

How to make a relationship work - Reflections and strategies for success

Reflections

1. Good intentions

When we are in a relationship, it is desirable to understand each other. This may entail thinking about the motives of our partner, even during a heated discussion. We want to find out if they are speaking or acting in our best interests. She or he may mean well. Years ago while reflecting on a recent discussion I said, "She means well." A light bulb went off in my head and illuminated my feelings. Her intentions may have been lost in presentation, translation or my interpretation. This sentence had a transforming effect on the quality of your relationship. Tensions and discomfort were minimized. Once I emphasized the fact that she was on my side and looking out for me, it changed my disposition. This reflection may work for you as it worked for me.

Additionally, we may wish to stop using ineffective words such as "I am not the enemy: I am not out to get you: You should know me by now after all these years." These words may not be necessary. They do not affirm our position in a positive manner, anyway. It is crucial to state our view in a more positive manner. "I am on your side." "I am in this with you." "I am for you."

2. Imagine your partner is right

Listen to their ideas and remove our ego and the urge to compete and win. Remember there is more than one way to solve a problem. There is more than one right answer. Be objective and pull ourselves out of the picture. Could they actually be right on whatever issue being discussed? Could their idea be better than the one we suggested and more fitting to the situation? Ask if their suggestions would be a good idea if we thought of them? Suppose we woke up one morning with the same idea or suggestion, would we consider it a revelation? If the objective is to use the best ideas out there, why not give them credit and embrace it? Thank them and praise them for their genius. They deserve to hear it from us.

3. Evaluate the message and not the messenger

Sometimes we are unwilling to give our mate credit for being right. The issue is not with the message, it is with the messenger. Would the suggestions be more

acceptable if they came from someone else? We have to remove the messenger from the equation. We compete with the messenger and cannot evaluate the message on its own merit. All of us have people we consider to be experts or have credibility with us in a certain area. When they speak we immediately agree with their remarks. It may be easier to accept their point of view rather than once again agree that our mate is right. If they are accumulating a lot of points and a reputation for always being right it could be disconcerting, especially if we are keeping score. In reality, if we should accept their opinion and be thankful we have aligned ourselves with a very intelligent person.

4. Men and women think and act differently

Some differences in perspective are due to gender, culture and class. Remember women and men process things differently. If they have a different perspective it does not make them right or wrong. Place ourselves in the other person's shoes. Why do they feel that way? What shaped their belief? There may be a clash in culture and characteristics. They may not say things the way we would have said it. They were created and conditioned differently and society has layered on a range of expectations that helps to explain much of the variance. The books *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* by John Gray Ph.D. and *You just don't understand* by Deborah Tannen, Ph.D. provides valuable insight into understanding the sexes.

5. The only person you can control

We can try as hard as we can to change someone's mind, but the result may not reach our expectations. We may be frustrated, but bear in mind we can only affect the way we respond to the situation. The phrase from Quantum physics still applies, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change. Working on self is a project that has predictable results. Also realize we cannot meet all of our mates needs on our own. It takes a village filled with friends, elders and challenging experiences for everyone to reach fulfillment.

6. Remember the good times

Hopefully the pleasant moments outnumber the bad. The original attraction we had for each other was appealing enough to join together as a couple. Reflect on the times together and shared memories. Reflect on the times together and the shared memories. Is winning the argument worth sacrificing the value and the wonder of your relationship?

7. Think about the potential benefits

Treasures, good fortune and unimaginable positive experiences lie ahead. I recall the pleasantries and blessings my wife and I encountered on the other side of the storms. We encountered joy we would not have seen if we bailed at the first sign of turbulence. Many people abandon ship or bail out of the plane when it has enormous potential for a corrective passage to happiness. It will be a pleasure to share the wonder of the vistas and oasis discovered because you did not abandon ship when the storm clouds formed and the discomfort filled the air.

8. A companion's need to feel special

Women like it when their men are involved in housework. When we leave it all on their shoulders they think it is beneath us, therefore it makes them feel small for doing the work. Our companion frequently let's you know what they would like and the role they want us to play. This may include dividing up the chores and being more spontaneous to add variety to our routines.

9. Everyone wants to be heard

Our confidante should be high on the list of individuals we listen to. Developing the fine art of listening shows the other person their opinions have value. Improving communication skills is one of the most cited areas in creating a stronger relationship. Consider how frustrated we become when no one pays attention to our ideas and contributions. The same is true with our partner. Conduct an inventory of your life and relationships. Who commands our time and attention?

10. People are happiest when following their dreams

It is crucial for us to follow our dreams and encourage the dreams in our companion. Fulfillment is a refreshing state of being when someone is working toward their purpose and making a difference. Knowing this to be true should motivate us to help others. When we are the only one pursuing a dream, our partner may not be content standing in the shadows cheering us on if their dreams are not being met. Be sensitive to their position.

Strategies

1. **Do not take disagreement personally**

We are not always right nor are we perfect. There is a streak of insecurity in each of us. When someone offers an alternative opinion, we view it as a lack of approval; an assault on our character or a betrayal of trust. The more secure we are in a relationship and in ourselves, the less we view this as a problem. Would we rather hear feedback or information about a shortcoming from someone who cares about us or someone else? Would we rather be aware of a situation or walk around blindsided like in the emperor's new clothes while others laugh at us? Silently ask the questions, "Why are their words bothering me"? Is it my ego? Do I have a feedback allergy? Do I have a problem accepting criticism?

2. **Grow in different and similar areas**

Be distinctive and find common interests to accomplish mutual development. It is important to specialize where we can increase our knowledge and skills. Our mate can respect and encourage us and vice versa. But, it is also critical to engage in activities where we can share and enjoy companionship and compatibility in the same activities.

3. **Choose a different messenger**

Realize that in some matters we are not the right messenger. Sometimes our mate cannot hear our arguments or for some reason cannot listen to us. We may not have the sensitivity, qualifications or experience to address what they are feeling. There may be an invisible barrier on certain concepts and conversations. Additionally, sometimes words are more acceptable coming from another source. We may joke about getting experts to quote us so our words would appear more acceptable. This stresses the fact that we are not the ones to proceed or lead on all issues.

4. **Explore and discuss guidelines for conflict resolution**

We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can debate without hate. We need to know the temperament and philosophies of engagement to see how each party handles conflict. How do we respond when things don't go our way and disappointment sets in? Agree on rules of engagement with guidelines on what is and is not acceptable behavior.

5. **Don't elevate things that are not important**

Don't argue about things we don't care about. We might feel the need to voice an opinion on something that doesn't matter to us. We get involved in ego driven debate to make a point. Don't argue as if it is a sport with a winner and a loser.

6. Don't get engaged in future focused situations

We have disputes over things that are scheduled for the future. This is a waste of time. Both parties may change our minds or the events may not happen. Be careful not to argue something that may or may not happen. Fight that battle when it gets here. Many problems are often based on a failure to communicate properly and how we treat each other in a relationship.

7. Beware of arguing someone's point of view

Don't become the defender of someone's opinion. Allow them to wage their own battle. We may find ourselves acting as if we are the proxy for a phantom person or an individual hardly worth sabotaging our relationship. We do not owe anything to the other person if we unwisely decide to support their opinion.

8. Schedule vacations and date nights

A mate may love night life and exotic locations. Vacations may invigorate them and allow other people to clean the rooms and prepare the meals. Make decisions around this information. Remember the important days and show spontaneous acts of kindness and affection. We may want to write this information in your computer, telephone or the other places we use to keep track of vital information.

9. Divide chores and involvement in children activities

Successful relationships are partnerships. Studies show that most successful marriages involve both partners playing a major role in all aspects of the home. However, some people would rather perform a certain activity on their own. This is perfectly fine, as long as the couple agree on the arrangement.

10. State your commitment

Saying phrases like "I want this to work." Thinking defection is not an option and instituting rituals to show our sincerity are ways to state our commitment. Our

religious beliefs are another way to help us become stronger in our intent and demonstrating our allegiance to the covenant with our mate. Additionally, in a management classic by Robert F. Mager, managers were trained to ask the performance oriented question “Can they do the job if their life depended on it?” We should modify the question to ask, “Is this relationship important enough to us that we would do it as if our life depended upon it.”

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