

Let's be guided by communication, not by assumptions

"The thing that upsets people is not (so much) what happens (to them) but what they think it means." Philosopher Epictetus

As human beings, we are born, live, and die in relationships. Relationship is important to us because we learn many things from it. We get hurt and heal in relationships. Therefore it is important to update our knowledge about it. We get formal education about everything but relationships. In this article, I am going to provide you a few hints re ways of enhancing relationships and warn you about a habit that sometimes trap us.

Ideally we want to be able to express ourselves fully to one another and expect to be accepted without any fear in any relationship. What happens is we enter a relationship with our own baggage, which comes from our past experiences. Sometimes our past personal experiences may color our view of relationship and prevent us to have effective communication with one another. Although we logically know that communication is an effective tool to connect to others and resolve possible problems, we don't practice it when problems arise. We forget to share our thoughts and feelings with each other and we tend to keep them inside. We personalize the problems and feel threatened by conflicts and problems. Therefore, in order to protect ourselves we tend to either get angry and act aggressively or get depressed and become passive.

When we get angry, we don't communicate with each other or we may say things that we don't mean; we lose our control over self; we think by yelling, shouting and possibly assaulting, problems go away. No, problems don't get resolved that way as a matter of fact we get into more troubles. We get angrier and develop more personal problems for self and others.

When we become depressed and passive, we lose control over self too. We don't do what we plan to do; we develop sense of unworthiness and experience more difficulties.

Therefore, these two solutions, getting angry or becoming depressed, don't do good to us. They invite and escalate our problems. I suggest allow yourself to practice another alternative which is communication. Practicing communication with a person that you are in conflict with as an alternative way of dealing with problems. Problems happen in relationship and needs to be dealt with in relationship. You may ask how? This article is about to answer your question.

One of the most threatening habits in communication is making assumption. We do make assumptions when we don't have enough knowledge around someone's behaviors, thoughts or feelings. We make assumptions based on what we have learned from others such as our family, peer groups, co-workers, partners, and so forth. We take our assumptions as absolute truths and don't bother to examine them. Do you think you could find two people exactly alike? I don't think so. You could hardly find two people alike. If you agree with me in this point, why do we apply our learned generalized assumptions to our relationships? Is that because it is easier and simpler? Is that because we don't like disagreements? Or it could be other reasons? What I found is when there is a problem in relationship, making assumptions color our minds and disable us to resolve it. Therefore I would suggest before going ahead with your assumptions, be sure you examine them by sharing it with the person you are in conflict with.

Communication allows us to explore and examine our doubts and assumptions; it allows us be positive and empowered; it prevents us to have a black and white mentality; it expands our horizons and allows us to explore other alternatives to resolve our problems; it generates understanding and connectedness; it eliminates mind reading habit; it disrupts/ stops our

negative thinking; it allows us to build or shape our relationship, it takes us to the highest level of satisfaction where we could express ourselves freely and feel connected to one another.

Practice telling the other person what you think about discussed issues. Allow a person to share her/his thoughts with you. Try to ask questions respectfully in order to clarify the other party's behaviors or thoughts. Avoid repeating yourself and try to rephrase your points in order to cross your message smoothly. Repeating has negative effects on the other person and it can be interpreted as nagging. Make your points clear and brief and express them in a calm manner.

Look at conflicts from different angle. Conflicts in a relationship could be signs of need for improvement. Don't be afraid of having conflicts. It is normal to have conflicts in a relationship. It is normal to have arguments with your spouse, children, co-workers, and so on. Like anything else, the relationship goes through its own ups and downs until it gets its own unique shape. The relationship becomes one of your sources of growth when you practice more communication.

Communication can help you to resolve conflicts easier; it invites you to understand other party's point of views. It opens space for discussions and eliminates negativity; it assists you to fight against the problems effectively. It allows you to develop your own voice. It helps you to listen to the other person's voice non-judgmentally. It provides you an opportunity to learn to respect the differences.

In the end, relationship survives in the light of communication not assumptions. Don't assume! Assumption statements sound more like accusations to the person on the receiving end. For instance, "I don't understand why you don't want to do that" can easily be replaced with "I feel that you don't want to do that. Do you feel like you don't want to?" is more practical. The latter statement opens up a space for conversation.

With a little awareness and patience, you can avoid this common habit in your relationship and make time for the good things. Enjoy!

Tahereh Barati
Case Manager/Counselor
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