

Feel better about yourself, feel better about your relationship

BY RHONDA RABOW, FREELANCE APRIL 24, 2010

When we think of relationships, we normally think of how our partner is treating us, whether we are happy and feel heard. We tend to weigh the pros and cons of the relationship and then consider how we feel about our partner.

But what if your happiness in your relationship has as much to do with how you feel about yourself as it does with how your partner is treating you?

Have you noticed that leaving one relationship and beginning a new one doesn't necessarily solve everything? At first you think this person is different and now you will be happy forevermore. The honeymoon feelings can last anywhere from three months to three years, but eventually problems crop up again.

The kicker is that you take yourself with you wherever you go. This includes your own baggage and self-esteem issues, and you can be sure that how you are feeling about yourself will affect how you see your partner.

Here are three ways you could be sabotaging your relationship as a result of self-esteem issues:

1. Your self-esteem is an indication of what you feel you deserve in a loving relationship. We all know that intellectually we believe we deserve to be loved and cherished. However, the unconscious mind is powerful, and if unconsciously we have feelings of inadequacy, insecurity or failure, we can sabotage a loving relationship without even realizing it - until it is too late.

For example, if on some subconscious level we feel that we don't really deserve happiness, we could think that our partner is too good for us and fear one day he or she will figure this out and leave. Some people handle this insecurity by provoking fights with their partner, challenging and threatening them until they do leave. Then they say to themselves, "You see? I knew he would leave me."

2. Another way your self-

esteem can influence your relationship is if you have difficulty asserting yourself. Some people are afraid of confrontation, and see all discussions as replays of traumatic conflicts they experienced in their childhood, so they avoid and minimize conflict, never resolving the issues. Over time, these unresolved issues fester and become resentments, which lead to feelings of detachment and a lack of intimacy in the relationship.

3. For some people, low self-esteem affects their tolerance level. They cannot deal well with frustration or stress and often explode, blaming their partner for some minor infraction, when in reality they feel powerless and out of control.

The partners of these "rageaholics" report that they feel like they are walking on eggshells; instead of having loving feelings toward their partner, they feel fearful and anxious about openly discussing

concerns. So they hide their feelings, lie to avoid confrontation and incur more anger when the lies are discovered. This "dance of anger" can be extremely toxic to relationships.

If you had a great day at work, got a promotion or positive feedback from your boss, and then come home and your partner is late, or didn't pay a bill, how do you think you would react vs. a situation in which your boss berated you, or you got a speeding ticket, and your partner did the same thing? The situation at home is the same, but your self-esteem is in a very different place. Therefore, it's not your partner creating the angry reaction - it is your feeling about yourself in the present moment.

As you learn how to raise your self-esteem, how to communicate calmly and reasonably, that alone will create a ripple effect that will positively influence how you feel about your partner and the loving quality of your relationship.

This is not about blaming yourself for everything that is wrong in your relationship - and it is not to say that your partner necessarily needs to work on his or her own self-esteem and communication skills. But it is important to acknowledge that how you feel about yourself in the moment affects your perception of what is happening, along with the way in which you choose to deal with it.

It's true that both of you need to take responsibility for what you contribute to - and contaminate in - your relationship, but just changing your feelings about your self-worth can help improve all your relationships and how you deal with life's challenges.

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