



Relationships

keeping them alive and well

As the old saying goes, you can't pick your relatives, but who you choose to befriend is up to you. In the main, we humans are social animals, tending to keep company with others of our kind for a variety of reasons. Whether at home or work, relaxing, playing a sport, even exercising, most of us prefer not to be alone. There are, of course, the exceptions such as jogging and the appreciation of those quiet, private moments, plus the need of the odd (no slant intended) intrepid adventurer who gets a buzz from sailing solo around the world; but all eventually return to the bosom of society and are usually glad to do so. To make the most out of any relationship, a certain amount of effort goes into forming it in the first place, then much more to keep it the way that suits its purpose. Unfortunately, we don't always treat each situation as unique, rather employing a similar modus operandi for the lot. Unlike stretch clothing, one size doesn't fit all. An approach or attitude that works well with a group of people may be inappropriate for a tete a tete; and any relationship will change over time, often without notice.

The family unit is a classic example of continuing relationships that start out one way and evolve into something totally different over time. This has as much to do with the environment outside as the individuals within the family. To begin with anyway, there is no family, just a couple of people who choose to live together. Initially, they presume they are compatible and will soon discover whether this is so. There will probably be a period of adjustment and more than a few compromises to keep the relationship running smoothly. Should it turn out that only one is making the changes while the other is carrying on in their own sweet way, maybe not so sweet in some instances, their relationship is either destined to failure or, at best, will not be a mutually happy one. If this is the case, with luck they will decide to call it a bust before taking the relationship to the next stage. It is not hard to imagine how a rocky or one-sided partnership will influence the family of which it is to be the foundation. Hopefully, however, both parties will have an earnest desire to please simply because it pleases them.

How two people come to meet shouldn't matter; how they continue does. Frequently, the relationship begins in the company of others – a casual meeting of friends, at a party, maybe in the workplace, or at the bus stop. That environment will influence the initial approach, the first words and what happens immediately afterwards. Even if they have been acquainted for some time, stepping up to this new and more personal level requires each to test the water, neither being sure exactly who their prospective partner is. Will they behave the same way they do in company, or temper their words and actions to please only one rather than anyone else present at the time? An individual who is normally loud and boisterous and continues to display this over-confidence while talking to the person they are trying to impress could care more for their social standing than the relationship they are trying to nurture. By toning down their brash behaviour when conversing with just one of a group, they are showing consideration for that person and are apparently prepared to adapt as necessary, despite what others may think or say.

A brief word of warning here: friendships made and conducted via the Internet are quite common these days but, unless they have already met face to face, neither party can be certain that the one they are apparently developing a relationship with actually exists: they may be a complete fabrication. Sadly, there have been too many instances of broken hearts and worse simply from trusting an electronic profile that can't be authenticated. Anyone participating in online chat should be very cautious.

Back to real people. Once alone together, the courtship becomes more personalised. Questions will undoubtedly be asked about likes and dislikes, past experiences and future desires. Ideally, this familiarisation ought to be generalised, referring to family, hobbies, the kind of entertainment enjoyed and the places and events that bring pleasure. In other words, gathering information that will ensure harmony, helping to take the relationship in a positive direction, while avoiding subjects that might offend or upset. Initially anyway, enquiring about the intimate details of someone they barely know is too forward and could be an indication of a possessive nature and a need to control. As the relationship progresses, that show of respect, or the lack of it, will become clearer. This is the stage where trust is established; but it has to be mutual. If either party believes they are being lied to, or that a personality is emerging which they will be at odds with in future, they would be advised to bear this in mind, because it is unlikely to get better. The other side of the coin is much brighter, especially when the couple eventually feel they can divulge some of their secrets and idiosyncrasies in the belief that they will be safe with their intended. When proven over time, this honest exchange could well be the foundation of a strong and lasting union.

Not all relationships are fostered with intimacy in mind. We make connections with people in a variety of situations and all have a unique set of rules. The workplace usually calls for arms-length associations, sometimes strictly formal and dependent on the relative standing of individuals within the environment. Rigidity may relax once everyone understands what is appropriate, but there is the danger of sending the wrong signal by becoming too familiar. Flirtations in the office or on the factory floor may seem harmless, but they can lead to unexpected problems simply because the parties involved know very little about each other except what they have been told; and that is not always the whole truth. The same applies to purely business relationships between boss and employee, and also co-worker interaction. Although individuals may meet socially outside of work hours, they still need to understand that the environments are not the same, and each demands the observation of different standards.

There are right and wrong places for everything, and this applies particularly to behaviour. Everyone knows that making excess noise in a library is frowned on; and it would be grossly disrespectful to act the clown at a funeral. These are time-honoured rules that are generally accepted without question. People, however, are not well-known institutions and they don't wear labels warning others of their preferences. Finding out what these are is essential to forming an appropriate relationship. Some information may be divulged when the time is thought to be right; but, in the early stages, more is probably learned by trial and error and simple observation. How a person reacts when a particular subject is mentioned says a lot about their background and past experiences. Should they suddenly appear angered or fearful, they probably are. To pursue the matter, or continue an act of physical contact if that was the trigger, is not the way to go. Neither is this the moment to ask why: far better to change the subject and hopefully lighten the atmosphere.

There is another, less-invasive means of finding out another's tendencies without actually subjecting them to the third degree. As strange as it may sound, date of birth seems to have a bearing on the kind of person we are and the type of relationship which would best suit. Astrological profiles are surprisingly quite accurate in many cases and can underline strengths, weaknesses and preferences. Not only can they make us aware of our own personality, but they can also provide a small insight into that of someone we might be thinking of forming a relationship with. Having said this, I wouldn't advocate taking these generalisations as gospel, certainly not with regard to compatibility. A blanket statement that certain star-signs go well together, whereas others do not, has been disproved many times. However, if the information in the individual profiles is used merely as a hint of how a person may react to certain approaches, there is less likelihood of making a hash of it at the first meeting. Whether it is close to the mark or miles from it, as long as any advances are made with consideration for feelings, no harm will be done.

Whether we use star-signs, intuition, past experiences, or other means, it is important to know as much as possible about whom we are sharing a particular moment with, even when that person is

a business associate, or the next-door neighbour. Everyone has desires, personal issues, things they are happy to share and some they prefer remain private. Any and more of these may or may not have a bearing on the current situation; all deserve respect. If we speak words that offend or demean, the one who hears them will think less of us; but making an effort to please will be rewarded in similar fashion. Should we go out of our way to be considerate, it will be remembered fondly.

We must also be aware that new circumstances will affect existing relationships, and the signs need to be noticed. Missing subtle nuances in manner and composure can lead to the assumption that everything is the same as it was. That is never the case. All friendships change over time, and if just one party fails to appreciate this and react in accordance, they are simply showing that they are not caring as much as they should; neither about the other person, nor themselves. If they don't want the relationship to continue, they just have to say so, or carry on doing nothing; but if the reverse is true, they can discover quite easily if their friend wishes the same. It is simply a matter of refreshing the relationship by treating each new day as if it is their very first meeting. Being as considerate now as then isn't difficult and the response will tell them what they need to know.

Perhaps the greatest damage to a relationship comes from taking someone else for granted. An employer may pay the staff handsomely, but a word of special thanks for a job well done costs nothing and will make a difference to all concerned. Parents who are often slaves to their children would definitely be happy to know their efforts are appreciated. As far as their private relationship with each other, the same applies. It is all very well to presume that a partner's role is accepted and enjoyed because they rarely complain. Asking if this is so and offering to help wouldn't hurt; and even when this would be impractical, the simple show of understanding can mean a great deal. People respond to kindness and consideration. Having received it, they will pass it on.

For every action there is a reaction. This is sometimes known as the butterfly principle – the effect of beating wings which disturb air in the immediate vicinity, in turn causing a breeze that moves something next to it, and so on. It's not a bad analogy with regard to relationships which also impact on themselves and others around them. In the early stages they can be up and down, flitting around much the same as this small, beautiful creature. Both need space to be what they can be, to fly free and away if they wish. Should they desire to stay close, a touch of any kind must be gentle. If these simple rules are observed, we will always have butterflies in our lives. Need I say more?

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