

Positively Fun
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*“It is well to give when asked, but it is better to give unasked, through understanding;
And to the open-handed the search for one who shall receive is joy greater than giving.”*
Kahlil Gibran; ‘ On Giving’, **The Prophet**

As you are preparing for summer fun, it might be well to remember that vacations are in the top 10 of stressful activities. We are removed from our comfortable surroundings and in unfamiliar territory. We have wildly high expectations of the ‘good time’ we are going to experience and, we are in the company of friends or family 24/7. This can be a recipe for disaster.

Kahlil Gibran’s poetic words from “The Prophet” give us a hint about how this time off can be refreshing and a time to build relationships. Relationships grow through what we get and what we give. What forms can this take? Sometimes, it comes out as harsh words; *criticism* or *defensiveness*. Or we can *stonewall* others by not listening at all. When these things are happening it paves the way for the most destructive form of relationship interaction, *contempt*. According to John Gottman, Ph.D., a well known author and researcher on relationships, these four behaviors are the negative processes which lead to the ultimate demise of a relationship.

What antidotes are there for these negative forms of communication? One powerful antidote is being positive. In relationships that are stable the ratio of negative to positive interactions is 5:1. When the ratio is about 1.25:1, the couple is headed for the end. Think about what your ratio of negative to positive behaviors is during the course of the day. The point is not to eliminate the negative entirely as we need that for balance. A relationship that does not deal with the negative wouldn’t be real or very human.

Another simple, yet difficult, antidote is to soften our approach to the other person. Criticism softened to a complaint moves from blaming to an honest sharing. For example; one partner says to the other, “You never listen to me. You’re so busy lecturing me about what to do, you don’t even hear me. I don’t get you!” Perhaps that could be softened to, “I really feel ignored and not heard when you lecture me.” Many times, with couples, it isn’t what either partner is trying to say to the other, it is how it is presented. The verbal and behavioral packages that contain our thoughts and feelings can be the difference between a statement escalating to yet another fight or one leading to more understanding.

Another powerful, positive antidote for master couples is how quickly repair attempts are made after an argument or negative encounter. Couples who have long-lasting relationships have found ways to make bridges to one another through humor, affection, positive statements, self-soothing and calming the other person.

I find that nearly every couple who is having difficulties rarely spend any quality time together. How is a relationship to thrive if it is never fed? Both partners must have time for themselves and the relationship must have time or it will begin to die. Then, we go on

a vacation with this person we rarely spend time with and wonder why we argue when we are together all the time.

One of the keys is to create a 'culture of appreciation.' We give openly and are able to receive openly. Some people are good at giving and not so good at receiving. Others are comfortable receiving but don't think to give. The balance is necessary in a healthy relationship. This is not always easy to accomplish as many people are afraid to take in good things even though they may want to do this.

So, as you prepare to have some summer fun with your friends, family or partners, think about the positive approach and I hope you will find some joy and fun ...positively practicing before you head out to spend days with someone who has been a stranger or an adversary. While getting the details of your trip or outings planned, make becoming friends again one of the preparations. I think you will find some positive fun!

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