

You Have a Relationship with Yourself

Does it surprise you to think about having a relationship with yourself? Somehow this simple relationship truth escapes so many of us so much of the time. But this understanding is critical to successful relationships.

Part of your resistance to paying attention to your relationship to yourself may be that it sounds, well, self-centered. And it is to some extent. But as with all relationships, it's all about balance. It is un-healthy to be too focused on your relationship to yourself; it can lead to what psychologists call narcissism. However, it is just as unhealthy to belittle, dismiss, or ignore yourself.

Do you have a healthy, dynamic relationship with yourself? Are you on good terms? Do you think of yourself as important? Do you like yourself? Do you accept yourself? Do you forgive yourself? Do you take care of yourself?

One of the things I see so clearly in the people who come for counseling is the difference between people who don't have a healthy relationship with themselves and those who do.

One of the women is Mary, who is dealing with alcoholism. It's quite a struggle. Besides the problem of her dependency on alcohol, her addiction affects all the relationships in her life. She has become distant from her husband and neglectful of her children. She has good days when she is more communicative, but other days she drops out of sight for hours on end. She barely speaks to her husband, Tom, and she forgets to pick up her kids from school.

Mary is unaware of what she does to the people in her life, unaware of how her behaviors affect relationships. When asked why she does what she does, she mutters, "I don't know" and has a blank look on her face. She looks and sounds helpless about herself. She consistently seems unable to see her own behaviors, to understand anything about how they affect others, or ultimately to have any perspective about herself in the world.

Now, addictions are very hard to overcome, no question. I don't minimize the difficulties that Mary faces on a daily basis. *But she'll never climb out of her situation until she sees herself **honestly and objectively***, which is the starting place for her developing a healthy relationship with herself. She needs a model, someone like Susan.

Susan also struggles with alcoholism. She was much like Mary, helpless in the face of her addiction and unaware of herself. But then she gave birth to a baby girl. The baby changed Susan's perspective of herself. She *suddenly saw herself through her eyes*, and she saw how her addiction could hurt her child in a major way.

She was able to step apart from herself and see herself objectively as if she were another person. It was as if she saw herself through a camera lens. She didn't like everything she saw - an addicted woman who thought she had no **choices** - but facing that reality helped her begin the process of change. Once she saw her own actions and how they affected others, she could take personal responsibility for those actions. Susan was finally motivated to change.

Soon Susan started making changes in her lifestyle and fighting the addiction that had controlled her. Do you see the third strand here again? *You are made to take **responsibility for yourself***. She started taking care of herself. She got into AA, which has been immensely helpful.

All of this started when Susan saw herself through the camera lens and developed a healthy relationship with herself.

People who *do* have a healthy relationship with themselves - who take responsibility and take care of themselves - are better positioned to deal with relationship problems because they can see themselves objectively.

The relationship truth is this: *Put yourself in the picture*. When you master this skill - seeing a

picture image of both the other person and yourself in the same frame - you suddenly have a perspective on yourself with others. You can see the consequence of your own actions and the effect they have on the feelings of your friends and family. And you can adjust your thoughts, words, and behaviors accordingly.

One of the things you immediately notice about people who have a healthy relationship with themselves is that they take care of themselves - their bodies, their minds, their emotions, and their spirits. This relates to the importance of self-care. When they accept this truth and start thinking about the future of taking better care of themselves, they get very excited and hopeful.

But be prepared for something else.

I have to admit, sometimes when I see snapshots of myself, I don't always like what I see. I look across a row of beautiful smiling faces - my children and grandchildren, my wife, and then I see my smiling self-and I think, *Is that really me?*

If you look at yourself through the camera lens, you may not like what you see. Some of what you see - in your behaviors, in the responses of other people, in the attitudes that you cast out among others - just won't be pretty.

The above material is from the book [The DNA of Relationships](#) by Gary Smalley