

MAKING RELATIONSHIPS STRONGER

One of the major aspects of being alive is that we are able to enter into relationships that are fun, exciting, and warm. These relationships are labeled differently.

Who are you? Who am I? In the initial phase of a relationship, these questions are answered. Who I am is largely what I think and how I respond to you, others and my environment. Getting to know you and others is what life is all about. In order for me to know you, you must "open up" to me and feel comfortable in doing it. I must do the same. Unfortunately, if you do not understand and appreciate yourself you will not accept and appreciate me. There are two extremes to avoid in relationships, "exaggerating" others or ourselves and "*demonizing*" others or ourselves.

Before you even begin a relationship, I am giving you a pre- relationship work, three areas (mentioned below) should be basically taken care of in large measure before entering a relationship. The personal unhappiness that stems from relative incompleteness of these three spheres will cause significant disturbance and will slowly poison an unfolding relationship.

- 1. Developing a sense of abundance at a personal level.**
- 2. Taking care of one's own self and one's own needs.**
- 3. Aspiring to reach one's own potential.**

Once this homework is done, a person becomes rich enough to build relationship. Relationships grow rapidly during their initial stages, probably because there is a certain excitement about creating new relationships.

Building Relationships is like Building a House. You need a :

- firm foundation**
- good set of tools**
- dedicated routine**

Strong relationships need to be nurtured. Let's think about some steps that all of us can take to strengthen our relationship. One needs to understand that a healthy relationship is not composed of two halves, but rather two wholes.

Two keys to building enjoyable relationships are self-disclosure and trust. We will explore other factors involved in making relationships stronger.

How can you build Strong Relationships?

Understanding Expectations

Each person brings to a relationship certain expectations. These expectations can be simple or complex. Unfortunately, most of us are only vaguely aware of these expectations. Nevertheless, when people meet our expectations, we generally tend to appraise them highly. We like people that do the things that we want them to do. When people stop doing the things we want, we change our appraisal towards the negative. The relationship becomes less enjoyable.

We can think of relationship as a bank account into which each person deposits and withdraws from. If care is not paid to the balance, it can easily go out of kilter. If we make the mistake of only taking from the account, there won't be anything for the other person. The account becomes unbalanced. The relationship is then in trouble.

Simply, relationships deteriorate because people don't get what they want from them. If we want to make a relationship last, we had better determine what our friend or partner wants from the relationships and try to give what he wants. For the relationship to be balanced, both partners must get a significant amount of what they want from the relationship. Therefore, it is important both partners keep a watchful eye on the "balance."

Suppose a friend treats you to lunch several times. He is depositing into the friendship account. Naturally, you feel warm and good because its nice to be treated to lunch. Perhaps you would not go to lunch because you could not afford it if you were not treated. Your friend pays because he may want your company. A heartfelt thanks would be in order. But, if your friend perceives that you have the money but are simply too "tight" to reciprocate, your friendship account will soon be out of balance. Continue to take without giving and you will find your friend negatively responding to you or avoiding you. Just as a farmer does not plant seeds without expecting to get something in return, so, people do not give and give without expecting something in return. We keep a mental record of

our transactions with others. Too many withdrawals from the friendship account without deposits and the friendship will be in trouble. **That's reality!**

Basic Needs (Honesty and Integrity)

There are some basic things that people want from relationship--honesty and integrity go without saying. There is nothing that will unbalance a relationship quicker than lies and dishonesty. Keep your word if you possibly can. If you have to break a promise, let your friend or partner know. Most people understand enough to know that we can't always do what we say.

Time spent together

Another requirement for good relationship is time spent together. A typical example I can sight here is a teen- parent relationship. I have found in many families the only time parent and teen child are together is some social occasion. The relationship is mostly thorny as admitted by many parents and one of the reason is not enough time being spent together.

Anger the unwanted thing

Anger has no place in relationships. We can say some nasty things when we are heated. Anger is one of the best ways to wipe out a friendship account. If you have a problem with anger, work on it. But, leave it out of your relationships. It is more effective to calmly disagree and discuss a subject than to display anger. Replace anger with "appropriate concern."

Understanding & Acceptance

More than any other characteristic in a relationship, people want to be understood and accepted. When a friend has a struggle with something that matters a great deal to him, we behaving non-judgmentally will create more appreciation in our friend than we might imagine.

People often play a game in their mind called "*If they knew.*" They muse, "*If they knew 'this' about me, they probably wouldn't be my friend.*" The person is attempting to determine if the friendship can withstand reality many friendships end because God has not made people as "perfect" as we think they ought to be. That's something we really need to think

about. Encouraging a person to overcome a weakness is fine. Insisting by our attitude that a friend or partner must overcome a weakness, or turn it into a lifelong obsession, puts a lot of stress on a relationship. Disappointment soon follows, when our "great expectations" are not met!

Enjoyable Relationships

What makes a truly enjoyable and a long lasting relationship? **Affection.** Relationships thrive on it. Telling people we like them, giving them a "bear" hug or doing some other nice act goes along way to make relationship blossom. We like people that are thoughtful, considerate, kind hearted, understanding--nice. If you would build a relationship, be nice. A card, a gift, a letter, praise, and appreciation keep the relationship account full.

If he thinks an anniversary is the most important time of the year to him. We had better play up that day as much as we can. Get him flowers, go with him out to dinner and attempt to satisfy his every whim. If he likes roast and potatoes on his birthday, we had better do our best to make sure he has gets just that. It may be a challenge to figure out what our friend's or partners' desires are, because we are all different. However, figuring out what another persons desires are and then trying to reasonably satisfy them goes a long in keeping a relationship balanced and happy.

Here are some skills that will help you form stronger alliances and bring more closeness, authenticity and trust to your relationships.

1. Be Relaxed

If you are comfortable around others, they will feel comfortable around you. If you appear nervous, others will sense it and withdraw. If you are meeting someone for the first time, brighten up as if you've rediscovered a long-lost friend. A smile will always be the most powerful builder of rapport. Communicating with relaxed optimism, energy and enthusiasm will provide a strong foundation for lasting relationships.

2. Actively Listen

Active listening goes beyond hearing words and messages; it connects us emotionally with our communication partner. Listen to what the person is not saying as well as to what he or she is saying. Focus intently and listen to the messages conveyed behind and between words. Listen also with your eyes and heart. Notice facial expressions and body postures, but see beneath the surface of visible behaviors. Feel the range of emotions conveyed by tone of voice and rhythm of speech. Discern what the person wants you to hear and also what they want you to feel.

3. Be Empathetic

Empathy is the foundation of good two-way communication. Being empathetic is seeing from another person's perspective regardless of your opinion or belief. Treat their mistakes as you would want them to treat your mistakes. Let the individual know that you are concerned with the mistake, and that you still respect them as a person. Share their excitement in times of victory, and offer encouragement in times of difficulty. Genuine feelings of empathy will strengthen the bond of trust.

4. Respond do not React

Choose emotions and words wisely. Measure your emotions according to the person's moods and needs. Words can build or destroy trust. They differ in shades of meaning, intensity, and impact. What did you learn when listening deeply to the other individual? Reflect your interpretation of the person's message back to them. Validate your understanding of their message. Compliment the person for the wisdom and insights they've shared with you. This shows appreciation and encourages further dialogs with the individual. A response can be encouraging or discouraging. If you consider in advance the impact of your emotions and words, you will create a positive impact on your relationships.

5. Synchronize Cooperatively

When people synchronize their watches, they insure that their individual actions will occur on time to produce an intended outcome. Relationships require ongoing cooperative action to survive and thrive. As relationships mature, the needs and values of the individuals and relationship will change. Career relationships will require the flexibility to meet changing schedules and new project goals. Cooperative actions provide synchrony and build trusting alliances. They are part of the give and take that empowers strong, enduring relationships.

6. Act Authentically

Acting authentically means acting with integrity. It means living in harmony with your values. Be yourself when you are with someone else. Drop acts that create false appearances and false security. When you act authentically, you are honest with yourself and others. You say what you will do, and do what you say. Ask for what you want in all areas of your relationships. Be clear about what you will tolerate. Find out what your relationship partners want also. Being authentic creates mutual trust and respect.

7. Acknowledge Generously

Look for and accentuate the positive qualities in others. Humbly acknowledge the difference that people make to your life. Validate them by expressing your appreciation for their life and their contributions. If you let someone know that they are valuable and special, they will not forget you. Showing gratitude and encouragement by words and actions will strengthen the bonds of any relationship.

Don't forget to acknowledge your most important relationship: the relationship with yourself. Acknowledge your own qualities, and put those qualities into action. You cannot form a stronger relationship with others than you have with yourself. You will attract the qualities in others that are already within you.

By: NTC Team

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