



How to Avoid Power Struggles and Enrich Relationships

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

Every time Tracy walks past Jonathan's desk in her smart business suit, he thinks to himself, *Prima donna CEO*. He ignores her, doesn't even acknowledge her presence.

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

What do these three have in common? 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.

So why do we so often find ourselves being disrespectful? Here are a few contributors:

- **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 Tips for Lifting Depression

Depression has multiplied during the pandemic, and if you're feeling that way, it can seem insurmountable. But there are things you can do to help lighten the darkness and even project a feeling of well-being and joy.

1. **Stay connected with others.** Isolating yourself doesn't protect loved ones or help you. Just being around others in silence is better than hiding away.
2. **Set priorities and do what you can.** Acknowledge (even celebrate) the completion of everything.
3. **Do physical work.** Chop wood or scrub the bathtub or prune trees. Physical effort helps to shift emotional blockages and numbness.
4. **Feed your senses.** Look at beautiful artwork. Listen to your favorite music. Indulge yourself with fragrant oils. Surround yourself with vibrant color.
5. **Soak up the sun when you get the chance.** Its warmth helps penetrate even the bleakest of moods.
6. **Get your hands in the dirt.** Gardening or working with the earth in some fashion can be energizing.
7. **Sing.** Whether you hum a quiet melody or belt out Broadway tunes, singing gives voice to hope.
8. **Look to your nutrition.** Eat healthfully; consider a vitamin/mineral supplement. Don't forget to drink lots of water.
9. **Take hot baths or cold showers.** One or the other—or both—can help to lift you out of despair.
10. **Connect with nature.** Take a long, slow hike, or sit still, and notice nature at work. It helps give your mind a rest from negative thoughts. *

A Letter From

Rolind Susan



Relationships with family members have been tested over the past months of the pandemic like never before.

The relationship we have with ourself has also been tested.

So this issue focuses on power struggles, depression, defensiveness, abuse and changing.

The front page feature focuses on how truly satisfying relationships require tolerance and appreciation of who we each are as men and women and as individuals. In other words, respect.

Respecting yourself and others lays a great foundation for tough conversations, such as when criticism comes your way. This issue's quiz will help you ascertain how defensive you are being and discover ways to shift from "defending" to a more helpful "responding."

Sometimes, lack of respect turns abusive. The page 3 article on stopping verbal abuse is full of good examples that will help you identify—and then stop—the yelling, belittling and emotional injury that result from such relationships.

Finally, as noted in the Top 10, it's important to acknowledge that feelings of depression are (unsurprisingly) more prevalent these days. One way to shift from depression to joy is to utilize the power of intention, as discussed in the page 4 feature.

As always, be well, and don't hesitate to call if you are experiencing feelings that you are unable to sort through, or if you would like to work on anything that's troubling you.

Are You Receptive or Defensive?

So much of our communications energy is used being defensive. As soon as we feel any threat, either of not getting what we want or of being harmed or put down in some way, we are ready to protect ourselves by being defensive. Imagine how more enjoyable our communications could be if we learned how to respond nondefensively and how to avoid provoking defensiveness in others! Take this quiz to see how defensive you tend to be.



True False

- 1. When people criticize or judge me, I am quick to point out their own faults.
- 2. When a police officer pulls me over, I've always got a "reason" ready for why I was speeding.
- 3. I often think, "Can't others see that I'm not perfect?"
- 4. If people are upset or disappointed with me, I let them know why they are wrong with explanations and excuses.
- 5. I'm afraid that what others think of and say about me is true.
- 6. I'm always looking for the hidden critical message beneath people's requests.
- 7. If I don't defend myself, I'll just get run over.
- 8. If I'm open to people's criticisms and judgments of me, it means I'm weak.
- 9. I can never admit that I'm wrong.
- 10. I may not defend myself verbally to someone, but I'll be sure to get that person back somehow.
- 11. If I'm at fault for something, it's always because of some factor outside of myself over which I had no control.

If you responded true more often than false to the above questions, consider some of the following alternatives to defensiveness.

- 1. I'm always looking to improve myself, so I welcome feedback from others on how well I am doing (or not).
- 2. I sit with someone's criticism of me to see if there is a kernel of truth in it. If there is, I acknowledge it and work to improve in that area.
- 3. I realize that sometimes people's criticisms about me are all about the "story" they have made up around a situation. I don't take it personally, and I don't take it on as my responsibility.
- 4. I know that I can actually have greater influence in a situation by acknowledging that I may be wrong.
- 5. When someone uses the words "always" and "never" I ignore those words and focus instead on the rest of the message.
- 6. I take responsibility for what I can change.
- 7. I listen for the (usually) hidden need expressed in a person's complaint or anger, acknowledge the need, and then see whether there is something I can do to meet it. *

Learning How to Recognize and Respond to Verbal Abuse

Holly and her husband Frederick are watching television. A commercial for a fast food company comes on, and Holly picks up the remote and mutes it.

"Hey!" Frederick yells. "Why the hell did you do that! I was watching it!"

"Oh, sorry," Holly says, turning the sound back on.

"Well, it's too late now!" he rages. "I missed it. *You know* that I've been wanting a hamburger all day."

Holly stares at him, shocked. She hadn't known that, and how would viewing the commercial satisfy his desire? She's trying to figure all this out, why he got so mad, what she can do to fix it.

"Sorry," she says. "I thought you hated commercials."

He turns to her, calls her an idiot and an obscene name, heads for the door, then slams it behind him.

Now, she's even more confused, remembering all the times he's complained about commercials. Didn't he just say last week that he wanted a DVR so he could skip them? But Holly's afraid to say that, to set him off again, so she just stares blankly at the screen.

Like many in verbally abusive relationships, Holly thinks that if only *she* changed, *she* communicated more clearly, *she* explained things better, her husband wouldn't get so mad at her.

But abuse victims usually don't realize that the problem *isn't* theirs: it's in the abuser's need to dominate and control. When Holly's husband yells at her for no reason, she thinks he's misunderstood her. She doesn't realize that he's not looking for understanding, he's establishing his power over her.

Holly's story exhibits several of the hallmarks of verbal abuse:

- It's hostile, manipulative and controlling.
- It's unpredictable and even bizarre; the attack comes out of the blue.
- It happens when no one else is around.
- The victim feels confused and surprised.
- The words are hurtful; they attack the person or his/her abilities.
- Verbal abuse may be overt, such as angry outbursts, or subtler, such as jokes that convey a general disdain for the other person or her/his interests.
- If confronted, abusers deny the abuse and try to convince the victims that they are too sensitive or are imagining things.
- It's insidious. Over time, the victim's self-

confidence erodes. Victims stop trusting themselves or their perceptions. They become conditioned to the abuse and adapt. They may even think it's normal, that all people treat their spouses that way.

So what can you do if you are being verbally abused? First and foremost, recognize that the abuse is not your fault, and that you can't debate or reason or understand it away. What you can do is refuse to play along.

- Respond to abuse with "Stop it!" or "Don't talk to me like that"—twice if necessary.
- Resist the urge to explain or defend. Remember, the abuser is not interested in understanding you; the abuser wants to control you.
- Listen to your feelings and believe them. Don't believe it when an abuser tells you you're crazy or wrong or that you can't take a joke.
- If the abuser keeps trying to provoke you, assess the danger and, if necessary, remove yourself. Verbal abuse can be a doorway to physical abuse.



- Get support through a therapist and/or a support group. An abuser's behavior is designed to keep you off track; you'll need support to see it for what it is and develop the self-esteem to stand up for yourself consistently.
- Seek information. Read the books and articles written on the subject. You're not alone. Other people have paved the path for your freedom. Take advantage of what they offer.

When you calmly stand up for yourself and refuse to be goaded

into defending or explaining, the abuser will give up. That's because abusers need a victim; if you won't play that role, he or she can't abuse. Elgin also recommends ignoring the bait, but then responding to the underlying assumption that often hides in abuse.

For example, Holly could have responded to Frederick, "How long have you thought I didn't care about you?"

Frederick would have been flustered, thrown back on himself, this time staring at her in shock. Sure, he'd recover; he would use some of the common abuse strategies that the authors outline in their books. But it won't matter, because no matter what he says, Holly will not be provoked.

Verbal abuse *can't* function without a victim, and with a lot of support and information and self-care, Holly has learned to refuse that role. *

Put Your Attention on *Intention* for Conscious Change

Don't just wish for things to be different. For real change, put the power of intention to work.

That's because conscious change happens at the intersection of attention and intention.

"Attention energizes, and intention transforms," writes Deepak Chopra in *Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. "Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life....Intention, on the other hand, triggers transformation of energy and information. Intention organizes its own fulfillment."

When you declare an intention, you gain the support of your subconscious mind. Here are some suggestions for how to work with intentions in order to bring what you need into your life.

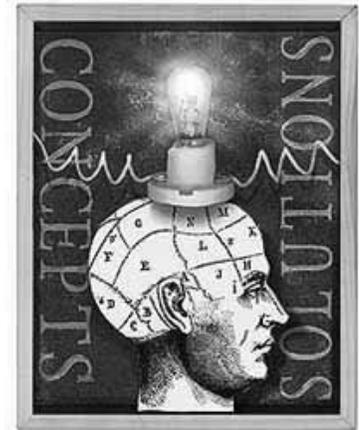
- **Get clear on what you want and why.** It's not enough to know what you *don't* want. You can't get what you want until you know what that is. Steven Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, writes that all

things are created twice. "There's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things."

- **Imagine it.** See it as happening. "Your imagination creates the inner picture that allows you to participate in the act of creation," writes Dr. Wayne Dyer in his best-selling book *The Power of Intention*. "Your willpower is much less effective than your imagination, which is your link to the power of intention."

- **Keep yourself receptive.** Exercise, eat healthily, play and relax. Stress, exhaustion, anxiety, etc., become "static" that interfere with the "frequencies" of what you're wanting to bring into your life.

- **Take action.** Intention isn't about sitting back and waiting for it all to come to you. For example, Victoria enrolled herself in a rehab program; Travis became involved with a social organization and took relationship classes to overcome his fear of dating; Doug began working with a therapist



to examine the feelings of emptiness that led to his suicide attempt. When we commit to a thing by taking action, it's often surprising how quickly our intentions are realized.

- **Surrender control.** This means to let go and trust. Let go of the particular way in which things will happen. Let go of fear, doubt, worry and disappointment. Let go of the notion of struggle. Trust that the outcome will be just right. *



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