Caretaking vs Caregiving

I awoke the other day with the saying "Love knows no bounds," running through my mind like a jingle you can't get out of your head. Perhaps it's the editor in me, but I wanted to revise the statement because it struck me as incomplete. While on the surface the line sounds like a lovely truism, it hit me as a dangerous enticement for those of us with codependent or care*taking* tendencies. Candy to a child and all that. I found myself adding a bold-faced, italics, underscored, all in capitals *BUT* that screamed a warning.

Then my internal editor changed the "but" to "SO," finally amending the adage to: "Love knows no bounds, *SO* it needs boundaries."

My monkey mind wasn't content to let it go at that, however, and two other familiar lines from songs about love popped into my head. So now I had actual tunes swimming around. I amended one to, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love, *WITH* reasonable limits." The other became, "All you need is love *AND* balance."

Why all this focus on boundaries, limits, and balance when it comes to something as wonderful and necessary as love? Because I've seen the toll providing *too* much to too many too often can take. And I know from my own life how easy it is to get so consumed with being a caregiver to others that we forget to care for ourselves in the process. Through trial and *way* too many errors, plus the collective wisdom of caregivers who have "been there and done that," I have learned the difference between care*giving* and care*taking*. Here's how I describe it in my recent book *Take Good Care: Finding Your Joy in Compassionate Caregiving*:

"I think of caretaking as codependency's close cousin. However, while there has been a trend to think of codependency as a pathological disease that requires treatment (or a support group), I don't view caretaking through that same lens. While many caretaking behaviors may be similar to codependent behaviors, my aim is to normalize them somewhat because I believe we all have a tendency to care*take* from time to time.

I think it helps to think of care*taking* as the out-of-balance and 'self-centered' behaviors that reflect a person's deep need to be in control and accepted. On the other hand, care*giving* consists of more balanced behaviors that reflect compassion and concern for others. You might say care*taking* is more about getting love, while care*giving* is more about giving it."

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(accessed 11/19/19 https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/orange/difference-caregiving-caretaking)