

The Ten Commandments for Extraordinary Relationships: Part 2

“Son, a successful relationship is really a series of successful negotiations.”

I have to admit I was disappointed when my father shared with me his secret to relational success. Successful negotiations? That doesn't sound very romantic; in fact, it sounds like hard work!

Despite my initial disappointment I have learned the truth of this wisdom in my life and in the lives of my clients. Given most core differences in a relationship are never fully resolved, the ability to negotiate is essential to a relationship's survival. In last month's column I presented the first five of 10 principles essential to negotiating difficulties and making the most of intimate relationships. My father, Ted Klontz, Ph.D., and I explore these principles in our CD “Relationship Toolkit II: The Ten Commandments for Extraordinary Relationships” (available at www.amazon.com).

The first five commandments urged you to take responsibility for your part in disagreements, speak your truth, listen to your partner, maintain a successful ratio of positive to negative interactions, and realize that true intimacy is much more than just a feeling. Here are introductions to the final five commandments.

Commandment # 6: Love Thyself: The quality of our relationships will be limited by the quality of the relationship we have with ourselves. How much love we can give or receive is limited by our beliefs about how lovable we are. We can't allow someone to love us more than we love ourselves. The best thing you can do to improve the quality of your relationship is to improve the relationship you have with yourself.

Commandment # 7: No Baggage Allowed: Unresolved emotional baggage from childhood experiences and previous relationships keeps us from seeing or hearing what is happening in the moment. This baggage filters the words and actions of our partner through the historic voices inside our heads. If we are unaware of our past being triggered we can't distinguish between an issue that is current and one that represents a piece of unfinished business. While it may seem as if two free single adults enter into a relationship alone, in reality there is always historic baggage lurking in the background ready to seize

control of a situation. The key to handling emotional baggage lies in being aware of what actions or words trigger old hurts, healing them, and find ways to mitigate their impact on the present situation. If left unexamined, unresolved emotional baggage can ultimately destroy a relationship.

Commandment

8: Beware of Invaders: Invaders are people, things, activities, or beliefs that come between, interfere with, or drain energy from a relationship. Differing from historic baggage, invaders are issues that couples face in their present lives—including children, work, friends, relatives, hobbies, etc. Anything in life, both good and bad, can become an invader if the couple allows it. To protect against the divisive effects of invaders, after one's relationship with a higher power, and with self, successful couples make the relationship THE priority. Learn to negotiate with your partner to neutralize the dividing power of invaders.

Commandment # 9: Children Need Not Apply: Little kids can't have adult relationships. A child sees or hears something and reacts, often in an emotionally flooded way. This emotional flooding results in the child fighting, throw-

YOU'RE NOT ALONE



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ing a temper tantrum, running away, freezing, or giving-up in times of trouble. Partners should avoid childlike responses when feeling angry or scared. This includes avoiding such actions as name calling, throwing things, slamming doors, going silent, running away, tattling to others, making threats, hitting, or self-soothing in inappropriate ways. Successful relationships can

only occur between adults.

Commandment # 10: Safety First: A successful intimate relationship cannot exist without safety. Most importantly, this involves avoiding verbal, physical, or emotional violence. There is never any excuse for violence in a relationship. A safe relationship has built in safety devices to help a couple navigate tough times and disagreements. This may involve delineating rules for how you interact with each other. For example, rules might include not using words such as “you always” or “you never,” not interrupting, not bringing up past grievances to make a point, not walking out of the room during discussions, and keeping commitments.

Research shows that most couples struggle with the same problem for over seven years before seeking help. That is a lot of time spent rehashing old arguments and

hurting each other. If you are at an impasse in your relationship and are having trouble putting The Ten Commandments for Extraordinary Relationships to use, seek help sooner rather than later.

You won't regret it.

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