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What I think it takes to be a good top

1 [GloriaBrame](#)

2002-10-31 05:02

To start this section off with a bang, Catherine has provided us with the following essay. I have a feeling November is going to be an awesomely interesting month!

GGB

"What I Think It Takes to be a Good Top"
by Catherine Gross

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Please know everything I put out is simply my point of view and beliefs. They may work for you or not. They are not law or any greater than another person's opinion. It is simply my own ideas placed here for your use and personal determination.

I think there are certain characteristics that a top should be able to bring to the table. I believe these characteristics allow a top to be better than average. I do not sit in judgment of tops that do not bring these aspects to their relations. However, I think a top would be unacceptable to me who didn't have these skills.

The first is clarity. As a top, you need to know what you want. Do you want service? Do you want a masochist? Do you want your bottom to keep the same head space all the time? Do you want varied space such as Mommy or Daddy? What type of games do you want to play with this person?

If you do not know what you want as a top, you will be completely unable to further define the details of how you will manage the relationship. Being clear in all things is paramount to a good relationship. This is foundational and cannot be skipped over. As a top it is up to you to create the structure of your relationship. You cannot do so without personal clarity.

You must have an understanding of your personal boundaries. You need to know what's acceptable to you and be able to communicate exactly what those boundaries may be. You should also be clear what the consequences of breaching a boundary is. Know the difference between a deal breaker and a solvable issue. For your boundaries to mean anything, you need to be consistent in the enforcement of them. You cannot have a breached boundary and not deliver the consequences. If you do not deliver them you will lose the respect of

a breeched boundary and not deliver the consequences. If you do not deliver them, you will lose the respect of those who serve you. You will appear to be wishy-washy and unreliable. It will break down the trust in your relationship because what you say and what you actually do are different and do not match up.

Some examples from my own boundaries are: 1) Never lie to me, if you do, the relationship is over; 2) What happens in the privacy of my family, stays within the family. I will consider this a breach of trust and the consequence is dependent on whether this was clearly an accident or not; 3) My bedroom is not entered unless permission is granted; 4) My privacy must remain intact (don't read what's on desk, etc.); 5) Time, attention, play and sex are decided solely by me; and 6) Servants will never have a say in who I play with, when I play or how I play.

Being clear about what is acceptable on a basic level and what isn't is fine for play here and there. Not knowing what you want from this person when you're moving into a deeper, contracted, or collared relationship isn't ok. Your job as a top is to know and to communicate your vision so the bottom can make informed decisions as to whether or not you are the type of toy they wish to serve. I highly suggest making a concrete list. It's helpful.

Another aspect of excellent topping is good, clear management. You must be able to manage people well. First you know how you wish to play with this person and what you want from them as discussed. Then you manage the relation. One part of good management means that you are prepared to use your bottom's time well.

Let's use house cleaning as an example. You have someone who is going to come to your home and you know they have exactly six hours to be with you. You have to prepare for your servant. If you have them for 6 hours, you must fill that time. You must know what you want done in the house and how you want these things done. You cannot simply say—go girl and clean.

If you aren't prepared, you aren't managing your bottom well or doing your job. This preparation is your job, what you bring to the exchange and generally the key to allowing the bottom the feeling that you have it together, are a good person to serve and that they have been well used. There is no way around it. After all, I don't believe tops should be so helpless that they are unable to organize themselves. If they are, how could they possibly manage/organize bottoms well?

I can't stress enough the importance of learning a bottom's limits and capabilities. This comes from listening during negotiations. Have them tell you about past relationships. This can be full of information you may really wish to have for future reference. Ask about their fantasies, their fears, and their secrets. Then know how to expand their lists and fantasies. Listen carefully so you know where to push and where not to push. Being able to do these things is part of how one keeps bottoms interested. You need to have periods of rest and periods of pushing. It's up to you to create situations that allow them to learn more about themselves and more about you. Goals are one way to up the ante. It's a good way to keep things fresh, mobile and interesting.

Devise ways to utilize this person according to their skills, interests and needs that fits with what you want. Utilizing the full person at your disposal is not just smart but allows the bottom to be exercised mentally. You want smart servants who feel the challenge.

The duties must match whom the person is that you have selected. Discern what this person is best suited to do and to be as a servant. Many people do not understand that we do not need to reinvent the wheel. We can use

the past and various service models to discern the realm of possibility of service. While we may need to change some aspects because this isn't 1624 anymore, many of the basics will apply. Being able to evaluate property in my opinion is a particularly important skill in tops. Bottoms come with a diluted language (girl, boy, submissive, slave). It is up to the top to discern the specifics of what that may mean for each individual parcel of property. It is up to you to figure out their particular niche in service according to your understanding. If you don't know, how can you direct them properly? It is also equally important to make sure who they actually are, not your fantasy of them, fits with your vision and needs.

It's also up to you to evaluate what they know and what they don't. This will provide out a plan for you immediately as to what they need to learn to improve their position and happiness. It is up to you to train this person to respond as you wish them to. It is up to you how you will allow them to know your needs. It is up to you to teach them to present as you wish them to present. Training is important and up to the top generally. It does not mean a bottom comes to you without skills. Many have educated themselves well or even been trained

Does not mean a bottom comes to you without skills. Many have educated themselves well or even been trained by another. However, since the most successful relations are tailor-made ones, this means that you must teach them from your particular set of preferences. They can't simply learn it by focusing and paying attention. As you embark on this, do not forget to utilize mistakes well. Mistakes are a great tool, they teach you what you need to teach them. They are a guideline. Not to mention, if bottoms were perfect and came to you perfectly, you would miss many opportunities for interaction that deepen the relationship.

Creating protocols are part of any d/s relation. This is another aspect of good top management. I recommend creating systems that have the 3 p's 1) point; 2) purpose; and 3) pleasure. The protocols and actions that ensue from protocols do need to make sense. Many bottoms need to initially understand why they are doing what they are doing in the beginning of a relationship. This understanding creates trust that can lead to devotion that can lead to a highly self-motivated servant.

Generally it isn't in the best form to drop an entire list of protocols on a bottom immediately- they can't remember everything immediately and it doesn't allow time for growth and tailoring these protocols. All well running system must be adjusted from time to time. Giving protocols in small doses allow for this growth and change. If you give a servant 3-5 over two weeks and then add 3 more and so on, you will have a good system that allows the bottom to feel accomplishment as they learn each one instead of overwhelmed. Providing this time also allows you as a top to focus and correct their actions without fail. In doing so, you will know them better as a servant and further tailor lessons and your game plan to create the best servant for you. By the end of six months, you will have a person who is well trained to your standards and needs.

As a top you should have a solid decision-making process in everything you do. That means distilling your personal feelings out of many situations. It means logically looking at what is "best" for your property- and that it isn't about you all the time. If you can do this, if you're willing to put yourself aside at times and make decisions that are good for your property and perhaps not good for you- then you are ready to be an owner.

If you can't do this- I'd say play, top and enjoy but don't own in a manner that makes you responsible for making decisions for this person regarding what they can and cannot do. This could be the single most important skill you bring to any relation. Having this particular sensibility, could teach you when to make things all about you and when it's too important to be about you at that moment. It may tell you when you're wrong before someone else has too. It may keep you from making mistakes that are potentially harmful to your property and your relationship.

If you feel you can't manage your own life and having a submissive will help you clean up your life- you have no business owning. You must be clear about your own life before you can manage someone else's life. You must be willing to do the work of ownership and dominance. If you're not clear, play on weekends until you're willing to be responsible in full for another person.

Let's talk about your responsibilities as a top for a while. First and foremost, don't do anything you aren't qualified to do. If you are experimenting, do so only if you're willing and able to clean up the mess you may create. I think you should only experiment in ways that you know won't possibly end in damage. If you want to do something truly dangerous, go to someone who knows how and offer to trade skill sets. Learn your craft well and set a great foundation. After all, you'll be furthering and learning your craft for the rest of your life. Give the rest of your life something good to stand on.

I think all tops should know how to own your actions. This means you don't get to cut corners cause it's easier, you don't get to have your ego in the room, and you fully recognize that high school is over. This means you know how to apologize when needed, be sincere, own mistakes, have better coping skills than the long list of passive/aggressive actions. You don't get to act in anger, have revenge, or any other sophomoric behavior. Be secure in who you are and unapologetic for what you want.

Behave in an ethical manner. That means honesty about self and others. That means even when you're afraid to tell the truth, you do it anyway because it's the right thing to do. Pursue nothing that will do damage or harm or take a life. Have your own interests that are separate from your bottom- do not make them the end all be all. No one can live up to that. You are separate individuals and both of you need to function well on those individual levels.

Provide clear instruction and good management. Be clear in your communications to your bottom. Be willing to answer questions and encourage them. Be point blank clear in setting your boundaries. Know who you are as an individual and do not allow servants to define you.

Take good care of your property without being a caretaker. It is not your job to "fix" things in their life. It is not your job to supply answers to the philosophical questions of their life like, "Who am I?" It is not your job to break their falls if they make a mistake. This is one of the greatest mistakes I have seen tops make over and over. They attempt to take good care of their property by not allowing their property to make a mistake. If you do this, you are stealing their ability to learn from the situation. You are stealing their ability to learn that they can "fix" their own life and save themselves. All you are doing is interfering with the basic self-esteem lessons that each and every one of us needs to learn as we age. I don't call that love. I don't call that taking good care of your property. I call it smothering, care taking and exhibiting a lack of trust that this individual is smart and has chosen the best path to learn what they need to learn most.

Your responsibilities as an Owner differ somewhat. You agree to take responsibility for certain things in your properties life. Clarity again is key to creating a good, sound relationship of duration. You will need to make decisions that are consistently good for your property- they are your first and foremost responsibility. If this relation is long term, you must provide for them in the event of your death. I recommend providing growth-oriented challenges for them so they grow in their craft. In the case of owners, there are many things not covered here. This is a very basic explanation regarding the owner's responsibility. Said responsibility could be a class unto itself.

In summary, be clear regarding your desires and your understanding of your personal boundaries. Provide good, clear management that makes sense. Create a good structure and uphold it consistently. Be able to make sound decisions for your property and know when they can be about you and when they can't. Be responsible for all you do and say and be a model of good behavior so your property can continue to admire and respect you.

I think all of this is the bare bones minimum for being a good top. What do you think?

Lady Catherine

2 [memneth](#)

2002-10-31 15:12

Your right.

Justin Medlin
YDWPFWEP

3 [TooLoose](#)

2002-10-31 16:46

>> I think all of this is the bare bones minimum for being a good top. What do you think?

An excellent list :-) Here's a few related questions.

- How does a new Dom reach those lofty goals? How does one become such a person?
- How can a sub find such a person? where to look?

TooLoose :-)

4 [notnilla](#)

2002-11-01 00:26

Hi TooLoose,

You asked, "How does a new Dom reach those lofty goals? How does one become such a person?"

I think a new Dom can reach those goals by being a whole person. I believe strongly that much of what I am talking about are life skills. How do we decide how to be a good friend? Or an excellent, patient parent? We learn how we wish to be treated and hopefully treat others in the same manner. We grow up and attain self esteem. When one has attained a healthy level of self-esteem one generally doesn't feel a need to shout, exact revenge, react defensively as we know who we are. When we're solid and know who we are, we have also

assessed our flaws with a gentleness that allows empathy and sympathy for others. This provides a hearing ear that doesn't leap but tends to learn and assess in a deliberate manner which further leads to well thought out deliberate decisions for ourselves and others.

These are life skills of people who cherish themselves, others and can be honest because they don't feel shame due to being out of sync with their personal views of integrity.

In other words, we decide each moment who we will be. We decide how closely we will look in the mirror and we either do the right thing or we don't. We become our best selves by making the right choices to lead our best lives and do so without the leash of fear that almost always leads us to make poor decisions. We take responsibility for our actions and decisions. We create the person we wish to be day by day, decision by decision.

You also asked, "How can a sub find such a person? Where to look?"

By becoming their best selves. Know yourself well, be honest, don't cut corners, cultivate the life skills in yourself that you wish to find in another. If something isn't acceptable in another person, then it isn't acceptable for you to exhibit those behaviors either.

Be whole, know yourself and it won't be that difficult to discern who around you also shares the elegance of living well as you do. So, where do you look, first you look inside yourself and then to the rest of the world.

Catherine

5 [Hawkins's kate](#)

2002-11-01 05:40

Hello Lady Catherine,

well, my month has started off with a flourish. Thank you so very very much for that article.

I've printed it out (which is a first) on nice paper, and put it in my Master's tray to read.

I'll let you know what he thought, although I don't think more than big applause and more praises will ensue.

Looking forward to reading more,

kate

ps. I'm sure someone already did this, and I am not sure it is my place to, as I have not been here so long yet, but for what it is worth:

Be Welcome here, Lady Catherine

6 [notnilla](#)

2002-11-01 09:36

Dear kate,

Thank you for the compliment of printing the essay. I hope your Master enjoys it. I also appreciate the welcome. I have no doubt I will enjoy my stay here completely.

Lady Catherine

7 [TheirFaerieGirl](#)

2002-11-03 14:57

I think everything C said is right on. I also think however that you can NOT be a good top unless whomever you are topping is willing to say "Omg .. _____ is a good top"

8 [willbehis4ever](#)

2002-11-04 15:36

Lady Catherine,

Well said! ::smile:: I found myself nodding in agreement. Of course, I come at this from the other end of the spectrum, but I think what you are describing are good life skills for anyone in a position of authority. Those skills

allow the ones you have authority over to feel safe, to be clear in what is asked of them, and to know that they will be expected to excel and to take responsibility for their own actions. Speaking of taking responsibility...on to the "punishment" thread!

me(cherry) and Welcome from me too!

9 [GloriaBrame](#)

2002-11-04 16:41

Catherine,

I am already thrilled with your stay here, short though it's been thus far :-) Thank you for all the prep work you did for this section and all the fabulous writings you are sharing with us. I owe ya big time ;-)

looking forward to many more important discussions,

Glory

10 [notnilla](#)

2002-11-04 23:45

Thank you very much. For all the kind compliments. And Gloria, I'll take an IOU anytime from you. :)

cherry, I think it's important that tops provide clarity for their bottoms. We wish to create successful structures for ourselves and those who serve. I believe strongly that certain recipes work.

Catherine

11 [pendragon41](#)

2002-11-05 01:45

Catherine,

I too printed your essay- Well Said! and let me also extend my welcome to you now on to my question;

In Miss Abernathy's 'Concise Manual of Slave Training' Miss Abernathy suggests that would-be Dominants would do well to read and understand "The Knight Of The Cart" Chretien de Troyes 13th century romance. She quotes De Troyes to emphasize her point about dominants and chivalric ethics-.."Lancelot vowed to do his lady's will without hesitation, thinking not of himself, but only of her wishes"..

Is that saying the same thing as-

"You will need to make decisions that are consistently good for your property- they are your first and foremost responsibility. If this relation is long term, you must provide for them in the event of your death..." ?

Pendragon41

12 [notnilla](#)

2002-11-05 16:19

Pendragon asked:

<<In Miss Abernathy's 'Concise Manual of Slave Training' Miss Abernathy suggests that would-be Dominants would do well to read and understand "The Knight Of The Cart" Chretien de Troyes 13th century romance. She quotes De Troyes to emphasize her point about dominants and chivalric ethics-.."Lancelot vowed to do his lady's will without hesitation, thinking not of himself, but only of her wishes"..

Is that saying the same thing as-

"You will need to make decisions that are consistently good for your property- they are your first and foremost responsibility. If this relation is long term, you must provide for them in the event of your death..." ? >>

I would say they are slightly different. Lancelot was acting from a notion of romantic love. I believe if tops make decisions from that standpoint, they may be tinged with information that may not be helpful in the end. This is especially true for Master/slave relations. Lancelot was also fairly obsessive if you have a look. He had the ultimate tragic love tale, the eternal longing that becomes more about his personal fantasy than any real relationship with the Lady in question. He spent more time in his head fantasizing than having a real relationship. I wouldn't use him as an example of reality in the least. But that's just me.

What I am referring to is that there are times that you need to sacrifice your own needs for the good of your property. An example would be: You know your property is about to make a mistake. It's clear to you how it will turn out and when the mistake is made it will inconvenience you greatly perhaps effecting you emotionally as well. However, you can't simply order your property to do it differently as this mistake will provide an invaluable life lesson. If you stop it, your world is good but they learn nothing about themselves to take forward and make

better decisions. So, in the interest of the greater good for your property, you allow the mistake to be made and the lesson to be learned rather than stopping it so you will not be inconvenienced. Clearer?

Catherine

13 [memneth](#)

2002-11-05 20:38

And after you have allowed them to make the mistake (which is some of the best advice you have ever given me, even if I still struggle with it) do you pick them up and brush them off?

Justin Medlin

14 [pendragon41](#)

2002-11-06 00:07

thank you - I agree *wholeheartedly* that the romantic ideal personified by the fictional character Lancelot is neither viable nor desirable; But then De Troyes, a Frenchman, probably was not overmuch enamored with the Welsh anyway... :)

So...if you could pick any character from literature who would embody YOUR ideal of the perfect dominant, who would it be? And no you cant pick King Henry the 8th!.. ;)

Pdgn

15 [knyghtflyher](#)

2002-11-06 11:39

Pendragon,

How about Snidely Whiplash?

Knyghtflyher

16 [notnilla](#)

2002-11-06 19:17

Justin asked, "And after you have allowed them to make the mistake (which is some of the best advice you have ever given me, even if I still struggle with it) do you pick them up and brush them off? "

No, I don't. I allow them to learn the lesson that comes after the first one. The lesson that they can save themselves, are self sufficient and complete. I will not steal a perfect opportunity to learn more about their own competency.

After that, when they have picked themselves up and their mouth is hanging open over the fact that the mistake was made and that they were able to fix it-- that's when I sooth. I will verbally encourage all along but I will not fix it unless they are in danger and really can't handle it.

Ok-- here goes, my ideal of the "perfect" top in literature is Anderson in the Marketplace Series. Chuckle, even I would drop for her as I lingered in the depths of emotional masochism she'd provide.

Catherine

17 [memneth](#)

2002-11-06 22:13

Anderson.....why does that not surprise me?

Please if you don't mind, provide examples of the difference between "soothing" and the "fixing" that you typically do not do.

Justin Medlin

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