

Intention +Attention – The Secret Sauce of Effective Relationships

"So when you are listening to somebody, completely, attentively, then you are listening not only to the words, but also to the feeling of what is being conveyed, to the whole of it, not part of it." - Krishnamurti

So here you are in the midst of an interaction – perhaps on the phone, at the watercolor, on the elevator, golf course or airplane and during any lulls in the interactions (of a second or more) you've been checking emails, text messaging, talking intermittently on your cell or been "otherwise engaged" with someone or something else. When the whole thing's over, you realize, with some sense of either regret, surprise or embarrassment, you hadn't been focusing very well.

The pity is that, truth be told, you may likely have no complete recall of the specifics of much of what you were doing or saying during that time – details about the who, what, where, when or why.

So, what's happening here?

Most folks would say they're multitasking - you know, "staying on top of things," and the like. But if you drilled down, deep down, many of these folks, if they're being honest and sincere, would say they "abhor a vacuum" - that, for them, silence (even of a second, or more) is deafening. Further, if pressed, many (most?) would say that in times of silence, they often turn to negative thoughts. So, they choose to keep their minds occupied – engaged in anything that will fill the void. How about you?

Consider:

Do you engage in other activities while eating, watching TV, responding to emails, talking on the phone, etc.? If so, why? Once you come up with your usual "stock" answers, then ask yourself, "really, really, really, why?"

Contrary to what many folks believe (a belief or story that justifies their so-called multitasking behavior?), neuroscience research tells us that the pleasure center in our brains lights up when we're fully and completely engaged in a single activity – when we're focused used on one task. The research suggests that intention and attention (both, not either/or), when focused like a laser, are what lead us to experience fulfillment, satisfaction and pleasure – whether it be a water cooler conversation, walking the dog, cooking a meal, folding the laundry, preparing the budget or watching "the game."

If you've ever experienced a great teacher, counselor, coach, clergy person, health care professional, therapist and the like (what about your spouse/partner?), the reason you called them "great" is most likely because they treated you as the most important person in the world when you were in their presence. Their intention and attention were squarely devoted to - you.

Dare to be great!

So, if in your own world, you want to be "great!" at relationships, invest your intention and attention on the person in your presence – even if you're in a group – one person at a time – regarding them as if they're the most important person in your life in this moment.

Oh, and one more thing - that "silence" issue

The next time you experience a “lull” in what you’re doing, don’t jump for the next gadget to “save you from yourself.” Take a slow, deep, quiet and nurturing breath (or two, or three or four) into your belly and listen to your intuitive voice and inner wisdom. It’s there, below the mental hubbub going on in your mind.

The more you take time to experience stillness and to direct your intention and attention inside, you can move below the inner din and negative thoughts and stories to a place of peace, contentment, equanimity, wisdom and well-being – the core of your essential and true self.

You might find the quality of your relationships moving to a higher level - even your relationship with yourself.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Are you generally “otherwise engaged” when you’re interacting with others? What story do you tell yourself to justify dividing your attention?
- Do you ever get upset when someone is “otherwise engaged” when you’re trying to have a conversation with them?
- Are you easily distracted? Is it hard for you to remain focused for periods at a time? Honestly.
- When you were growing up, did you ever feel you were being an “irritant” to your parents or primary caregivers because they did not give you their undivided attention when you wanted or needed it? How did that make you feel?
- Do you know folks who make you feel you’re the most important person in their life when you’re speaking with them? Do you ever make an effort to treat others that way?
- How well do you do with silence? On a scale of 1-10, how comfortable do you feel with silence?

P.S. True story: my partner just walked in from a lunch date with a friend. In the course of our “So, how was it?” conversation, I asked her if the restaurant were crowded. She replied, “You know what, I was so focused on (friend) I didn’t even notice.” Intention and attention.

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