

The Art of Relationship

By Mel Schwartz

It's in the manner in which we approach relationship that results in so many of the difficulties and hardships that we encounter. Most professional advice in regard to issues of intimacy and relationships reads like a how to manual or a condensed version of the six steps to happiness. Workshops and seminars abound offering advice on the do's and don'ts and pundits enumerate the differences between the genders. More recently, reductively oriented researchers began analyzing brain chemistry to explain emotional states. Frankly, this mechanized approach underscores a troubling theme. It is looking at relationship not as an art form but as a cookbook. This results in the loss of spontaneity, passion and the art form of coupling. It is representative of larger issues in our culture and speaks to the business of relationship, rather than the art of relating. Relationship is not commerce; it should be an art form. But the way in which we relate exists in a very adulterated form and we become emotionally impoverished as a result.

Relationship, in its ideal form is a creative, evolving and beautifully raw experience whereby two individuals craft their particular way of relating with each other. In so doing, there aren't so much strict guidelines as there is a commitment to the participation and evolution of the partnering. The primary difficulty in relationships is the inclination toward the routine and the inclination toward institutionalizing, particularly in the case of marriage. Institutions are designed to specify the rules of engagement and conduct and the expectations of behaviors. All of these contribute toward providing predictability and some degree of certainty. We learn the rules of marriage and play by those rules and in so doing we lose the art of the relationship. And this is exactly where we suffer.

Relationship is not, and should not be, primarily about the business of the partnership. In recent times, people have become most proficient at compartmentalizing their roles and are expeditious at getting the job done. People learn how to have good working relationships. But they don't have good loving relationships. Productivity has replaced creativity. Functionality has superseded romance. Sensibility wins out over passion; all at a very large cost. Our relationships are suffering because we haven't learned the art of relating.

Uncertainty is the essence of romance

Consider the experience of two people meeting and falling in love. No sooner do they decide to marry than they start to turn away from one another. Their focus is on the wedding plans, seating arrangements, photographers and travel plans. Thus begins the process of the business of relationship. The art of relationship is never crafted. Oscar Wilde wrote that "uncertainty is the essence of romance." If this is so then predictability is the death knell of romance. When anything becomes routine or predictable it no longer requires being fully present, for the outcome is already known. Whether we're referring to a conversation, a night out or a sexual interlude, the formatting of experience is counterintuitive to the crafting of an emotionally alive and intimate experience. If we view relationship from a differing context, as a vibrant and evolving partnering, open to the vicissitudes of change, we might begin to thrive in our partnering.

When individuals or couples share their difficulties to me, they are typically presenting the symptoms and may be confusing them with being the actual problem. The underlying problem is that the couple has not learned the subtleties and nuances of the art of relating. Given that we are uneducated in this form, other than watching a romance movie or reading a novel, it's important that we not blame ourselves. It's the fortunate but rare individual who was gifted to witness this art form modeled by their parents and we certainly received no schooling in the matter. So what is one to do?

Begin to break free from the constraints and rules of relationship as you know them. Dare to be different. Write your own script. Co-create together free from the fear of non-conformity and the rules of relationship. Relationship as art is flowing, unfolding and invigorating as it spirals into deeper and more complex levels of understanding and experience. Relationship as a formatted and regulated system of relating is boring, predictable and mindless. Mindfulness requires the presence of being, not the certitude of predictability.

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