

Preface

During my thirty years in the field of behavioral health, I have never ceased to be amazed by the mind's ability for self-deception. Seemingly rational human beings engage in thought processes about themselves and the world around them that defy logic. Time after time patients come to my office professing to want positive change in their lives. More often than not, however, they insist that the reasons for their problems lie with other people—spouses, significant others, even humanity in general. These individuals say that they are misunderstood, that their partners behave inappropriately toward them, and that if their partners understood “reality” as the patients do, the relationship would be fine. If one were to suggest that the patients might be responsible in part for the problems in their relationships, they would respond in disbelief, claiming, “You just don't understand,” or asking, “Why should I be the one to change when the other person is clearly wrong?”

In reality each person in a relationship brings with him or her conditioning derived from societal norms, religious affiliation, nationalities, family of origin, gender, and emotional and psychological underpinnings. With all these influences to contend with, it is a wonder that anyone is able to engage in, let alone maintain, mutually satisfying relationships. Unfortunately there is no formal training in how to relate to others and most people learn as they go along.

Harville Hendrix, in a presentation to doctoral students on Imago Relationship Therapy, July 7, 2008, illustrated this unfortunate lack when he stated that over 50 percent of first-time marriages end in divorce. The divorce rate increases to over 70 percent in second-time marriages. The good news is that only a little over 30 percent of third marriages end in divorce. Who would willingly want to go through the emotional and financial pain of two divorces in order to get to a successful third marriage?

The right versus wrong mentality is not limited to two people in a relationship. Take for example our two party political system. Republicans and Democrats both take polarized positions, viewing the other party as unenlightened. Can one party be so right and the other so wrong? The right versus wrong perception of reality also manifests in countries. The Israelites and the Palestinians, for example, are engaged in an intergenerational struggle in which both tenaciously consider themselves right. Can one side be so right and the other side so wrong?

In this book, I will not try to solve the country's or the world's problems. I will instead concentrate on the individual in the context of a relationship with another person. Though the book deals with couples, it is equally applicable to individuals who, although not currently in intimate relationships, certainly come in contact with people every day. Individuals in any life situation find themselves struggling when relating to others. As a result, they feel inept or inadequate, reinforcing their own unhappiness. However, viewing relationships as vehicles for personal growth can go a long way in overcoming barriers to taking charge of one's own life.

Therefore, the purpose of this book is psycho-educational in nature. It has current theories in psychology blend with strategies and techniques that the reader may use for self improvement as well as improving his or her relationships. It can be read by itself or in

conjunction with ongoing counseling. It can also serve as a guide for practitioners working with individuals and couples in relationships.

The book will address the emotional and psychological tug of war that evolves in many relationships. It will show how understanding and working with the unique qualities within oneself and the other person is far more beneficial than engaging in emotional power struggles that leave both feeling misunderstood and frustrated. It will focus on developing the ability to be in charge of oneself instead of allowing others, living and dead to be in charge.

The book will benefit individuals and couples willing to take a hard look at the origin of beliefs that are no longer useful to them. It will examine why, despite being dysfunctional, these beliefs are constantly reinforced. It will also examine how a greater likelihood of emotional success in life can emerge through the interdependency of personal development and relational satisfaction.

Far too few of us have gotten the training necessary to exhibit sensitivity and understanding in dealing with others. I hope an awareness of and a consistency in using the strategies and techniques in the book will help the reader toward better relationships. Though acquiring knowledge is important, putting that knowledge into practice is equally important in achieving success. It's like the old joke about the man looking for directions in New York City. He goes up to another man and asks, "How do I get to Carnegie Hall?" The second man answers, "Practice, practice, practice."

This work has been compiled from research done by various theorists as well as from my years of working with a wide variety of individuals and couples who struggled to achieve personal and relational satisfaction. It is not offered as a substitute for the body of work done by others, but rather as an additional tool in one's arsenal for achieving the lifelong goal of being in charge of one's own destiny.

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