

Choosing the Right Partner

“May those who love us, love us
And those that don't love us
May God turn their hearts;
And if God doesn't turn their hearts
May God turn their ankles
So we'll know them by their limping”

An Old Celtic Blessing

The key to a fulfilling and meaningful relationship is knowing how to identify the essential characteristics most important in choosing a compatible partner. This will involve having a better understanding of both your own and your partner's personality characteristics. Getting to know someone involves not only conversation but observation of how he/she responds to life experiences based on their belief system.

Most people are able to list superficial traits most desired in their “ideal relationship.” Unfortunately, as the divorce statistics indicate, a surface attraction is not usually enough to sustain a lifetime commitment.

Most of us have a mental picture of the perfect life partner based on what we learned to do or not to do from our parental figures as well as the myths and fantasy of “happily ever after endings.” Our mental picture can be distorted and sabotage our ability to carefully choose partners who have the attributes we value.

The following are a few characteristics that I believe are essential to seek in a partner as well as to develop in oneself.

- **Listen:**

The ability to listen is the most valuable virtue in developing a healthy relationship. “No characteristic reveals as much about a person as their ability to pay attention to others,” according to Dr. Gordon Livingston, MD. Being able to listen objectively and without judgment gives your partner validation and respect and allows for connectedness at the deepest level.

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- **Loyalty:**

The ability to trust the reliability of your partner's commitments and the congruency in what he/she says and does. Being able to trust that your partner is honest not only with you but with others is a fundamental requirement in building a lifetime of relationship security. Dr. Gordon Livingston says, Integrity is a "window into the soul of another person."

- **Kindness:**

The capacity to genuinely care about the well being of your partner. A relationship will grow and be nurtured by "random acts of kindness."

- **Courage:**

The willingness to admit fears and insecurities and be open to working toward overcoming obstacles rather than avoiding or giving up. An important character virtue that increases success in a relationship is tolerance to accept and let go of past mistakes. When we can forgive our partner as well as ourself, we can learn from the mistake and ultimately become a more evolved person who will allow for deeper intimacy.

- **Optimism:**

The ability to focus on solutions rather than get stuck in the problem. Optimists are correlated with success in life which also includes attitude in relationships. The characteristic is reflected in a behavior of resiliency and the continued belief to anticipate happiness and fulfillment. It is important to avoid people who have learned helplessness by thinking they have no choice on how to respond to life experiences. The concept of the "self-fulfilling prophesy," of we get what we expect to get, is generally true.

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It is critical to NOT build relationships upon fear, insecurity or pity. It is equally important to avoid faulty thinking based on myths such as

- 1) He/She makes my life complete
- 2) He/She will change me
- 3) He/She will make all my problems go away

According to Dr. Barbara DeAngelis, the following are some flaws that may be fatal to the relationship:

- Addictions
- Verbal and physical abuse
- Hasn't recovered from past relationships
- Victim consciousness
- Emotionally unavailable
- Excessive need to control

In my couple counseling sessions, I encourage the couple to:

- Understand self
- Understand partner
- Analyze the dynamics of the relationship
- Talk to each other
- TAKE TIME

*Not what you have, but what you use;
Not what you see, but what you choose;
Not what seems fair, but what is true;
Not what you dream, but what you do;
Not what you take, but what you give;
Not as you pray, but as you live.
These are the things that mar or bless
The sum of human happiness.*

Author Unknown