

COMMUNITY

The importance of honesty in relationships

"If you do not tell the truth about yourself you cannot tell it about other people."

Virginia Woolf



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Recently I attended an event in which one woman, I will call Sarah, was quite refreshing because of her honest manner. Someone innocently crossed Sarah's personal boundaries and she spoke directly to the situation.

Initially, the other woman seemed deaf to her kind, yet firm stance. Sarah continued to truthfully assert her limits and finally the other woman understood her and responded to Sarah's request.

Because Sarah is so forth-

right, she is highly respected. Although her honesty can sometimes be startling, her authenticity and fair intentions are ultimately comprehended and appreciated. Also, Sarah's ability to be genuinely honest appears to enhance her self confidence.

In contrast, another woman, Polly, is extremely talented, directs a nonprofit, yet has a propensity to inflate details pertaining to herself. For example, I was with Polly at a social gathering when someone inquired into her academic background. Polly stated she held a master's degree. I knew this was not true and later when it was just the two of us I asked her why she responded that way. She stated, "well, I have all the courses, I just didn't do the thesis." I walked away thinking, what if the person who inquired looks up her

background and learns that she had been lied to. Wouldn't she mistrust her and be less apt to enroll in Polly's program?

What is honesty? According to the Wikipedia: "Honesty refers to a facet of moral character and connotes positive and virtuous attributes such as integrity, truthfulness, and straightforwardness of conduct, along with the absence of lying cheating, theft, etc. Furthermore, honesty means being trustworthy, loyal, fair and sincere."

"Nothing in the world is harder than speaking the truth, nothing easier than flattery," Fyodor Dostoyevsky said. In my experience, people struggle to be honest in relationships. They fear another's anger, rocking a calm boat or hurting someone's feelings.

If you are frequently fearing someone's anger, and are

diluting your own responses, you may need to ask yourself, "What is going on? Is it competition? Power? Control? If you find the courage to address your concerns that you are lacking a voice in the relationship and the other person begins to listen, great. If, however, after many kind, thoughtful, attempts at sharing and communicating are thwarted, then one has to question the potentiality of the connection.

Ask yourself, do I have a voice in this relationship? Does the other person try to understand me? Are we able to tolerate not always agreeing? Someone who is unwilling to listen in a relationship diminishes our essence and our investment into this kind of person should be questioned.

As Jenny O'Connell states, "Hiding how you really feel and trying to make every-

one happy doesn't make you nice, it just makes you a liar." Friends or family eventually become upset with deception when they realize the truth. In witnessing Polly's interaction with the other person, it would have been easy to say nothing. Keep the peace. Yet, I would not have been true to myself, and would have felt complicit in the lie. Also in witnessing her lie, I lost some trust in her.

You cannot develop long-term meaningful relationships without trust. Trust is the fundamental element that is the glue in connections. In my therapeutic work, I experience people struggling with the issue of honesty and trust often. They want to trust the other.

Often the desire to trust is so strong, they deny all the contrasting and contradictory information. It is painful to feel lied to, yet when people muster

the courage and confront the perceived lies, they often are relieved with gaining the truth. They may not like the facts, but they are relieved to be grounded in clarity.

For individuals striving to disclose more genuine responses, consistent attempts at being honest can get easier. Like Sarah in the first example, in time people begin to expect forthright responses and start to appreciate the authenticity. Also, authentic, honest people are often considered more reliable because others realize where they stand with them.

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