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Giving Respect Its Due

Every time Lloyd walks past her desk in his smart business suit, Tracy thinks to herself, *Prima donna CEO*. She ignores him, doesn't even acknowledge his presence.

Gerald looks with derision at a videotape of his wife's recent theatrical performance. *Ridiculous to be doing this at her age*, he thinks.

Missy leaves the house when her husband's friends are over. *They're all such oafs*, she thinks.

Their common ground? A lack of respect.

Respect isn't getting much respect these days. While we seek respect within our families, our social circles, our work environments, we can sure "dis" with the best of them! Disrespectful comments and attitudes toward politicians, bosses, spouses, grocery store clerks—you name it!—abound in our culture today.

Yet, respect for and from others—and ourselves—is essential to our ability to interact with people in healthy and productive ways. Truly satisfying relationships require that we acknowledge, accept and value others and ourselves, respecting who we are as men and women and as individuals.

Without respect, we lapse into power struggles within relationships. We lose morale, productivity and the ability to positively influence people in the workplace. We contribute to conflict in the world.

What's Getting in the Way?

So why do we so often find ourselves being disrespectful? Here are a few things that tend to get in the way:

- **We misunderstand**, thinking that to show respect means that we agree with a person or that we must cater to that person's whims. Not so. To respect means to acknowledge, accept

and value, not necessarily to agree with or to indulge.

- **We make assumptions** and rush to judgment. What if, for example, someone witnessed you driving aggressively and concluded you were a "jerk." You may have been trying to get an injured child to the hospital, but to the other person, you will remain a jerk.

- **We fear** people with different thoughts, convictions and approaches. For some reason, we feel threatened by the differences. Why can't we just enjoy the differences in each other? How boring would the world be if we were all the same?

- **We generalize**. When we see "all men" or "all women" or all people from one ethnic group as the same, we forget that each person is unique.

- **We harden our hearts**, stifling compassion and empathy. It's not that we need to disregard bad behavior or that we have to like every person and every action. But we show our respect—and our strength—by attempting to understand.

- **We get too busy**. Try investing time: listen to others, recognize their contributions, and speak constructively in ways that support and strengthen the people you love and work with. The return on the investment could be phenomenal!

Respecting others and ourselves can enrich our lives like nothing else. When respect leads, curiosity follows and our world opens up. When self-respect points the way, we take care of ourselves better—physically and emotionally. We feel better about ourselves, and we can receive the gift of respect others offer to us. *

10 Ways to Raise Your Self-Esteem

Self-esteem is not a gift bestowed by those outside of us or something that can be taken from us by others. It's an inside job. Rather than wait passively for good self-esteem to happen, we need to take action. Daily or weekly is best.

1. **Make a list.** What's good about you? What's wonderful? Hang your list near your bed so that you see it at night and in the morning.

2. **Forgive yourself.** Acknowledge mistakes, but let go of self-recrimination. Recognize that you are human and "allowed" to fail.

3. **Do one thing you've been putting off.** It's amazing how clearing clutter of all kinds can clear a space for better self-esteem.

4. **Relax!** Meditate, exercise, take a bath. When you're relaxed, negative things don't seem so big.

5. **Do something you're good at.** Competence and accomplishment are great antidotes to low self-esteem.

6. **Learn something new.** When we commit to learning, we commit to growth as a way of life.

7. **Get absorbed in a project.** Taking the focus off yourself can help when you feel low, anxious or lacking in confidence.

8. **Assert yourself.** Learning this skill goes a long way to improving your self-image.

9. **Remember what you've achieved.** Take a step back and look at the whole of your life.

10. **Do a self-esteem "workout."** In a private place and with complete abandon, shout all the things you're good at and why you matter. It's surprising how instantly effective this exercise is. *

A Letter From

Non F. Schmitt



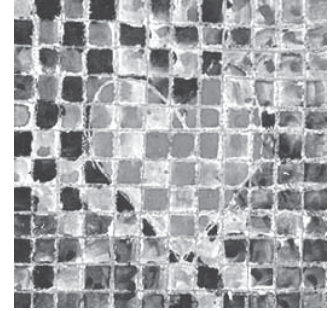
Another spring is upon us and at The Brandywine Center, we are putting the finishing touches on our Annual Women's Retreat on April 1. This year's theme—"Embracing Possibility"—is timely, given world events and societal pressures that cause many of us to feel anxious, depleted, angry or even powerless. It feels safer to make our worlds smaller and to focus on surviving rather than thriving.

Some of us need only a simple reminder; others of us need a real jolt to break out of the trance of packing-as-much-as-we-can-in-a-day auto-pilot living. We need to remember that alongside stress, hardship and suffering, there are simple pleasures and exquisite moments of beauty and love. Real living means being willing to experience all of it, which means pushing well outside of our comfort zone.

Within these pages, you will be challenged to evaluate your relationships—with self and others—to consider issues of empathy, self-respect and healing from trauma. When we step back and observe carefully how we are treating ourselves and others, we move into the realm of choice. And when we begin to make conscious choices, we feel more powerful in our lives.

Anything is possible, it's true. Miracles can happen. We can make better, more self-enhancing choices, we can grow and change. But, when it comes down to it, the best stuff comes in the quieter moments when we are paying attention.

How Well Do You Practice Empathy?



Empathy—that quality of recognizing and understanding another person's desires, beliefs and emotions—is one of the most important skills we can ever acquire. It fosters meaningful relationships, reduces prejudice and negative assumptions, encourages honest communication and can help avert violence. Studies have found that people high in empathy are more confident, sensitive and assertive, and they enjoy better physical and mental health. Often described as standing in another person's shoes or looking through the other's eyes, empathy connects us human-to-human. Take this quiz to see how well you practice empathy.

True False

Set 1

- 1. If I don't know enough to understand, and empathize with, another's dilemma, I try to increase my knowledge by asking questions.
- 2. I recognize that others are different from me and might see and feel things differently from how I might experience the same situation. I look at things through that person's eyes, not my own.
- 3. I don't need to be right about what I imagine the other person to be feeling. If I've misunderstood, I ask the person to help me correct my impressions.
- 4. When I show that I understand the other person's experience, I notice that the person I'm talking with opens up more.
- 5. My irritation with another person often dwindles when I understand what's going on inside him or her.
- 6. Being a good, active listener helps me "get" what someone else is going through.
- 7. I try to focus on the other person's feelings, rather than actions or circumstances. When people are upset, it's better to handle their feelings before figuring out how to solve their problems.

Set 2

- 1. If a friend complains about a boss at work, I'm likely to advise that person to find another job, change departments or speak up. I like to be helpful by offering solutions.
- 2. I'm always ready to psychoanalyze my friends' troubles.
- 3. If a co-worker expresses anxiety about her relationship with her husband, I'm quick to reassure her that all couples have their little problems, and that she shouldn't worry about it.
- 4. It seems that I always know better than my friends what's behind or underneath their problems.
- 5. When family members are upset about something, I find a way to distract them or change the subject.
- 6. I'm quick to remind people that plenty of others are a lot worse off than they are.
- 7. When empathizing with others, I imagine how I would feel in a given situation and assume the same would be true for them. We're all basically the same, aren't we?

True empathy can only occur when we have successfully shed all preconceived ideas and judgments about others—and when we're comfortable with others' deep feelings. If you answered true more often to the second set than the first, you may benefit from learning more about how to respond with empathy, how to really hear someone. It's one of the greatest gifts you can give another person. *

Healing from Trauma: Putting Yourself Back Together Again

Two individuals are robbed at gunpoint. One experiences overwhelming helplessness and has a hard month. But by the end of that time, he has pretty much resolved and integrated the incident into his life. The other person experiences intense rage. Years later, she is still struggling with the negative, life-changing aftermath of the trauma.

As seen in the above example, not everyone reacts to trauma in the same way. Just as pain thresholds differ, so do trauma thresholds. But as William Shakespeare wrote in his play *Othello*, "What wound did ever heal but by degrees?"

Having studied trauma intensively over the past couple of decades, researchers now know that a traumatic event's impact depends on the *perception* of it. Perception is influenced by a number of factors including age, physical characteristics, level of support, etc. Thus, emotional trauma can result from a single extreme and deeply felt experience or from a series of low-intensity events. Even everyday happenings—falls, difficult births, betrayals, medical/dental procedures—can cause the same lingering traumatic effects as extreme or violent events, such as physical abuse, combat or serious accidents.

Fortunately, even traumatic effects that linger for years can be resolved, and the result can be a new present-day reality that includes, but is not dominated by, a traumatic past.

"The same immense energies that create the symptoms of trauma, when properly engaged and mobilized, can transform the trauma and propel us into new heights of healing, mastery and even wisdom," writes Peter Levine, author of *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*.

The Natural Trauma Response

Levine and others contend that emotional trauma goes unhealed when the natural trauma response is interrupted and feelings unleashed by the event remain unresolved. Because of this, anxiety, anger, depression, guilt, hopelessness, self-blame, shame and other feelings freeze up inside of us.

That "freeze" is not just emotional, but physical as well. Recent research indicates that parts of the brain become altered by traumatic events. These disruptions are actually visible on brain scans.



Just what is a natural trauma response? It's the whole continuum of emotional and physical sensations that occur with the first inclination that something is wrong or dangerous. To understand it, Levine suggests looking at how animals respond to danger, real or perceived.

After the animal has instinctively chosen to fight, flee or freeze, and the danger has passed, the animal trembles throughout its entire body, "shedding" the tension required for alertness and quick response.

Human response to danger—real or perceived—can also involve shaking, sweating, crying, laughing or shuddering. Just like the animal, such responses are natural and part of the body's effort to return to a state of equilibrium. They are crucial to the recovery process, and they may go on for hours, days or weeks.

Too often, however, we deny this process or don't give it its due. We say to ourselves or hear from others, *Pull yourself together. Forget about it. Get up and shake it off. It's time to get on with your life.*

And when we do that, when we ignore the emotional and physical sensations that continue after a traumatizing event, we interrupt the natural cycle, short-circuiting our natural ability to heal. It is this, more than anything, that sets us up for a damaging traumatic aftermath.

"The animal's ability to rebound from threat can serve as a model for humans," Levine writes. "It gives us a direction that may point the way to our own innate healing abilities."

Trauma's Effects on Basic Human Needs

The incidence of serious negative events that typically evoke traumatic response is surprisingly pervasive in our culture today. A 20-year study released in 2005 by Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that of the 17,337 middle-class participants, a startling 64% had experienced one or more of eight categories of traumatic childhood events.

The study showed a significant connection between this childhood trauma and disease, depression, drug use and/or suicide.

Perhaps that is because unresolved trauma can undermine basic human needs. Dena Rosenbloom and Mary Beth Williams, authors of *Life After Trauma: A Workbook for Healing*, identify these basic needs as safety, trust, a measure of control over one's life, self-worth and intimacy.

These writers and others stress that it is not necessary to relive one's emotional pain in order to heal trauma. For some, doing so may trigger re-traumatization. Focus on what you can do today. Pay attention to your feelings and reactions, seek helpful support, learn from others who've "been there," allow yourself to grieve and above all, take your time. *

One-Liners to Avoid in an Argument

They slice and dice, cutting wounds not easily healed by apologies.

They inflame like a lit match near gasoline.

They suck the life out of all they touch.

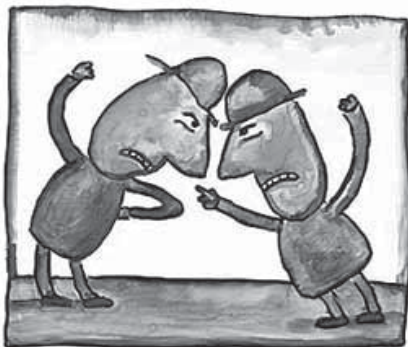
They're the zingers we fling at each other during arguments, the cruel and aggressive wisecracks or retorts that escalate a fight like nothing else. And when the zingers begin to outnumber the kind words

spoken to each other, it may be too late to fix the relationship because the love has dried up and blown away.

Learning how to communicate well in a conflict—how to argue without hurting and insulting each other—is possibly the most important relationship survival skill ever. Doing so reduces divorce and domestic violence rates—and increases

personal happiness, relationship satisfaction and peace of mind.

Here are a few one-liners you'd do well to avoid:



"That's not what's happening here!"

This is one of many versions of: "I'm right and you're wrong!" Whether you say it or think it, the only thing "You're wrong!" creates is a lose-lose situation.

"You always..." or "You never..."

Starting a sentence with either phrase is guaranteed to raise temperatures. How about stating instead that the other person does XYZ "more times than feels good." Rather than, "You never listen to me," try something like this: "When you respond that way, I can see that you're not understanding me the way I'd like you to."

"You really know how to hurt me." This line assumes that the other person is intentionally trying to hurt you. It also implies that someone other than yourself has power over what you feel. It places you in the role of emotional "victim." But you can choose whether or not to be hurt by someone's actions or words.

"How can you be that way?" This isn't really a question. It's an aggressive statement something to the effect of, "You're a terrible person; you should be ashamed of yourself."

Of course, these are mild, compared to the doozies we come up with in the heat of an argument. But for love to flourish and deepen, for healthy and long-lasting relationships, we need to learn how to incorporate acceptance, self-understanding, compassion and tolerance into our conflicts. And maybe one-liners like, "I love you!" *

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