

### **Strong relationships: Five simple things that help them grow**

Relationships are built by the little things we do throughout our time together. As a result, over the long run these little things become very important. Being aware of the kinds of things that strengthen or weaken our relationships, helps us build something strong enough to weather any storm.

Five simple things we can do to grow strong relationships:

1) **Overdoing the teasing/jokes.** Taking little shots at one another can be fun and affirming in a relationship. Knowing a person well enough to joke with him about little details in his life creates an intimate connection. The problem is when we overdo it. We joke too often, or in front of the wrong people and end up hurting, embarrassing or angering the person we were trying to tease. Instead of being funny we create a rift that can develop into a sensitive area.

Remedy: balance your joking with twice as many sincere compliments or other signs of appreciation.

2) **Not giving back to the relationship.** When life gets busy many of us begin to take our relationships for granted and forget to do the maintenance that keeps them strong. When this happens we stop doing the little positives and ride on the strength we have already built. The problem with this is we are still taking little bits from the relationship causing it to weaken over time.

Remedy: find the time to listen without judgment, do kind acts, say nice things, stand up for the other person whether she is present or not and have quality moments.

3) **Telling stories that are not ours to tell.** Part of having a strong relationship is sharing our stories, intimate thoughts, and secrets. Sometimes these tales are too funny, cute or shocking to keep to ourselves. As a result we tell it to others, embellishing as we go. The problem is, without permission to share these stories we are actually gossiping and hurting our relationship in the process. People feel vulnerable when they are “talked about” and are not in the room.

Remedy: when you find yourself sharing a story that isn’t yours, stop...or at least be sure to tell it as if the person involved was standing beside you listening.

4) **Being too unpredictable.** Most of us equate being unpredictable with a sense of adventure and fun. It adds spice to life and keeps things interesting. The problem in relationships arises when we are too unpredictable. There is a comfort that comes from knowing a person and having a sense of how they will behave. Even if their behaviour is erratic it is still comfortable to us if that is what we’ve come to expect (An exception to this is when people are predictably violent, it is hard to feel comfortable in that situation even when we can predict it). When we are too hard to predict we make it challenging for people to build relationships with us.

Remedy: figure out your core values and live true to those values. If you are predictable at the core you will be easier to know.

5) **Not trusting or giving the benefit of the doubt.** All strong relationships are built on a foundation of trust. We believe in the other person and are willing to give him the benefit of the doubt in any questionable situations. When we find ourselves not believing in the other person, but instead judging or accusing them, we make it challenging for our relationship to grow.

Remedy: trust, you have nothing to lose and everything to gain. If trust has been broken, start with baby steps and repair using all the steps above.

Relationships are complicated. They take work yet can feel effortless when things are going well. By being aware of what makes a relationship strong and then putting in the effort to build a little bit everyday we can create structures that quite literally last a life time.

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