

Pretoria-based counselling psychologist, Tenjiwe Lindiwe Bayi believes that putting someone first means considering their needs, opinions, wants, feelings and thoughts before your own. This scenario can play out seamlessly in small ways from choosing a movie or restaurant to a holiday destination. There's no harm in pleasing your partner, after all.

Bayi warns that these small concessions can lead to a greater submissive role within relationships. It might not seem like a big deal when your partner gets the pizza without consulting you, but it's a different matter entirely when it comes to deciding on where to settle down or selecting schools for your children.

*Thuli learnt this lesson when her husband signed a contract for a job in another city without so much as asking for her opinion. "He came home and casually mentioned that we'd be moving from Joburg to Durban in two months," she explains.

"The most awful part was that he genuinely didn't understand why I was so angry. It took me a long time



LOVE HIM BUT PUT YOURSELF FIRST

When it comes to romance, where does compromise give way to total domination? EOA finds out.

to realise that, because I'd never insisted he consult me about the small things, he didn't feel he had to consult me about the big things, either."

Relinquishing control may masquerade as compromise, so it is important that you retain the right to voice your opinion, loudly and unapologetically.

DRAWING THE LINE

"Compromise and sacrifice are imperative in a relationship. You are influenced by your partner and you also influence your partner. Compromise is a two-way street," Bayi advises, emphasising that compromise should never involve

neglecting your feelings for the benefit of the other person.

When we become involved in a relationship, it is tempting to put our partners first – especially if this method of loving comes easily to you. In fact, if this is how you've always shown love and appreciation, you might not even know you're doing it.

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"I ended up going to therapy because my relationship had become so unhappy. Through my sessions I realised that watching my mother give all of herself, physically and emotionally to my father without ever putting herself first, made me believe that that was the only way to show love," Thuli says.

Bayi believes that inevitably, this scenario will lead to resentment. "If you are a person that puts your partner first and neglects your own needs, in time you will become unhappy, frustrated and resentful," she explains. She also notes that it's worth taking time to reflect on your individuality within the relationship.

"Can you still see yourself outside of the relationship? Do you have a voice within it or are you feeling unheard or taken for granted?"

THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

It isn't always easy to address your concerns and share your feelings with your partner, but you will have to if you want the dynamic of the relationship to change.

"Communicate with your partner to prepare them for the changes that will happen," Bayi advises, "and start falling in love with yourself. Thuli did exactly that, and she feels grateful that she was patient during the long process.

"We did end up moving to Durban, but my husband and I now discuss everything as equals and he actually loves how assertive I've become." This means being selfish in the sense of self-love and self-worth. Be confident and believe in yourself."

Initially both of you may struggle to adapt to the new tone of the relationship, but keep in mind that these are positive changes that should result in a closer bond with your partner. "Loving and prioritising yourself actually enables you to maintain a healthy relationship," Bayi says. It's no good belonging to a partnership if you're unable to stand firm as an individual. **E**

*Name changed for privacy

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