



Rose Coaching  
Time Management  
Stress Management  
Work/Life Balance Strategies

Transforming the life you have into the life you want  
www.RoseCoaching.info  
LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info

## When are ultimatums appropriate?

**By Laura Rose, CTACC**

Certified Business and Personal Life Coach



Whether we are in the office or in a relationship, there are times when we hit a roadblock or impasse. So, when are ultimatums appropriate?

Ultimatums are an attempt to force and control what is not naturally there. Avoid them if at all possible.

Whether you are giving or receiving an ultimatum, it is an indicator that you are trying to control the other person. So, for the most part, ultimatums are not very effective in the long run. The best way to have a difficult conversation (and any conversation that either leads with or ends with an ultimatum is a difficult conversation) — is to keep the mindset or focus on “I need to do this to make myself happy” versus the “You need to do this to make me happy”

1) Clarify exactly what you need to be happy. Focus on the essence — not on the specific task or the how to accomplish it yet. Sometimes we mix up the “HOW to accomplish” with the why/reason. Focusing on the essence or reasons — allows both sides to come up with alternative solutions that encompasses and blends both perspectives.

2) Understand first — then be understood. (from Steven Covey’s *7th Habit of Highly Effective People*). First understand their point of view, and the essence or why they need “this thing” to be happy. You might be surprised to find that there is a Win/Win/Win to most situations. Win for you, Win for them, Win for the higher-level, big picture, future dimension.

3) If the gap between what they need to be happy, and what you need to be happy is too large — be able to walk away. This could mean — “walk away from this particular conversation at this particular moment in time.” This could mean — “walk away from the relationship”. It’s up to you to decide the appropriate level of “taking a break”. In general, it’s not to your benefit to force someone else to temporarily change to make you happy, because it will be a temporary change. Realize that you really want someone in harmony, that complements, that is moving in the similar direction that you are. If this person’s vision, goals and desires are not in line with your vision, goals and desires — it’s simply not a good match (right now). It doesn’t mean that it wasn’t a good match before, or that it won’t be a good match tomorrow. Things constantly change. Your desires and their desires will certainly change as we experience new things. Our paths will cross, mingle; flow together naturally as we continue to live on our purpose. And those that share those desires will naturally cross at the appropriate times.

### Conclusion:

If ultimatums are an attempt to force and control what is not naturally there, how does one avoid getting into that point in the first place? Taking the upfront time and planning to place ground rules; clearly

articulating expectations and verifying you understand their expectations. That is one way to avoid misunderstandings. Then when you are feeling that you are about to either make or hear an ultimatum, use it as a trigger tool. Tell yourself: "Aha, I hear an ultimatum around here someplace. This means this is a good time to go back and review what we really want to accomplish in this meeting." Then attack from a different perspective that covers both concerns.

Some examples to illustrate:

- 1) Two friends want to meet outside to enjoy a lovely day. One wants to sit in the shade because he forgot his sun-glasses, the other wants to sit in the sun because the shade is too chilly for her. He suggests sitting back in the car. Although he won't have a problem with the sun or she with the cool air in the car, the solution doesn't encompass the original goal "enjoying the lovely day". She suggests moving the table halfway in the sun and halfway in the shade. They were both able to enjoy the lovely day in comfort.
- 2) One spouse wants to live on the ocean, the other in the city. Once they discuss "why" or "what is attracting them to either the ocean or city life", they were able to move forward. The husband likes the sound of the ocean at night, it's relaxing and soothing. All his hobbies and sports are water related, etc. Wife's hobbies and friends are in the city. She also is responsible for all the household chores and errands. She can't spend her time driving hours for her work and her errands. Once they understood each other's perspective, they were able to find a lakeside property within the city limits that encompassed all their goals.
- 3) Lending money to a friend is a difficult and risky situation. A fellow borrowed lots of money from a friend (to be paid back in full by a certain date). The pay-back date passed without any payment – partial or otherwise. He borrower continued to make excuses for not paying back what he owed. After 2 years of waiting, the friend that lent the money is feeling used and really demanding a payment plan in place. Because of his changed situations, the lender really needs to receive the agreed amount by the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month. The fellow that borrowed the money wants to use the postmark date on the letter to show that he has paid it on time. The friend that lent the money needs the money in their hands by the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month and doesn't really want the borrower to wait until the 25<sup>th</sup> to put the check in the mail. Therefore, the "Paid on time" definition was documented as "postmark dated prior or on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of each month". This way the borrower would have his on-time proof AND the lender would have the money in their hands by the 25<sup>th</sup>. Everyone got the essences of what they needed in this difficult situation and was able to move forward.
- 4) Seven year old son wants to go over the friend's house to watch a Ninja R-rated movie. Son's friend is 11 years-old and the house will be unsupervised. Father takes the time to understand why the father is uncomfortable with this. He wants his son to make friends and be happy. He has seen these Ninja movies. The R-rating is for choreographed violence. He doesn't have a problem with the R-rating in this instance. But the father hasn't met the 11-year old boy, this boy's parents or never been to their house. Also, the age difference between 7 and 11 seems off a little. The father brainstorms with his son and gave him several options:
  - a. Invite his friend to their home to watch the movie
  - b. Invite the father and son over for dinner, so that dad can meet them before the movie night
  - c. Have him (the dad) chaperon the movie night at his friend's house.

By focusing on what the father was concerned about, helped the family come to a solution that encompassed their goals.

### **About the author**

Laura is a certified efficiency and business coach. Laura offers one-on-one career and life coaching, small group coaching, seminars and workshops.

She has been in the software and testing industry for over 20 years. She's worked with such



international companies as IBM, Ericsson, Staples, Fidelity Investments and Sogeti in various client advocacy and project management roles. The techniques she uses in her business coaching and client advocacy work saved these companies both time and money, which resulted in on-time, quality product delivery with higher client satisfaction. Laura now uses her client focus, project, quality and people management skills in her business and personal life coaching career. As a personal life coach, she helps people integrate their goals and dreams into their everyday lives. Laura uses creative and practical tools to help her clients realize what really matters to them in their professional careers as well as personal development. They then follow-through with project and time management techniques to create the reality they really want.

You can learn more about her at [www.RoseCoaching.info](http://www.RoseCoaching.info) and contact her at [LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info](mailto:LauraRose@RoseCoaching.info)