

Putting First Thing First - RELATIONSHIP over Logistics

Two recent incidents inspired this article. The first was overhearing a conversation on a bus. A passenger was confiding his marital woes to his friend. "Our relationship is on the rocks. We will have to work at doing things differently."

The second was hearing the lament of a mother. "My children don't talk to me anymore. I cannot even enjoy a proper conversation with them even though they are always on the phone with their friends." This was said with a mix of envy and perplexity.

The people in both incidents have experienced a relationship breakdown. They have once enjoyed intimacy, the sense of closeness with their loved ones. But it is now gone.

Many things can kill intimacy in relationships. One which is fundamental of them all is when we put everything else over and above maintaining and developing the intimacy in our relationship. The 'everything else' has usually to do with 'Logistics'. So we shall refer to them as such from this point on.

A relationship is like a house. A house is built brick upon brick. A relationship is built interaction upon interaction. The quality of the brick and the workmanship determine the strength of the house. The interaction and what guides it determine the



quality and intimacy of the relationship. We can choose to let our interactions be guided either by a Relationship-First principle or a Logistics-First principle. What guides the interaction will communicate to the other party, whether spoken or unspoken, if we have put Relationship over Logistics or the other way around. If we are guided by the Relationship-First principle we will make effort to discover and note the 'being' of that person. We will want to connect and engage with them emotionally. What are their likes and dislikes? What is close to their heart? What irk them, sadden them or excite them, etc.? We will be concerned for their well-being. We will put their needs before ours.

Husband calls wife to say that the function hall where they had planned to hold their son's birthday party is no longer available. He had been too busy at work to book it earlier. The wife blows her top. She has

reminded him several times in the day. What she communicates through this interaction is: The need to keep to their plan for the party is more important than how he feels, his needs, his priorities and his need to be respected. She has placed Logistics above Relationship. Suggesting that she places Relationship above Logistics does not mean that she should dismiss his 'shortcoming' or to suppress her disappointment and displeasure. If she had decided that maintaining the intimacy in their relationship is more important than the matter at hand, and so became guided by the Relationship-First principle, her reaction to her disappointment would be different. Her approach would keep their intimacy intact.

When we walk through the door at the end of our work day, are we more concerned about whether the Misses has contacted the plumber to fix the leaking faucet or if she has managed to catch a nap to make up for her sleepless night? Do we communicate that we are more concerned about other things than her well-being? Logistics over Relationship?

When we caught the first sight of a colleague, was it to ask about her ailing mother or to ask for a document we needed from her?

Do we ask our children when we pick them up from school about their homework and how many marks they got for their 'Spelling' or if their quarrel with their best friend has been resolved? Do we even know about the quarrel or what is happening in their life?

Does our pride cause us to want to win at all costs in our arguments or do we choose, sometimes, to back down for

the sake of the relationship?

Do we choose to spend Sunday cleaning up the house and feeling too tired for the planned outing the rest of the family has been looking forward to?

There is certainly a place for asking about our children's homework, for enforcing discipline, for ensuring that their bedrooms are clean, for expressing displeasure; in short, for

'Logistics'. It is the overall picture that the party receives from the sum of our interactions with them that matters. If our interactions with them are not guided by a Relationship-First principle, but consist only of logistics, our own needs and little or nothing that satisfies the other party's need for love and feeling understood, intimacy in the relationship will slowly and surely ebb away.

Connect-Point

Stephen Covey, in his book '7 Habits of Highly Effective People', used the fitting of rocks, sand and pebbles into a jar to illustrate the principle of putting 'First things first'. The 'First things' is what matters, what we identify as 'the most important things' -the major things. Instead of majoring the major as we should, we often get it wrong, he asserts. We minor the major and major the minor. The major is represented by the rock. If the rock is put in first, the pebbles and the sand will be able to fill in and around the big rock. That is a picture of putting what matters first, and letting everything else fall into place. If the 'Relationship-first' principle which is the rock, is mindfully placed foremost in all our interactions, we will have no problem with getting our loved ones clean their beds, do their homework, persuade them to our point of view etc. When we get along well, things can get done easily. But if we pour in the sand and put the pebbles in first, there will be no room left for the rocks. If we unknowingly and mindlessly place importance on Logistics at the expense of our relationship, the intimacy in our relationship gets worn out over time.

I often write from a place of learning. More so in this issue here. I am guilty, big time guilty, of not putting first things first in my relationships. Circumstances of the past have conditioned me to become more task-oriented than I was aware of. Getting rewarded for doing things well reinforced this further. I found myself more concerned about getting things done than for the being of the person I was relating with. This is not to say that I did not care. My approach towards caring for others however would be another item on my list of things to do. (Logistics) Visit Grand aunt, tick. Call friend to check on her fever, tick.



For a long time I was blind to the fact that I was satisfying my own need to care. (Doing) I now discover that for caring to truly engage, connect and build intimacy, it must flow from a desire of our being. Our being must desire to satisfy the need of the other's being to be loved and understood. I am still learning day by day to tackle my 'task-oriented' tendency and my blindness to the subtle difference in my motivation, to connect and care as I negotiate towards putting Relationship above Logistics.

Well, thankfully, life is forgiving. No matter where we may be in our relationships with our loved ones, for example for the people in the incidents I mentioned, there is always hope. 'Change our perspective and it will change our life', it is often said. So for as long as we still have breath and can still engage our will, we can determine to approach our relationships with a fresh perspective. We can determine to do better today, with them, than yesterday, this year than the last. We decide on the course we want our relationships to take. We call the shots. We will see the change.

Contact Us

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