

# SPOOKED

## BEWARE OF THE HALLOWEEN PRINCIPLE

*by Steven Gaffney*



**A**re there life principles that you used to live by, but now you don't? Have you ever allowed someone to spook you to such an extent that you change your behavior? It's natural to let someone's bad reaction derail us from doing what we know needs to be done. I encounter this reality so often as I speak with people across the country about communication issues that I have a name for it: The Halloween Principle – because people get spooked, and then they start living according to fear rather than the life principles they believe in.

The sad part is we often do this subconsciously, meaning that we're unaware of how much a past situation is affecting our present. If

left unnoticed and unchecked, our changed behavior could even alter our future.

It often takes someone to point it out before we can say to ourselves, "That is so true. I know what needs to be done and I know certain life principles work, but I'm not living that way."

To help you see whether you've been spooked, let's look at a few life principles that most people believe in but have trouble living by because the Halloween Principle has taken over.

### **1 Honesty Is the Best Policy**

Most people I meet believe that honesty is the best policy. They may even believe they live by it. But on

further examination, they don't. When they are upset, they stuff what they are thinking and feeling and tell others that things are okay. Or when people ask them for feedback, they spin their answers to sound nice and pleasant out of fear that if they say what they really think, that person will get defensive and react badly.

The result is that people don't get their issues handled. In our personal lives this can lead to all kinds of trouble. Spouses fall out of love and get divorced. Kids fear telling their parents the truth or just don't feel comfortable talking, so they stop talking with their parents and get advice and support from peers instead. Good friends get annoyed or

angry, drop out of communication, and friendships slips away. When issues aren't handled in our professional lives, program and project problems can escalate into bigger problems; good employees get fed up and leave, and clients and customers stop hiring us.

Considering all these negative ramifications, why do people continue to withhold, spin, and alter the truth when they know that honesty is integral to fixing problems? After all, someone can't fix a problem if they don't know about the problem.

When I ask people why they withhold or spin the truth, they often say, "I used to be more honest and straightforward. But awhile back, I was in a situation and...." And then they proceed to tell me how a boss, a spouse, a co-worker, or a friend got upset when they spoke the truth and took it out on them in one way or another. No wonder people get spooked.

**2 The Law of Reflection.** The Law of Reflection says that whatever we give out in life, we tend to get back. You may say it another way: what goes around comes around, you reap what you sow, do unto others, but it's all the Law of Reflection.

Most people know this is a sound principle to live by, but few implement it to its fullest capability. For example, sometimes a person chooses not to give as much as they could because in the past they encountered someone who took and took – and kept on taking until they drained that person dry. So that person allowed someone's selfishness to stop them from giving their heart and soul to others. In other words, they allowed the person to spook them and started to live by the Halloween Principle.

On further reflection, this person may realize that we all run into selfish people from time to time, even people so selfish that they'll take advantage of others. But that is no reason to stop living the Law of Reflection -- because there are always exceptions to the rule. In general, however, the more we give and help out others -- whether that's our boss, our co-workers, our employees, our spouse, or our friends -- the better our life will work.

## Choose to Overcome the Spook

No principle will always work out just right. But as a whole, these life principles do work and provide benefits to us and to others. For that reason, we have to stop letting people spook us. We need to make our choices and live by our principles rather than allowing others to derail us and dictate how we're living.

When we become aware of the Halloween Principle, it gives us the power to choose a different course of action—the one we know is right for us.

Here are a few practical recommendations for disarming the Halloween Principle:

**1. Separate:** When you feel an internal disconnect between the way you want to live and the way you currently are living, try to remember when that disconnect started. Then ask yourself why you're allowing that situation to continue to affect you. Maybe it is time to separate from the situation by forgiving and letting go. If you can't let it go yet, implement some practices to work on it. If you are not sure of one, contact us and we can give you some simple recommendations that produce a profound effect.

**2. Counteract:** There are several ways to counteract the Halloween Principle. First, surround yourself with people who have the attributes you want to live by. If you believe that honesty is the best policy, make sure the people around you are willing to tell you the truth and who won't get defensive as you speak your truth. If you want to live by the Law of Reflection, then choose to be around people who try to help out and give value to others. Another important key to counteracting the Halloween Principle is to read books and articles, listen to podcasts and radio broadcasts, and watch DVDs that provide information, advice, and encouragement to live by the principles that are important to you. Remember this: insights can happen in an instant, but sustained change takes effort, reinforcement, and reminders.

**3. Model:** In the future when you encounter someone who spooks you from being yourself, ask yourself whether this is an exception or the new rule. Remind yourself that every life principle has exceptions, but overall, they do work. Choose to live your life principles -- modeling them for yourself and others -- rather than being controlled by your reaction to an exception. Think about the situation as a valuable reminder of the importance of standing up for what you know is right and taking responsibility for your life.

Who have you allowed to spook you? Have you stopped living by any of your life principles? Now that you are aware of the Halloween Principle, what are you going to do about it?

**If you need help or would like more information, please call us or send an email to [info@stevengaffney.com](mailto:info@stevengaffney.com).**

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Steven Gaffney is a leading expert on increasing team performance, collaboration, and managing change through honest communication. He is one of the recognized authorities on the subject of honesty. He is also the author of three ground-breaking books, *Just Be Honest: Authentic Communication Strategies that Get Results and Last a Lifetime*, *Honesty Works! Real-World Solutions to Common Problems at Work and Home* and his newest book, *Honesty Sells! How to Make More Money and Increase Business Profits*.