

EMOTIONAL WELLNESS MATTERS

VOLUME X, NUMBER 6

Truth
and
Honesty
in Our Relationships

“We had no secrets;
We’d tell each other everything...”

– Carly Simon

When we commit ourselves to a relationship with another person, we rightly expect to experience a sense of fulfillment that we didn’t have before. Humans, as social beings, seem to have a universal desire to find a partner. Sexual attraction often serves as the motivator for making initial contact with the other person, and this is usually replaced over time with a deeper sense of commitment and intimacy. It comes as a terrible disappointment to some people when the sexual phase of their relationship fails to lead in time to something deeper. The task, then, is to understand the forces which block the development of a deeper sense of intimacy – and to do something about it. Fortunately, with some work – and it’s often hard work – couples can learn to move into the stage of deeper sharing and more fulfillment in their relationships.

The excitement which comes with entering a new relationship touches us at the core of our being. It influences our thinking, our emotions, and our physical bodies. In some sense it feels like a dream come true. We feel that, finally, the hard years of experiencing the world alone have come to an end. The thing that we have longed for has been achieved. We now have a partner, someone who can share, understand, and appreciate our most private experiences. The world suddenly seems like a happier and more secure place. The beginning stages of a relationship can bring a precious sense of connectedness – but when that phone



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call doesn't come, when a plan goes awry, when the wrong words are spoken, the emotional high can turn swiftly into a feeling of devastation. Being in love can have its down side.

Over time the physical stage of the relationship is typically replaced by a period of getting to know more about other aspects of our partner's personality. Some of these characteristics are endearing to us – and others serve to irritate us. We learn how our partner attends to the demands of everyday life, and we learn that he or she may not do things the way we do them. Our partner may take a more aggressive approach than we do. Or we may find that our partner dwells on issues, mulling them back and forth, before coming to a decision – which is something that may create anxiety in us. Our partner's sense of loyalty to the relationship may be different from our own. These differences may seem catastrophic during this phase of the relationship. And at this stage, rather than looking within to make our own personal adjustment to our partner's quirks, we may try to force our partners to change their behavior. Power and domination may enter into the dynamics of the relationship – and this can have a major negative impact on intimacy. It is at this stage that genuine communication becomes important to the continued success of the relationship.

Genuine Communication

Communication is at the center of relationships. The quality of a relationship depends on the quality of the communication between the two partners. The most treasured times within a relationship are those in which we tap into our partner's authenticity with heartfelt communication – those times when we talk truthfully.

Unfortunately, these moments come far too rarely for many of us. Those who can achieve physical intimacy are not necessarily those who can communicate well verbally. Why is this? Some people simply lack the tools and experience for talking about emotional issues. Others talk a mile a minute, needing to be validated by others but instead driving them away. Some people are guarded and have difficulty in opening up about anything personal. Some people are unable to listen to their partner – they always bring the topic back to themselves, or they may see their role as the one who gives (unsolicited) advice.

Some people interpret their partner's desire for a serious talk as criticism. They become defensive when their partner tries to share the honest truth

with them. A serious talk, then, can easily lead to an argument – and this leads to a failure of honest communication. The more failures there are, the less likely the couple will try to communicate on a genuine level in the future – to the detriment of intimacy in their relationship.

Telling the Truth

Truth is difficult for many of us. We all engage in a bit of self-deception in our lives. There are things about ourselves that we have not been able to examine or accept. We have difficulty in admitting our flaws – even to ourselves, much more so to our partners. Sometimes we guard our intimate feelings because we have been hurt in the past when we tried to share them with others, so that trust is a difficult area for us. For example, if you and your partner are feeling unloved and lonely, but you try to cover it up by saying that everything is fine, you will continue to feel isolated. Our commitment to a relationship means that we have decided to open ourselves up to another person, flaws and all. To continue to deceive ourselves with our partner impedes the intimacy of the relationship.

A relationship has the potential to provide a healthy way to come to terms with our issues, both personal and interpersonal. Accepting the truth, and talking about it, can free us of pain and set the stage for a healthier future. When we share our fears within the context of our partner's loving understanding and acceptance, the fears dissipate. The issues we have been holding on to alone for so long lose their force when they are shared with someone who loves us. Telling the truth can bring down the barriers that isolate us from our partners. It can lead to a new level of self-acceptance and authenticity in our own lives – and this in turn leads to a stronger level of commitment and intimacy in our relationship. The truth can make us whole and set us free.

Here are some guidelines for telling the truth –

- **UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO WHEN YOU COMMUNICATE.** This calls for an honest look at your motivations. If you intend to create healing, clarity, or a deeper sense of intimacy within the relationship, your intention will probably lead to these results. If, on the other hand, you want to make yourself

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look good and your partner look bad – or if you want to hurt your partner – then distrust will result from the communication.

- **ASSESS HOW WELL YOUR PARTNER CAN HANDLE THE TRUTH.** There are times when your partner may not be ready to have heartfelt talks. A clue to this is when your partner continually rejects, or is unable to hear, your attempts at increased closeness. If your partner tends to become defensive, if there is a history of fighting when serious issues are discussed, if your partner is unable to honor your personal information and can't keep a secret, or if there is a history of betrayal – then it might be best to practice telling the truth with another person, not your partner. Then, when you feel comfortable in telling the truth and trusting, it will be time to engage in heartfelt talks with your partner. Some people prefer to start the process alone with a therapist, since they are trained to listen nonjudgmentally and are less likely to take things personally.
- **UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN FEARS ABOUT TELLING THE TRUTH.** Communicating on an honest and truthful level makes you vulnerable. You may fear getting hurt or hurting your partner's feelings. You may feel that you will be misunderstood or that your partner will judge you negatively. Our fears are based on past experiences and reside within us. They are often unrealistic. The higher goal is to communicate truthfully with your partner in order to have a more satisfying relationship, and this means having the courage to confront your fears.
- **ACCEPT THE FACT THAT YOUR PARTNER DOES NOT HAVE TO AGREE WITH YOU.** Many of us are afraid to have intimate talks with our partners unless they agree with everything we have to say. Unfortunately, this leads not so much to intimacy, which involves a sharing and acceptance of our differences, as it does to control struggles and isolation from our partners. Accept, and even treasure, your partner's individuality. Two people can be right at the same time in a relationship – it's just a matter of two different interpretations of the same events. Intimacy occurs between two complete, whole individuals, each of whom honors their partner's way of looking at the world.

Listening to the Truth

If you want your partner to be honest with you, you have to be a good listener. Communication is a two-way process. A good listener –

- is nonjudgmental and open-minded;
- doesn't jump to conclusions;
- understands that the truth comes out a little at the time, not all at once;
- doesn't try to impose his or her personal version of the truth on the speaker;
- doesn't interrupt and allows the speaker to finish talking before responding;
- helps the speaker clarify what is being said;
- can tolerate different opinions without becoming defensive.

People frequently hear something other than what is being said. We misperceive because of our own life experiences. If we frequently become argumentative or have our feelings hurt during conversations, it is helpful to examine our ability to listen without drawing conclusions prematurely. ***The way we hear what others say is often more a reflection of us than the other person.*** True listening involves looking within and developing the ability to hear correctly what the other person is trying to say. When people have heartfelt talks, their intentions are usually good.

The long-term success of any relationship depends on the ability of the two partners to achieve intimacy through their communication. When the two partners feel isolated from each other and blocked in their ability to achieve the closeness they once felt, it is time to work on expressing their innermost thoughts and feelings to each other. This involves a taking deep look within and a commitment to face the fears which have driven them apart. Telling the truth takes practice, and lots of it – first on your own and then with your partner. Looking within and accepting who you are – and then sharing this with your partner – is healing. It is a way to wholeness, both personally and as a couple.

RECOMMENDED READING –

- Straight from the Heart*** by Layne and Paul Cutright.
– The online version of this book (2002) can be ordered by going to www.EnlightenedPartners.com/bookstore.html, by emailing the Cutrights at partners@EnlightenedPartners.com, or by calling (760) 730-0668 from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm Pacific time.
– The paperback version (1997; ISBN 0-9651371-0-4) can be purchased at www.Amazon.com or by calling the number listed above.

A Way to Work on Intimate Communication

Many couples go for months or years without having deep and intimate talks. They live with silence and feel emotionally estranged from the person to whom they have committed themselves. They want the closeness they expected when their relationship began, but they don't know how to get there. The walls seem too high. They hope that something magical will happen, that suddenly the barriers will come falling down and they will be able to feel close again. Unfortunately, couples seem to be able to endure years of silence, and for many, the turnaround never happens. It takes a realization that the relationship needs work. This means taking an honest look at the state of the relationship and a determination to do something about it.

Layne and Paul Cutright have developed a structured approach to achieving truth and honesty in relationships. In their book, *Straight from the Heart*, they propose learning how to share intimate communication through having Heart-to-Heart Talks™. They identify four types of processes that make up these talks –

Nurturing Processes – Every relationship needs mutual nurturing. Each partner needs to feel cared about. In this phase of the talks, the partners learn how to say things that lead to mental and emotional wellness. This healing energy allows the relationship to begin to flourish.

Clearing Processes – In order to let go of (or clear) your fears and anxieties, it is necessary to talk them through so that you can begin to see new possibilities. It is difficult to see these possibilities when fear prevails. Sharing your fears with another person diminishes their power over you.

Discovery Processes – Talking out loud helps us to achieve a new understanding of a situation. These are things about ourselves that we normally keep hidden, both from others and ourselves. Sharing them with another person allows us to gain new perspectives.

Affirming Processes – Your partner can help you to strengthen your self-esteem and self-respect. Your relationship can become a place where you feel good, whole, and complete.

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