

Special Report

7 Keys to Creating a Great Relationship

By Susie and Otto Collins

We all like that adrenaline rush--that high--that we experience when we begin a new relationship that holds great promise. We believe it's not only possible to feel this rush at the beginning of a new relationship but it is also possible in an existing relationship when both partners consciously decide they want to improve their relationship.

Whether you are in the beginning of a relationship or making a conscious choice to try to improve an existing relationship--we believe there are some practical things you can do to create a sensational relationship.

1. Consciously communicate what is most important to you in your relationship and your life

We are all constantly growing, changing, evolving and we need to look at our values, needs, desires, goals, aspirations and share these with our partner. We suggest that you take some time and discuss what's important to you with your mate and do this on a regular basis. Turn off the television and tell the kids that you need some alone time with your partner. Sit close and make eye contact with each other and take turns talking about what is important to you—what your goals and needs are—and it

doesn't have to be about your relationship. This is not a time to point fingers at each other but rather time to connect with each other on a soul level. So often we go through our busy days and we don't really connect with the people who are most precious to us. Take some time each day—even if it's 15 minutes—to connect with each other.

2. Understand, embrace and learn from your differences

What helped us in the beginning of our relationship to sort out and understand our own and each other's emotional patterns and differences was the study of the Enneagram.

The Enneagram is an ancient Sufi personality inventory which is based on 9 personality types and their interrelationships. It is a tool which helped us understand each other at a much deeper level and gave us a much better understanding of the challenges the other faces in life. By examining our particular types, we learned to honor the differences in each other and to not take so much personally when core issues came up.

It has been very powerful for us to realize that one of the reasons that our relationship is so wonderful is that there are those differences. Through our study of the Enneagram, it became perfectly clear that what was once grounds for misunderstandings between us could now be easily explained.

Susie looks at the world through the eyes of someone heavily interested in self-preservation and Otto does not. In fact that's his least developed area. For example, Susie places her priorities on exercise and health concerns while Otto does not. It's not to say that Otto doesn't think that exercise and health are unimportant but he will do other things he's passionate about –usually using his creativity-- before he will turn his attention to health and exercise. What Susie is learning from Otto is to open more to her creativity, taking some time each day to do a creative project. Otto is learning from Susie to take better care of his body, choosing better foods and including some exercise in his day. Before gaining an appreciation and understanding of the way each of us looked at life, conflicts would arise from wondering why he/she didn't just do it my way!

An example of the differences between you and someone you are in a relationship with might be—

- One person likes to save money and the other likes to have a good time first and then save
- One person thinks sending the kids to a private school is important and the other parent thinks the public school will give their child a more rounded education
- One person likes to do the dishes right after dinner and the other prefers to relax immediately after dinner and then clean up the kitchen

What we're really talking about is that we're different from any other person we are in relationship with. And no matter how close we are to that person, our ways of doing things and the way we look at life will be different. If we don't honor and respect the other's differences, then over time the relationship deteriorates.

So, here's what we've found to be helpful--

If you are at the beginning of a relationship or rekindling the spark in an older relationship, we suggest that you start with a clean slate and look at your differences in a new light. First, each of you should identify the differences between the two of you that cause the most problems in your relationship. Become aware of your differences and don't assume that everyone thinks just like you think and his/her priorities are just like yours.

Next, talk about these differences and share what is important to you. Remember to listen with an open heart and not judge. Just because someone likes to do something in a little different way than you doesn't mean it isn't the "right" way. Look at your preconceived notions about the "right" ways to do things. Just because your mother did something a certain way doesn't mean it has to be done that way forever. If there are conflicts about the ways in which things are done or where the priorities are placed, we recommend that you devise a new way of doing things. Perhaps a third way that might be even better than the two previous ways of looking at or doing things.

We suggest that you look at your partner as the divine spirit that he/she is and choose to learn from that person. Turn your attention to appreciating each other's gifts instead of holding onto what we think is the "right way to do it." Choose love instead of fear and harmony instead of conflict.

If you are interested in a free online Enneagram test to discover your type and to discover more information about the Enneagram, go to the web site <http://enneagraminstitute.com>

The Enneagram is a tool that we have found to be of great value in learning to appreciate the differences between others and

ourselves. Whether you want to find out more about the enneagram or not—the important thing is that you cultivate an understanding that we are all different and learn to appreciate those differences.

3. Leave all the stuff from previous relationships with those old relationships

When you're starting anew, start anew. We've found that this old "stuff" will come up if you aren't conscious. You will carry old ways of thinking and acting that were part of previous relationships--or even the one you are currently in—into the relationship you are trying to revitalize or begin. The trick that we've found useful is for each person to become aware of his/her own baggage from this and previous relationships. Learning to help each other recognize, in a way that can be heard, when old destructive patterns are emerging can be difficult but invaluable to the growth of your relationship.

What has been helpful for us is to honestly tell the other person--in a non-judgmental way--that you think the issue is not about this relationship but about another one or the way your

relationship used to be. This has worked for us and has built a lot of trust between us. When we do this, we know that we have only the best intentions for the other person. We have done this from the start of our relationship and continue to do so.

In any case, find a way to communicate with each other about your old, destructive patterns that you both can agree on. Decide to listen without becoming defensive and be willing to heal those parts of yourself that are keeping you from having the relationship that you want.

4. Be willing to explore new territory/new ideas

We've found that being open minded and willing to try new experiences has helped us to grow and evolve from the people we were in our previous relationships. We decided early in our relationship that we were willing to keep talking until we resolve our differences and not run away from them like in previous relationships. We were also willing to "kill the monsters" while they are little. In other words, when we feel something coming between us, we tell the other person and not hold it in.

Sometimes, we need to be open to doing things that we normally wouldn't do because our partner enjoys doing them.

By no means does this mean that we have to do everything together. It does mean that if it's important to our partner and we have had resistance to doing the activity in the past, we are willing to be open to consider experiencing it now. For example, Otto has agreed to take dancing lessons which is something he didn't think he'd ever do because Susie enjoys dancing. Susie, who used to hate sports on television, finds herself actually enjoying watching basketball because Otto enjoys spending some time watching sports.

So, what is it you and your partner are willing to open to doing to have a great relationship? We suggest that if you sincerely want to improve your relationship, you both spend some time answering our question because your answers will indicate where you need to start.

Take some time now to consider these ideas and come up with your own as well.

- Are you willing to communicate without shutting down and running away?
- Are you willing to give up blame, judgment and the need to be right?
- Are you willing to tackle the issues and challenges when they come up and not let them fester?
- Are you willing to take responsibility for yourself

and your actions?

- Are you willing to make this relationship a priority in your life? How much time do you spend with each other now?
- Are you willing to explore an activity that your partner loves and you haven't had the courage or the interest up until now to investigate?

These are just a few ideas to get you started thinking about what you are willing to do to have a great relationship. Your answers to the previous exercise might help you discover where there's some resistance that's preventing you from having the type of relationship that you want right now and where to begin healing it.

5. Be willing to take the risk to open yourself to the other person

Think about your baby or someone else's baby-- When he or she was learning to walk, did you think to yourself that the child only had a certain number of attempts at walking and that was it—no more chances?

Of course not! The child was allowed to stumble and

fall as many times as was necessary until he or she learned to walk. The baby didn't give up, even when it was hard, but kept right on trying until he/she learned to walk.

That's the best advice we have to give. If you want to create the relationship that you've always wanted, you have to be willing to risk opening your heart to another. You have to take on the philosophy of "until" and keep trying rather than shutting off all hope of ever finding the love you want unless the other person does not want to have the type of relationship that you want.

As painful as it is to be in relationships that haven't been exactly the way you want them to be, you have to keep learning and growing "until" you can do it differently. Opening your heart to another person requires us to risk. But to have an outstanding relationship, there's just no other way. If you don't take the risk of opening your heart, you will never have a deep connection and it will stay on a superficial level.

To us, opening your heart means honoring the other by listening and by accepting without judgment where the other is in his or her growth process. Opening your heart means honoring the other's history and being there to encourage during

times of change. Opening your heart can mean any number of things to all of us.

The heart is a doorway. You can open it and allow another person to come in or you can keep the door closed and protected. Keeping it closed and protected to shield you from the pain also shuts out the joy.

6. Make conscious agreements with your partner

This means that you are openly aware of your intentions, of your words and of your actions. If you want to create an outstanding relationship, forming conscious agreements with each other is one of the best ways to start.

So what's a conscious agreement? A conscious agreement is between two or more people about what they expect from each another in a given situation. Ideally, you would create these conscious agreements in advance before the situations became real problems. Of course, following through on these agreements is an important element to their success.

Early in our relationship, one of us had jealousy and

abandonment issues from the past, especially in social situations. So what we did was create a conscious agreement we both could live with that would help us keep our connection, help us create trust between us, and eliminate the possibility of jealous feelings before they came up.

What we decided to do in social situations such as parties or large get-togethers was to connect with each other intermittently throughout the evening by making eye contact or by coming together for a quick hug.

In creating this agreement before the next social event occurred, we were able to talk about what we each would like in those types of situations and how we would like to be treated. Because of this agreement and the follow-through, the healing of old issues began and now the jealousy is not an issue in these situations.

Most people don't create conscious agreements for how they want their lives and their relationships to be in advance. They might fear that if you begin making conscious agreements in advance, the "mystery" and fun will disappear from their lives.

We disagree because when you don't create conscious

agreements, your relationship is ripe for fear, futurizing, disconnection, assumptions and worry about things that may or may not ever happen.

Conscious agreements can ward off problems and can be created for any relationship in any area of your life. They require you to take an inventory of what you want, honesty with each other, and courage to speak your truth.

We suggest that you look at the issues you have in your relationships and talk with your partner about ways to begin creating conscious agreements between the two of you.

7. Treat each day as if it were the last

What if you knew that this would be the last day you would spend with your partner? What would you do? What would you say to him/her? How would you treat him/her?

Otto's father says that he wants his flowers while he is living--which means don't wait until he's dead to tell him that you care. We think this is good advice for all of us.

From the beginning of our relationship, we practice using loving words with each other and express our gratitude to the other for being in our lives. We are well aware that this day may be our last together. There are no guarantees in life. When we talk about each other to other people, we are conscious of using loving words instead of critical ones. We think that this kindness in words and expressing gratitude are important ingredients that help pave the way for creating and maintaining trust, intimacy, and passion in our relationship. This is not just true of intimate relationships--but, all relationships.

Here are some pointers for expressing more gratitude, kindness and love with your partner:

- Think more about the words you use, especially when you are tired, irritated, need sleep, or stressed out
- See how gossip hurts people, including yourself and your partner, and work to eliminate it from your life
- Try to replace words that hurt with words that encourage, uplift and give praise
- In your thoughts, dwell on what your partner is doing right instead of what he/she is doing wrong

Choose to build each other up instead of tear each other down. Choose to love each other with thoughts, actions, and words and you will see a positive difference in your relationship.

These are 7 ways that we use to make our relationship sensational. We have continued to use them everyday to keep and deepen the passion in our relationship. Apply these to your relationships—whether you are in a new relationship or starting over in one you've had for many years. Love is a miracle and it is never too late for it to happen for you. Have you ever seen someone flying on a trapeze in a circus? The person has to let go of one of the trapeze bars in order to “fly” and catch the other bar.

It's that way in our relationships. We have to be willing to let go of what hasn't worked in the past and “catch” a new way of being in a relationship—whether it's with an old partner who is willing and wants to change or with a new partner.

We've found that you just have to be willing to walk through your fears and let go of that bar that you've been holding onto so that you can move on to the next part of your life. There's just no other way.

About Susie and Otto

We are soulmates, spiritual and life partners, who are committed to helping people like you improve your life and your relationships.

For 30 years, Susie has been a student of relationships, spirituality, energy and the life force. Her search for physical, emotional and spiritual healing has led her to the study of Polarity Therapy, cranio-sacral therapy, reflexology, Hatha Yoga, the Enneagram, and much more. Her formal training includes a Bachelor of Science degree in education, a Masters degree in Library Science, and is a Registered Polarity Practitioner with the American Polarity Therapy Association. Susie is a veteran teacher and university librarian with over 30 years experience teaching in the public schools and university classes.

Otto has spent over 20 years as a successful salesperson and marketer of a variety of products and services. Many years ago, as a result of pondering three of life's greatest questions-- Who am I, Why am I here and What's this all about-- Otto turned his life's focus to bear on the practice and study of spirituality, personal growth and relationships.

We passionately believe that life can be lived in a joyful, conscious, loving way and we are committed to helping others to experience the potential of what is possible in their own lives and relationships. The desire to be loved the way we wanted to be loved took each of us on a journey of discovery of how to create the relationship of our dreams. We believe Spirit put us together for our own personal growth and to shine the light of hope for others. Our goal is to help others create outstanding lives and passionate, alive, connected relationships.

Since 1999, we have been creating web sites about relationships, offering workshops, giving talks and writing on topics that relate to helping people create vital, alive relationships. Our free online weekly relationship newsletter reaches thousands of people all over the world. Along with our books and audio tapes, we offer relationship and life coaching in person or by phone. Our formal training has been with Gary Zukav, Drs. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, Dr. Belinda Gore as well as the works of many other authors dealing with relationships. We are also ordained ministers through the Healing Angels ministries and licensed by the State of Ohio. We are co-authors of Creating Relationship Magic and Should you stay or should you go?

For more information about our work or to schedule a relationship coaching session, contact:

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