



Re-kindling Your Relationship with your Partner

After years of marriage it is easy for the warmth of romance to die down. Sometimes couples feel that their spouse is a stranger, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Some couples assume that the best way to rekindle a relationship that has cooled is to plan a major event such as a cruise or vacation. That is often a mistake.

The best way to rekindle a relationship is probably to build time into your schedules to be together for mini-conversations. Maybe you take 15 minutes together after work to talk about your challenges at work. Maybe you take a walk together in the mornings to talk about goals and hopes. Maybe you meet for lunch or make a call during the day just to chat.

Such mini-conversations can start a process of reconnecting. A couple is wise to also schedule longer times together. An evening at dinner can help a couple trace the finest moments of their years together. Such great moments can be kept alive in memory as the defining times of the relationship. We can "find the glory in our marital story," as John Gottman reminds us.

Often the biggest impediment to reconnecting is lack of desire. If we see our partner as predictable and boring, we may deliberately choose to avoid each other. But the healthiest couples know that lulls in a relationship are normal. They choose to reconnect.

One of the most important ways to keep your relationship healthy is to keep your fondness and admiration alive. John Gottman, a researcher on marriage, has suggested that we get together with our partner to recall our best times. He observes that "couples who put a positive spin on their marriage's history are likely to have a happy future as well."

"The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families" contains excellent material on building your emotional bank account (Chapter 1). It is easy to become careless about making deposits in a relationship account. It is easy to make withdrawals and assume that the relationship will survive. But the healthiest relationships have a high account balance because of regular deposits and rare withdrawals.

One key to effective deposits is taking the time to notice what is important to your partner. Is it time for conversation? Is it shared activities? Is it small gifts? We can each learn to make more effective deposits.

We can also become more careful about withdrawals. When we know that we are withdrawing from our relationship account, we can pause, search for a different way of acting, and, if necessary, ask for help. For example, "Our relationship is really important to me but I am feeling very stressed. Do you have any ideas how we can have some relationship time together this week and I can still get my projects done?"

In the final analysis, our relationships are rekindled because we recommit. We recommit to being more patient, to making time to be together, and to remembering our best moments. A good relationship is no accident. It is the result of thousands of small choices.