

Relationship Health: It's time for a regularly-scheduled relationship workout!

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

"My wife asked me if I worked out today. I hadn't and I immediately knew what she was getting at; we have an agreement that each of us will exercise a minimum of three times a week. She listed a bunch of health benefits – which I had already heard ten times before – as I headed over to the exercise bike..."

Sam and his wife Laura are much healthier since both committing to an exercise routine last year. They feel better about themselves and have more energy, for starters.

But their marriage hasn't fared as well. They came to me for marriage advice and relationship help after "growing apart" over the last few of years.

They were surprised when I asked:

"You mentioned you work out three days a week, about an hour each day. You also said you need relationship help. What kind of regularly scheduled *relationship workout* have you committed to?"

Like most couples seeking relationship help, they didn't have an answer. For some reason, people don't put the same time and effort into improving their relationship as they do other areas of their life.

So they agreed to create a workout program for their marriage.

Relationship Help: Relationship Workout Basics

Time Commitment: Committing to a relationship workout is similar to committing to physical exercise: If you don't schedule and commit to it weekly, a successful follow-through is unlikely. Initially, Sam and Laura agreed to a two-to-three day a week, thirty-minute relationship workout schedule.

Relationship Aerobics: Part of Laura and Sam's physical workout consists of walking or bike riding. As Laura described, "We needed to get our heart rate up, strengthen our hearts through cardio training..."

As a counterpart to their aerobic workout, Laura and Sam's relationship workout needed to focus on their hearts—in particular, strengthening their *heart-connection* (that invisible bond that bridges two separate souls).

This connection is vital to the health of your marriage or relationship.

Heart-connection exercise:

There are different ways that you and your partner can renew the vitality of your heart-connection. Laura and Sam agreed to a "discovery" exercise and decided to evaluate its effectiveness after a period of time had passed.

Many couples assume that at some point in the progression of their relationship, they come to know *everything* about their spouse/partner. This assumption is never helpful and will only cause communication to grind to a screeching halt.

Since you and your partner are dynamic, ever-evolving beings, it's important to experiment with the mindset that there is *a/ways* something new to learn about one another—no matter how long you've been together. Embracing this mindset is an essential ingredient to your relationship workout and the growth of your heart-connection.

The goal of this exercise is to find out something new about your spouse/partner and/or to see him/her in a new light. It is often the small shifts in one's perspective that can make a big difference in your relationship.

So let's begin:

Find a quiet place (after the children have fallen asleep) where you won't be interrupted. This exercise can be unstructured (you each take turns sharing something about yourself) or semi-structured (you each have questions prepared to ask one another). The questions should be geared toward deepening your heart connection, so avoid loaded and sensitive topics.

Discovery/Sharing Questions

Here are a few questions to get you started (take turns asking each other these and similar questions):

- ~Who do you admire and why?
- ~If you could have lunch with three historical or present-day people, who would you choose and why?
- ~What is the one thing you'd like to be remembered for?
- ~What are your favorite movies? Books? Foods?
- ~Which teachers had the greatest impact on you?
- ~If you went back to school, what would you study (just for the sake of learning)? ~If you could have any job at all, what would it be and why?
- ~Which items would you place in a time-capsule to be opened one hundred years from now?
- ~What were your childhood dreams and aspirations?
- ~What are your present day dreams and aspirations?

Key part of your relationship workout:

While listening to your partner's responses, it's essential that you (as the listener) remain open and accepting to what your partner shares. Ideally, these questions can lead to new conversations that will bring self- and other-discovery. As the listener, your goal is to be attentive and savor the information your partner offers you.

This listener can also ask questions to deepen the discussion as it unfolds (curiosity will deepen discovery).

Laura and Sam told me that it took about two months before they felt stronger and had more endurance because of their physical workouts. In other words, they didn't quit after not seeing any results after one month of exercising. And their patience is paying off!

So it will be important to commit to your relationship workout once or twice a week to begin with. (Three days a week would be ideal.) Even if you're not immediately aware of any benefits, your heart-connections will be growing stronger.

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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.

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