

*A relationship can't be treated like a cactus*

Many couples, because of time constraints, fall into the trap of treating their relationship as a cactus, or something that requires little nurturance. Just as a rose would shrivel up and die if treated as a cactus, so too will a relationship. The purpose of this article is to review communication, the most important source of nurturance in a relationship.

The psychologist Erich Fromm, in his book *The Art of Loving*, points out that many of us bring discipline and concentration to our work lives but not to our relationships. We often act as if love is self-sustaining. Dr. Fromm points out that lasting love does not just happen, but requires hard work to be maintained and enhanced.

The kind of communication being referred to here should not be confused with current events or management sorts of

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## **Couple's Communication**

by

D. J. Palmiter, Jr., Ph.D., ABPP

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communication. In current events communication, a couple reviews recent events with each other (e.g., "The boss asked me to take on a new project this morning.") Management communication reviews how life's responsibilities will be satisfied. (e.g., "Could you pick up the kids at school today at 3 P.M.?" ) To be sure, these kinds of communication are very important. However, it is easy to make the mistake of believing that closeness can be maintained at this level of communication. If a couple lives at this level of intimacy for a long time it can be easy to drift apart. More intimate communication comes from the heart. It involves the sharing of deeper feelings and thoughts. It involves risk and opening up.

A prerequisite for good communication is making the time to communicate. In many marriages good communication only happens once every other significant obligation is met; however, rare

is the week that this happens. The years pass on and the distance between two people widens. After awhile, a couple realizes that they are standing

*Time needs to be set aside*

on opposite ends of a wide chasm. They wonder "how could this have happened to us?" In some instances, one or both people may get the idea that the chasm has been created because they have fallen out of love. A divorce or an affair may then follow as one as the person looks to "fall in love" with someone else. The real problem is that the marriage was not nurtured sufficiently; thus, it wilted.

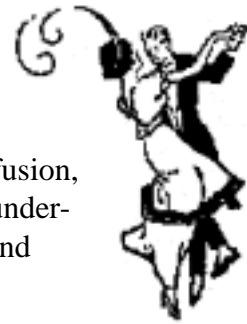


Assuming a couple is willing to sacrifice other obligations in order to make the time to communicate, there can be a sense of confusion or hesitation regarding how to proceed. In this event, help can be obtained at the psychology book section of the local book store. Good

books on relationship building contain suggestions for discussion launchers (for example: "I am most afraid of..." "the three things I want to accomplish next year are..."). However, just like starting an exercise program, it's important to start out with easier topics and to fold in more challenging subjects after a few weeks of warming up.

is tricky, as the word "feel" is often used in place of the words "think," and "believe." For instance: "I feel you are too hard on yourself." Is really saying "I think..." and contains no communication about feelings. "I feel I cannot do my job well" is really saying "I believe..." and says little about

intended message can save a lot of confusion, time, misunderstanding and energy.



*Good communication takes concentration, discipline and patience*

It is vital that this communication be intimate. A communication is more likely to be intimate if it would not be shared with an acquaintance or if feels difficult to disclose. Communication does not have to feel anxious to be intimate. But if a communication feels hard to share with a spouse, then it is highly likely that it is intimate. (Of course, everyone has to use good judgement about what intimate thoughts and feelings should be shared and which should remain undisclosed.)

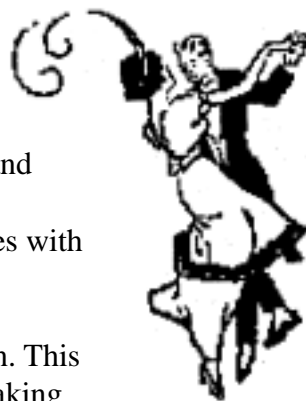
how one is feeling. These examples may constitute part of intimate communication. However, sharing one's feelings further facilitates growing closer.

√ Avoid attacks, even if they're counterattacks. These only hurt in the long run, as satisfying and as necessary as they can seem in the short-run.

**Additional tips:**

√ Try not be doing anything else during the communication; also, turn off the TV and unplug the phone. Multitasking interferes with intimacy building.

√ Maintain good body language. Make your body say to your partner that you are listening.



√ Give the benefit of the doubt. Assuming good intentions can create an atmosphere of openness.

√ Listen. Really listen. This means being quiet, making eye contact and paying attention to what is being said.

In closing, some couples may find that it is too hard to communicate because there are too many internal and external obstacles. They find they are not able to overcome these obstacles on their own. In these instances, a consultation with a relationship counselor may be helpful.

It is critical that this communication contain feelings and not just thoughts or analysis. This

