

*"I have learned a great deal from listening carefully.
Most people never listen."* ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?

IN RELATIONSHIPS, holding on to the need to win makes it hard to achieve harmony

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Did you know that the most common explanations couples give for their decision to divorce or separate are not extramarital affairs? It's relationship breakdown, which usually translates into poor communication.

Whether you are looking to improve your relationship with your partner, your in-laws, your children or your colleagues, effective communications skills are essential. To get them, you don't have to go back to school, take courses or read dozens of books.

Most people tend to use the communication styles they learned from their parents. Often, one of the parents had a passive style while the other parent had a more aggressive or controlling style. Neither one is ideal.

Many couples come to me as a psychotherapist as the last resort before mediation or a call to a lawyer.

They learn how to really listen, how to validate their friend or partner and how to ask for clarification to make sure they understand what they are trying to say. It goes a long way toward lowering resentment and opening up the channels of communication, and can tip the scale when you're deciding whether to give up to re-connect with your significant other.

Whatever you focus on expands, so as you focus on the things that annoy or hurt you about your partner, child or colleague, you will find more and more things to pile on that list. You will find more reasons to justify your anger, frustration or resentment.

But the good news is that the contrary is also true: Once you focus on the positives of people, how you saw them when you first met, their positive aspects and see them as well intentioned rather than focusing on their faults, you will notice that your feelings about them can soften and often change as well.

Learning these skills will get the ball rolling, but someone has to be willing to take the high road. Many couples are so enmeshed in the "blame game" that they are more focused on winning battles than finding solutions and healing the relationship.

You need to ask yourself, "Do I want to be right or be happy?" For someone to win, someone has to lose. Holding on to the need to win at any cost will never create harmony or bring back the close feelings you once had with each other.

When each person is ready to switch the focus from justifying his or her "I" to seeing himself or herself as part of a "we," the walls will start coming down and the healing begins. I have seen couples build a much stronger relationship than they started with. Their relationship



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thrived as did their self-esteem and feelings of empowerment. They felt heard and validated, sometimes for the first time.

The interesting thing is that not everyone needs to learn these techniques to improve a relationship. Just one person who is determined and willing to make a few changes will have a ripple effect on others. Once one person decides to withdraw from the power conflict, the game is over.

There needs to be a willingness to

let go of old resentments and hurts. Of course, these issues need to be addressed and resolved, but nothing is ever resolved if there is anger and defensiveness present; that's where learning to really hear each other and validate each other's needs goes far to opening up the heart once more, once you feel it is safe to do so.

You don't need years of therapy and you don't need to study all the books; all you need is to start with an agreement that whatever you

have been doing up until now has not brought you the results you both want and you are finally open to trying something new.

The question you need to ask yourself is, "Is being happy in the relationship more important than the need to be right?"

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