

How to Harness the Power Appreciation in Your Relationship

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

Many of the couples I've worked with over the years exhibit similar relationship problems that erode the foundation of their marriage or relationship. One common pattern:

Couples often stop showing appreciation for each other

This appreciation deficit often occurs long before the couple becomes aware of the existence of marriage problems or feelings of dissatisfaction. While there may be many different reasons why couples *initially* stop showing appreciation for one another, when this pattern continues unchecked, significant marital problems and relationship trouble can result.

Mutual gratitude and appreciation can go a long way in healing many relationship problems. Daily reminders of genuine appreciation can deepen intimacy and make a healthy relationship even stronger.

Can you and your spouse/partner make a daily appreciation commitment?

Start small

Genuine demonstrations of appreciation need to come from your heart. Sometimes couples (especially couples in distress) need to work hard to find something they feel appreciative about—and they end up getting stuck in a problem-focused mindset.

Don't let this stop you. Work toward expressing gratitude even for the smallest things your spouse/partner does (small demonstrations of appreciation have a powerful cumulative effective).

When couples work toward creating a shared mindset of gratitude, their relationship becomes imbued with positivity; cycles of positive interactions feed the emotional bond that connects the two of you.

Align your statements of appreciation with your partner's values.

All heart-felt expressions of appreciation can strengthen your relationship. To make appreciation even more powerful, align your appreciation to what's important to your partner.

For instance, let's say your husband values strength and pushing himself physically--he works out at the gym, plays racket ball, gets a rush rock climbing...you get the picture.

You've been after him to do the grocery shopping (usually to no avail) and much to your surprise, one Saturday he comes home after the gym with five bags of groceries. You'd love for this to become a routine, but you realize that asking him hasn't been effective in getting him to help out.

In the above example, which statement of appreciation/gratitude do you think would be more meaningful to your husband (because it taps into what's important to him) and therefore increases the chances of him feeling more connected with you?

- a. "I really appreciate what you did. That was very thoughtful. Thanks."
- b. "Thanks for doing the shopping. I can barely lift those heavy bags without hurting my back. You didn't even break a sweat lugging them around. Thanks."

Both of these are valid messages of appreciation that can make your spouse/partner feel good about himself/herself (and feel emotionally closer to you).

The second message of gratitude, however, highlights something that is important to your partner and may have a more powerful emotional impact on him. It may also increase his motivation to follow through on continuing this desired behavior (which would also be great!). So appreciation can be used to create deeper feelings of intimacy and also bring about the behaviors you'd like to see more of in your partner.

Are you ready to make an appreciation commitment?

If so, be patient. You may not see any immediate benefit (especially if there has been ongoing tension in your marriage or relationship), but with persistence, ongoing appreciation will gain positive momentum in your relationship. After all, we all want to feel appreciated by important others in our life.

Copyright © 2008 All Rights Reserved

Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

You can reach Dr. Nicastro via his website <http://www.strengthenyourrelationship.com>