

Commitment

By Mel Schwartz

What does the word commitment suggest? It usually evokes a strong sense of intention and focus. It typically is accompanied by a statement of purpose or a plan of action. Very often, we utilize this word in regard to proclamations we may make about the seriousness of our relationships. For example, “I’m in a committed relationship,” or “I’m completely committed to this relationship.” In such circumstances, what exactly are we saying? We take it for granted that the word or the expression means the same thing to all of us. I can assure you that it doesn’t.

These offerings of relationship commitments are typically statements about behavior or proposed outcomes. For example, “I’m committed to you” suggests that I may not be seeking another relationship or that I’m going to be monogamous. The institution of marriage is most identified with the pledge of commitment. It is an undertaking of legal vows to substantiate our pledge to fidelity, if not continued love. However, statistics reveal that even when we formalize our commitments through marriage, there is as much likelihood of failure as success. After all, more than half of marriages experience infidelity and we’re all aware of the divorce rate. So if our most honored commitments aren’t kept perhaps we need to understand why that is so.

The difficulty is that we’re making promises about behaviors and outcomes, but ignoring the process necessary to achieve that goal. Imagine a student offering a commitment to attaining straight A’s but not devoting themselves to their studies. The commitment simply becomes lip service without the earnest devotion toward achieving the end. In relationships, the outcomes that I’m referring to are notions such as continued love and fidelity. It is mindless to think that we might achieve such outcomes if we don’t focus on the process that achieves this lofty goal. How often do we hear people commit to the process of relationship? For example, what might happen if we committed to working on and sustaining our levels of emotional intimacy and learning the necessary tools to support that process? Or we prioritized our intimate relationship by actually valuing it over the less important things that seem to get in the way?

Often when I ask couples if they’re talking about their issues with one another they disappointingly answer that they haven’t time. And as unseemly as it appears, too often many couples actually don’t make the time to spend enough private time together. They say that life has gotten too busy. We might imagine that the rates of falling out of love, experiencing an affair, or ultimately a divorce might likely ensue. If not, at least we might expect a prevailing mediocrity in such relationships.

What is an outcome?

An outcome is but a momentary snapshot of life. In an instant, we take that snapshot and call it an outcome. In truth, it is just a moment extracted from the flow of our life

experience. You can choose to look at the singular behavior or decision that we refer to as the outcome, or you can look at the life process and whether you made a full commitment to that process. What we need to look at is the flow of experience and the quality of how we are choosing to live it. The outcome is simply the byproduct of that flow of process. If we learn to commit fully to the process then the outcomes will be what they should be. But, if we commit merely to the outcome and ignore the process, we've sabotaged both.

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