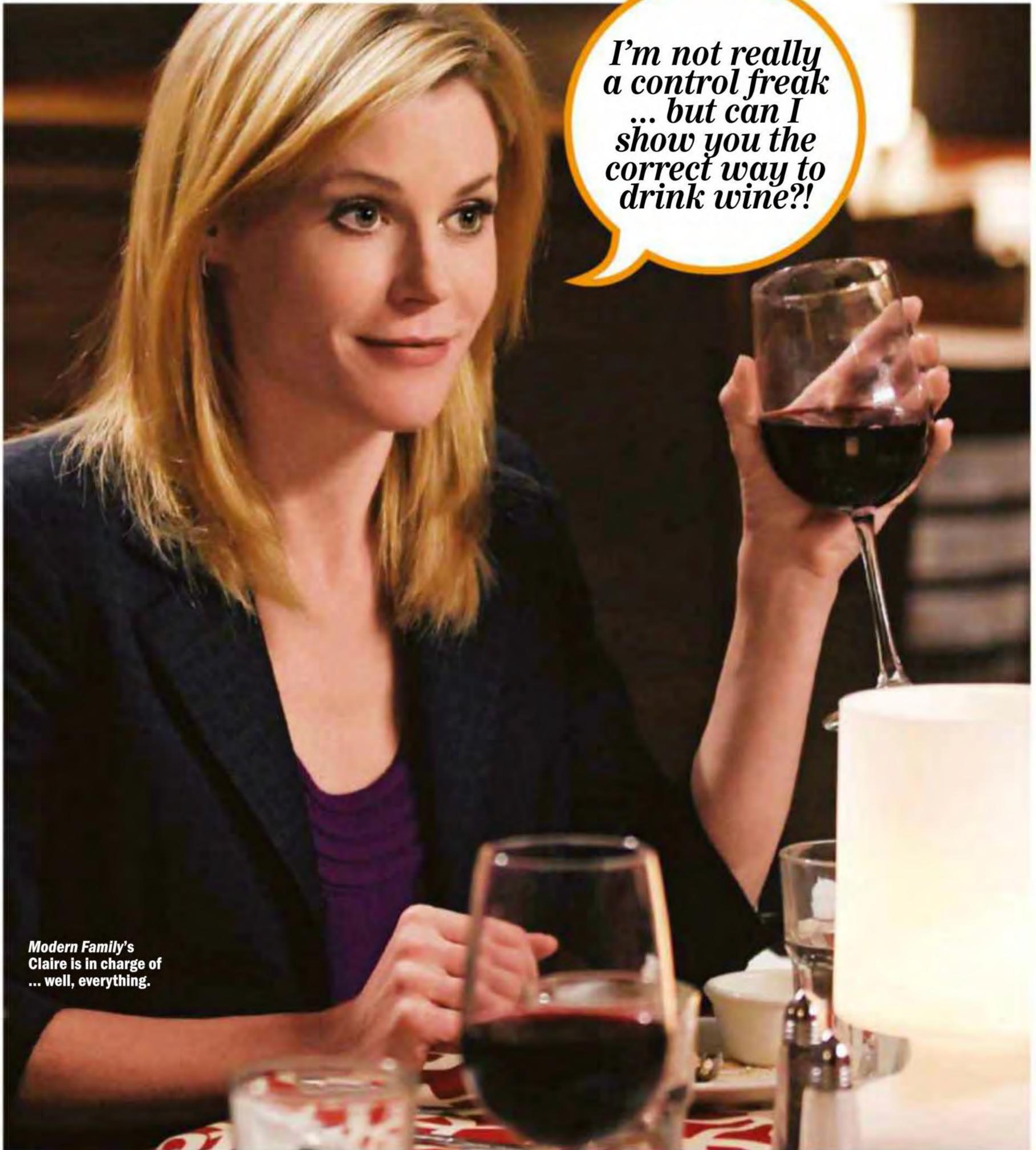


YOU, YOU, YOU



*I'm not really  
a control freak  
... but can I  
show you the  
correct way to  
drink wine?!*

*Modern Family's  
Claire is in charge of  
... well, everything.*

# **CURB YOUR CONTROL** **FREAK**

Is it always your way or the highway? Here's how to let go and live happier!

**I**magine this: It's your birthday, and you're hosting a dinner party when things start to go wrong. Guests turn up late, no one sticks to your dress code (glittery and fabulous!) and your hors d'oeuvres are just slightly overdone. What would you do? If you a) throw a hissy fit, b) lock yourself in the bathroom and weep, or c) call to shout at the caterers, chances are, you're a control freak.

"Control freaks are perfectionists who are obsessed with doing the right thing all the time," says Dr Lim Boon Leng, a Singaporean psychiatrist from Centre of Psychological Wellness. "They can't stand people who disagree with them or disrupt their pattern as it makes them feel vulnerable."

Why, you might argue, shouldn't I be stressed when it's an important event? Anyone's bound to lose a few marbles, right? For most obsessive perfectionists, however, it doesn't stop there. The need to control everyone and every matter is overwhelming, and when things and people don't go their way it feels like the world is about to end. "If you're a control freak, you won't be able to see your problem. You'll also justify your actions by telling yourself that what you're doing is for the best," says Dr Lim.

While being a perfectionist has its advantages — like producing meticulous work and excellent negotiating — it can put some of your relationships in jeopardy.

### FREAK AT WORK

If you're the office control freak, it's time to trust your colleagues and learn to work *together* — there's no 'I' in 'team' but there is one in 'sanity'. "The way controlling behaviour manifests at work is: you can't delegate, you micro-manage, and you have trouble sharing credit," explains Mataji Kennedy, author of *Hanging by a Thread*. "You end up with all the work, you don't work as a team, and you don't include the right people on the right projects. That's just unhelpful for everyone involved."

And usually it takes some pretty bad feedback or a shocker performance review to change your ways. "You really have to learn the value of working with others, and that to leverage everyone's strengths is a better way to work than doing it all

yourself," Kennedy says.

So start trusting your colleagues, divvying up tasks appropriately, and giving credit where it's due. And do it before you crumble, or someone from HR calls you for a serious chat.

### FREAK IN LOVE

If you're a control freak towards your partner, you risk pushing him away and making him feel inferior — and it might take him threatening to leave

## How To Deal With A Controlling ...

By Psychotherapist Lisa Griffiths

**Partner** "There's a difference between a partner who freaks out when you mess up his colour coded sock drawer, and one who dictates your decisions about career, social life and family. Ask yourself what you're willing to put up with and focus on being assertive in calmer moments."

**Parent** "It can be difficult for parents to realise that their child has grown up into a responsible adult capable of making their own decisions. Try to empathise while clearly drawing a boundary between what you're prepared to discuss with them and what's your business only."

**Colleague** "Chances are your colleague's behaviour isn't going to change, it's how you respond to the situation that will make all the difference."

**Friend** "Be consistently firm in a calm manner when it comes to little tussles. Don't sweat the small stuff but set limits on what she can interfere with, and when she goes too far, remind her in a kind tone that you appreciate her advice, but you'll deal with it privately."

before you realise what you're doing.

"Controlling people believe that if they could tweak just one thing about their partner, they'd be perfect," says Kennedy. Trying to change the person you love — whether it's picking on their shoe choice or guilt-tripping them into getting a different job — never works the way you hope, and you could end up losing that person for good.

"In extreme cases, control turns into abuse, where people get abusive if they don't get their own way. And they need

to get professional help," says Kennedy. "Therapy can help, but visit your GP first, who is the gateway to a referral to a psychologist or psychiatrist.

"Control is linked very closely to perfectionism, and you can't impose that on someone you care about — allow them to be themselves."

### FREAK OF THE FAM

If you're the family control freak, you might make your mum wear one particular shirt, criticise your bro's driving from the back seat, or need to set the table your way for the Chinese New Year reunion dinner.

Family squabbling is normal; it's what experts call low-grade controlling behaviour. But if you're endangering your relationships — by criticising your siblings' life choices, for example — then it's time to address the problem. The first step? Work out why you're so fixated on perfection.

"If someone has grown up in a chaotic or abusive family, controlling traits happen for a reason: because it makes the child's world feel safe," says Kennedy. "For many, having things in order is comforting. But thinking 'if only my family would do this my way' damages aspects of your life. Being controlling will alleviate anxiety short-term, but ultimately the controlling behaviour becomes the one thing you need to get under control."

### FREAK OR FOE

If you're the control freak friend, you might insist on deciding which movie to watch, where to have dinner and even what to wear when you and your girlfriends get together. Tread carefully here, as the dynamics of friendship are vastly different from a family's or a partner's.

"Being critical about your friend's life decisions, dominating conversations with your opinions, and not listening to others are the trademark signs of a controlling friendship," says Dr Lim. "You'll become depressed at the loss of control once they rebel against you or when your plans don't go smoothly."

Unlike a family member or boyfriend, a friend shares neither blood ties nor complex feelings with you. She doesn't belong to you and nobody likes hanging out with a dictator, so let her take the lead once in a while, before she gives up and walks away. ■