I am okay



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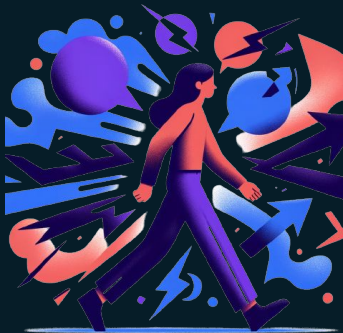




The Validation  
Seeker



The Invisible Martyr



The Peacemaker



The Loadbearer



## The Validation Seeker

### CHARACTERISTICS

🌈 Highly Agreeable

🌈 Eager to conform

🌈 Sensitive to others' opinions

### BEHAVIOURS




👉 Agrees with others, regardless of personal preferences

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### CHARACTERISTICS

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-  Neglects own needs
-  Is often unacknowledged

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### BEHAVIOURS

-  Overextends to make other happy sometimes at the cost of personal health or happiness
-  Struggles to say no
-  Regularly volunteers for tasks, especially those others avoid



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## The Peacemaker

### CHARACTERISTICS

- 🌈 Non-confrontational
- 🌈 Anxious about upsetting others
- 🌈 Highly cooperative

### BEHAVIOURS

- 🦄 may struggle with decision-making if it could lead to discord
- 🦄 Internalizes issues instead of addressing them



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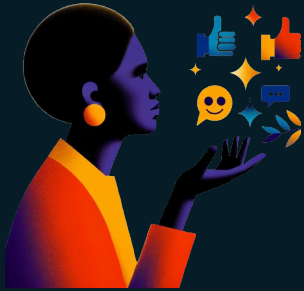
## The Loadbearer

### CHARACTERISTICS

- 🌈 High sense of responsibility
- 🌈 Perfectionist

### BEHAVIOURS

- 🐾 Struggles to delegate tasks
- 🐾 Tends to micromanage to ensure tasks are done to their standards.
- 🐾 Imposes very high standards on self



The Validation  
Seeker



The Invisible Martyr



The Peacemaker



The Loadbearer





# SCENE



## PRODUCT FEATURE LAUNCH MEETING



*Team has been working on a feature for 8 weeks. The Product Manager decides to bring key stakeholders in a room together to discuss the Go-To-Market Plan which is scheduled for 4 weeks from now.*

### *Attendees*

*Alex - Product Marketing Manager - The Validation Seeker*

*Jordan - Customer Success Manager - The Invisible Martyr*

*Masha - Tech Lead - The Peacemaker*

*Taylor - Product Manager - The Loadbearer*





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# Situation 1 - The Validation Seeker

## *Alex, Product Marketing Manager*

- *Has strong doubts about the quality of the feature*
- *His manager is very excited about the feature, and believes that this should be a Tier 1 (high priority, high impact, high effort) feature launch*

*Action: Alex decides to enthusiastically support this opinion, and echoes the positive sentiments of senior management.*

*Outcome: It goes ahead as a Tier 1 launch. He doesn't raise his concerns and views. The feature's return on investment is poor, and the market launch doesn't succeed. It reflects on his performance review.*

# Situation 2 - The Invisible Martyr

## *Jordan - Customer Success Manager*

- *Has early feedback from big enterprise customer that the feature isn't meeting their needs*
- *Doesn't want to hurt the feelings of the team who've worked so hard*

*Action: Jordan decides to share partial feedback and see if the feature works out after all, meanwhile trying to convince the customer on behalf of the team*

*Outcome: Several weeks after launch there's little to no adoption of the feature. Team decides to scrap it entirely.*

# Situation 3 - The Peacemaker

## *Masha, Tech Lead*

- *Is not confident of the timeline for the feature delivery*
- *Predicts there will be quality issues*

*Action: Masha doesn't raise this in the meeting because she is afraid that the Product Manager will be frustrated that she hasn't said it earlier and snap at her.*

*Outcome: 3 weeks later, every launch related campaign is in place ready for the go live - this includes social media posts, release notes, press conference and there are 3 P0 bugs that still need fixing. This leads to a lot of work being postponed and undone.*

# Situation 4 - The Loadbearer

## *Taylor - Product Manager*

- *Has a lot of their plate*
- *Doesn't trust Alex, the PMM to do their job well*
- *Is invested personally in this feature*

*Action: Taylor decides to do most parts of the launch, including the social media side*

*Outcome: Several checklist items for Go to market are missed, the launch is really sloppy and Taylor needs a vacation.*



The Validation Seeker

*Adopting a new tool/technology*



The Invisible Martyr

*Salary Negotiation*



The Peacemaker

*Managing an underperformer*



The Loadbearer

*Delegating Growth Opportunities*



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*Delegating Growth Opportunities*

*How to overcome people-pleasing?*



HEALTHY  
BOUNDARIES

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR BOUNDARIES

- Emotional Boundaries

- How do I manage emotional responses to project challenges or team conflicts?
- What are my limits for providing emotional support versus maintaining a professional leadership stance?

- Time Boundaries

- How do I balance time spent on hands on technical work vs leadership vs administration tasks?
- What strategies do I use to manage work hours, especially during critical project phases?

- Intellectual Boundaries

- How do I handle disagreements or diverse opinions in technical meetings and strategy sessions?
- What are my boundaries for sharing my expertise and delegate decision-making responsibilities?

- Energy Boundaries

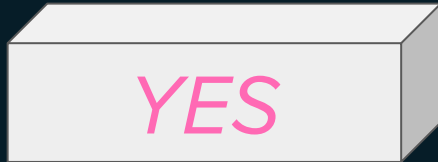
- How do I manage my energy levels to stay focused on both technical and leadership tasks?
- What are my strategies for delegating tasks to avoid burnout and ensure I am available for work that motivates me?

## SITUATION:

*My team was working on several critical projects with tight deadlines at the cost of tech-debt. My Product Manager approaches me with another project, which is important but not urgent and asks me if we can prioritize it in the next sprints.*

## MY RESPONSE (circa 2018)

*Yes, we'll make it work.*

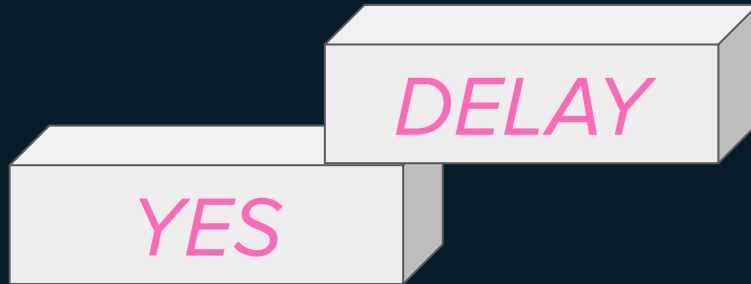


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## MY RESPONSE (circa 2020)

*Hey, let me check how things are progressing with the current priorities and let me get back to you.*



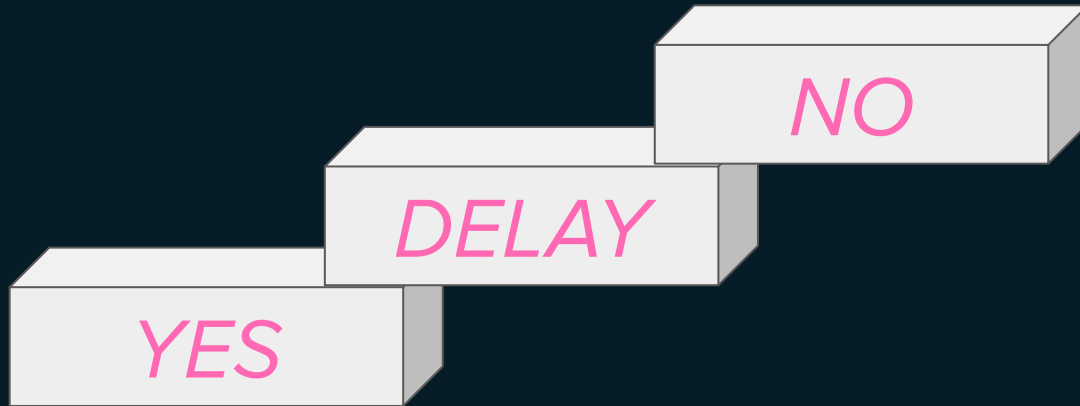


## SITUATION:

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## MY RESPONSE (now)

*Unfortunately, I'm inclined to say no until next quarter. If we have bandwidth for something additional, I'd rather it be the E2E Tests or Monitoring tasks we descoped. Does that seem fair?*





## Reflect and Understand

- ✦ Journal
- ✦ Coaching
- ✦ Build a community
- ✦ Practice Mindfulness



## Define small steps

- ✦ Create a Delay script
- ✦ Create a No Script
- ✦ Establish a routine



## Evaluate and Reinforce

- ✦ Read past journals
- ✦ Map your boundaries
- ✦ Recognize your emotions
- ✦ Define clear priorities for yourself
- ✦ Learn to delegate

# *Tips & Strategies*

# The Validation Seeker

## 🌟 Strategies 🌟

- 🌟 Celebrate yourself
- 🌟 Cultivate a support network
- 🌟 Bring data into your decision making
- 🌟 Embrace failure as an opportunity
- 🌟 Foster feedback culture
- 🌟 Don't forget to share praise forward



Based on the reach and impact of the feature and the feedback from our customers, I recommend that we do a Tier 2 launch instead.

Alex - Product Marketing Manager  
Wants good feedback from their manager

# The Invisible Martyr

## ✨ Strategies ✨

- ✨ Communicate your efforts
- ✨ Seek feedback and recognition
- ✨ Document your work
- ✨ Prioritize visible work over invisible
- ✨ Recognize signs of compassion fatigue



This may be disappointing news, there's been feedback from our customers that this feature isn't solving their need. Can we iterate and readjust our timelines?

Jordan - Customer Success Manager  
Wants to protect the team's feelings

# The Peacemaker

## ✨ Strategies ✨

- ✨ Role play difficult scenarios
- ✨ Embrace asynchronous communication
- ✨ Reframe the value of conflict
- ✨ Balance advocacy and inquiry
- ✨ Practice mindfulness and stress-relief techniques



Masha - Tech Lead  
Wants to avoid conflict

# The Loadbearer

## ✨ Strategies ✨

- ✨ Learn how to delegate
- ✨ Set realistic, small goals
- ✨ Invest in productivity tools
- ✨ Clarify Roles and Responsibilities
- ✨ Plan for downtime



Why don't we split the launch work, you take drafting the posts and I'll work with the Ops team.

Taylor - Product Manager  
Volunteers to do all of the work





Nikita Rathi (She/Her)



THANK YOU!

Let's connect on LinkedIn and share other stories of people pleasing and ways you've overcome them! 🙏



Senior Engineering Manager @ Taxfix

