

During the month of February, we at Unbeatable Spirit are celebrating **International Boost Self-Esteem Month** (dedicated to improving self-esteem among people of all cultures, races, ethnicities, age groups, and social statuses) and **Relationship Wellness Month** (a time to reflect on those who mean the most and take proactive steps to keep those relationships healthy).

Beyond Valentine's Day: Taking Care of Your Social Relationships

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(Reading Time: 5 minutes)



Social relationships develop in a variety of interactions.

The month of February is generally known as the month for love, focusing on one type of relationship – that of partnered affection. With all of the hype surrounding Valentine's Day, it's easy to get caught up in the romance and fantasy of it all. Yet, we must take the time to remember that the majority of our relationships do not fall into this category. Most of them are non-romantic social ones and our role in the health of those relationships is vital.

"I'm Charlie's brother..."

Did you know that you cannot tell me who you are without identifying yourself as part of a relationship? It's true, just try it. You are either someone's employee, boss, friend, or neighbor. You might describe

yourself as someone's sibling, parent, or child. Maybe you use the word mentor, coach, or volunteer. No matter what descriptor you choose, it includes some type of relationship. You are not yourself without the presence of others. And no matter where you fit in those relationships, your efforts are necessary to their success.

According to Dr. Andrea and Jonathan Taylor-Cummings, co-founders of Soulmates Academy, all successful relationships share four simple yet fundamental habits¹:

1. **Be Curious, Not Critical.** Curiosity is "all about investing the time to understand how we're wired differently so that we can learn to play to our strengths rather than waste time and energy criticizing our differences."
2. **Be Careful, Not Crushing.** This habit "helps us learn how to work together, argue well, treat each other with care, and come out stronger together."
3. **Ask, Don't Assume.** Here we get "good at having those courageous conversations that see us asking and discussing rather than assuming and stereotyping."
4. **Connect before you Correct.** Connecting helps us learn "how to communicate real value and appreciation and hold back on our insatiable need to give 'constructive' feedback."

Curious, Not Critical



To be critical of someone is to dwell on perceived thoughts while excluding what is good. In a world seemingly devoted to the importance of self, it is not uncommon to be critical of others and their decisions. We see it happening every day, from the slighted looks of strangers at the mall to the offensive social media posts shared online. Unfortunately, we can also find ourselves in the middle of the critical spectrum at one time or another.

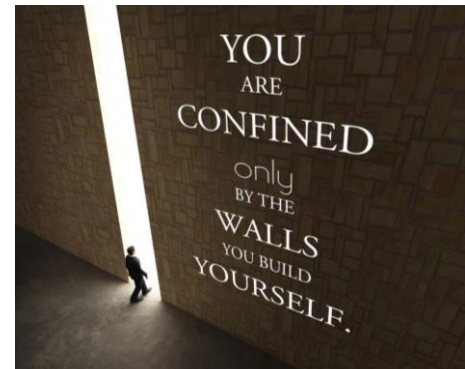
If we take a step back, we see that leading with a critical attitude is not the way to go. It comes across as both offensive and off-putting. Instead, we must first understand the other person and their point of view through our own curiosity.

To be curious in a relationship (family, friendship, work relationship, etc.) is to be open to the other person's entirety and balance out any preconceived ideas with the unknown. "Successful, authentic relationships are rooted in respectful understanding, and the only way you can achieve this is with

curiosity,” wrote Kirsten Siggins, co-founder of the Institute of Curiosity². “(It) is the single most powerful tool to which we all have access.”

Careful, Not Crushing

Have you ever suggested an idea to your partner, boss, or friend only to have it immediately shot down without you having a chance to explain your rationale? That feeling of being dismissed can be miserable. As people with inherent value, we all deserve to be heard. Otherwise, we begin to shut down and, in turn, develop a defensive attitude toward the other person. It is our role in every relationship to listen, have patience, and be careful with the other person’s feelings. After all, no successful relationship can be one-sided.



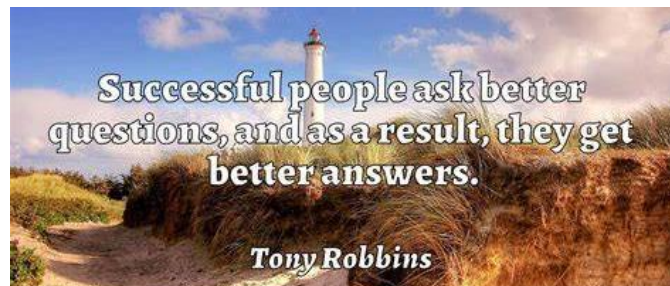
Ask, Don't Assume

It's easy to get caught up in the drama of the world and make assumptions about all kinds of people. Maybe there's gossip at the office that leads you to dislike your boss. Maybe there is neighborhood annoyance over a neighbor's new choice of landscaping. Or maybe it's even a personal assumption you have about your spouse's (lack of) ability to do the dishes in your timely manner. Whatever your assumption, it's usually based on a lack of understanding.

Could it be that:

- your boss is behind on a deadline and has felt so pressured that they unintentionally lashed out at employees?
- your neighbor chose the layout of their garden because that is exactly how his mom did hers and he is having a tough time now that she has passed?
- your spouse has been working extra hours to pay the bills and would rather spend weekend time with the family during the day instead of cleaning the house, something which can be done in the evening?

Just the same as we want understanding and compassion for ourselves and our decisions, so should we offer those things to others. Before you assume anything, ask probing questions out of kindness and respect.



Connection before Correction

If you're guilty of jumping to correct what you perceive to be undesirable behavior without connecting first, it might be for one or more of the following reasons, according to Marcilie Smith Boyle, certified Positive Discipline Parenting Trainer and Certified Get5 Career Coach³:

- It's faster and more efficient to get right to the point.
- You believe the other person values your candor.
- You're busy and have more important things to do.
- You feel the behavior needs to be corrected immediately.

"Sometimes these reasons hold. However, when we focus on correcting behavior all the time without investing in the relationship, at some point, the relationship degrades and the correction falls on deaf ears (or even worse, defiant ones.)"

Correction before establishing a relational connection rarely results in your desired outcome. Take the time to slow down and make those all -important connections so when the time comes, your suggested corrections are welcome and positively received.



The Positive Perspective

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A Two-Way Street

Just as with romantic relationships, maintaining a positive social relationship works best with intention and effort from both sides. It is helpful for all to be curious, careful, questioning, and connected.

So, how do we apply this to our daily life? The best starting approach is to focus on one or two specific relationships.

For the next month, we encourage you to pick relationships in your life that you would like to improve and use the four habits suggested. With or without telling the other person, be intentional in applying them and see what happens. Let us know - You might just be surprised at how much better your relationships become!

¹ [\(1060\) 4 Habits of ALL Successful Relationships | Dr. Andrea & Jonathan Taylor-Cummings | TEDxSquareMile - YouTube](#)

² [A Mother/Daughter Project: How to Be Curious and Strengthen Your Relationship | HuffPost , Communicate Effectively | Institute Of Curiosity](#)

³ [3 Easy Ways to "Connect Before Correct" in parenting - WorkingParenting](#)

Previously in **The Positive Perspective**: *"Don't Just Sit on the Sidelines: How to Take an Active Role in Improving your Self-Esteem,"* found at www.unbeatable-spirit.com/the-positive-perspective