

Thoughts on Relationship

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Besides being attracted to someone with whom you have, or want to create a personal relationship, there are certain more “mechanical” things that are required to develop and sustain this relationship. This is a quick overview of what I consider to be the most important.

1. Both parties need to operate “in good faith” and tell the truth about who each is and what each brings. Integrity and trust is a key to this process. A “betrayal” is any action taken by party #1 that, if the other partner (party #2) is present, would create discomfort or conflict. Basic self-security, however, is each person’s responsibility.
2. Both parties need to enter the relationship reasonably whole. That is: it does not work if one party looks to the other to shelter, fix or complete them.
3. Communication is mandatory. This includes willingness, a commitment and the skills set to communicate effectively. It includes communicating, both speaking and listening, completely and without a hidden agenda. It also includes risking both asking for and listening for what is needed and wanted. It can often involve learning (coaching from the partner, classes, counseling, books, CD’s or DVD’s... for skills sets to equalize. “Emotional literacy” or “comfort discussing the uncomfortable” is an important part of good communication.
4. It is important that agreements are made and kept. This implies that results are more important than reasons. This does not mean that all agreements will always be kept to the letter, but it has the corollary that when there is a short-coming/mistake/breakdown, that “it” is defined and acknowledged and that the agreement is renegotiated and, when appropriate, an apology or amend is offered.
5. Despite both parties’ best intentions, there will be breakdowns. How these are handled may well determine the success or failure of the relationship. Effective communication is essential. This means acknowledging one’s role in and feelings about the breakdown. “I did “I did (or did not,” ... “when this did (or did not happen), I felt...”
Sometimes, something said or done creates such an upset that any immediate response is like pouring gasoline on a fire. In these cases, a “time-out” is best. (“I need some time to digest this and/or diffuse my anger/reaction before we discuss this further.”) Or: outside help: in the form of a trusted third party, clergy member, or counseling, may be what is needed. What will NOT work in the long-run is either pretending that “it” did not happen or matter, or saving “it” to use as ammunition in the next fight. Studies have shown that what does not get discussed builds and crashes the relationship... turning toward rather than AWAY from the negative experience cleans it up more quickly and effectively and brings two people closer.
6. What follows is a list of issues which have the potential to be “deal breakers:
 - a. Current abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual or verbal actions.

- b. Baggage, including, but not limited to such things as previous abuse, family or relationship history, financial obligations, and tragic events.
- c. Financial issues, such as who will be “the bread winner”/(winners), disparities of incomes, assets and liabilities brought to the relationship; whether income is sufficient to meet basic needs and desired wants, and general financial responsibility.
- d. Goals, while common goals make life easier, they are not essential, though at least one shared goal is helpful. What IS essential is that the goals of each party not be in conflict, and that both parties are willing and able and to both give and receive support, and that both parties are making progress towards achieving their respective or common goals.
- e. Health issues, such as disabilities, large age differences, and chronic and or inherited problems can (but do not have to if discussed) create huge strains in a relationship.
- f. Lifestyle issues, activities (continuum: camping to cruising); kids and/or pets (his, hers, ours, none); where to live: (city/country, house/apartment), drug use/abuse: (legal/illegal, tobacco, alcohol), scheduling: (work hours, child-care, time together, time apart, vacations); and religion: (choice of denomination and the size of commitment.)
- g. Sexual issues, orientation, monogamous, preferences, frequency, and roles. Monogamy needs to be clearly defined by each party before an agreement can be reached. Previous associations do not necessarily mean nonmonogomy.

While there are some absolute deal breakers—current abuse comes to mind—most of these items can be negotiated if both parties are willing. What is important is for each party to decide which issues ARE deal breakers and then to negotiate the rest. A deal breaker for one party needs to be thoroughly worked through (most likely with some type of mediation) because it cannot be ignored. Deal breakers are not always obvious at the beginning: this “relationship” is like a road two (or more if workable) people walk down together.

7. Appreciation and respect: many small things are done every day that can confirm the appreciation and respect one has for him/herself, his/her partner and their relationship. Things such as “please” and “thank you” or “I miss you” all contribute to building a great relationship. So do gifts, both small and large. (what is defined as a gift really varies.) Finally, one hundred “great going!’s” may make up for one “screw you.”

8. The goal is to cherish, value, and sacrifice for the relationship rather than turning away during “tough” times. During “tough” times, it is easy to start adding the negative traits of a partner and this is when awareness, turning toward, and empathy are most needed.

One theory states it takes five positive interactions (in a day, if possible) to counter one negative, to build up a “bank account” from which to draw upon in times of crisis because the positive outweigh the negatives.