

Marriage, Personal Relationships, and Personality Types



We are often reminded of the importance of how meaningful personal relationships influence us and how much everyone needs love and to be loved. It also strikes a chord, sometimes painfully so, that there are few “perfect” relationships because there are no “perfect” people. Given this, what are the secrets of a successful personal relationship? What are some important fundamentals for keeping love alive? How can one keep the fire of passion burning, the depth of a meaningful experience and the music playing in the heart and soul? What is it that will make hearts sing long after the lumps and bumps of life has faded some of the outer beauty?

In the short term, good looks, sexual and physical health can be immediate attractions. In the long term, intelligence, honesty, warmth, passion, commitment and emotional stability are the essential elements that encourage couples to stay the course. External beauty and physical attractiveness alone will **not** a successful relationship make. There has to be a meeting of the minds, a sharing of values, and an intertwining of the spirit and soul at a depth far below the surface of what is seen on the outside.

For many centuries, the impassioned issue of how to find and keep the flame of love alive has been the subject of countless books, articles, counseling sessions, support groups and conversations. So what, if anything, keeps the flame of genuine love, excitement and commitment thriving? What are some key principles that everyone can and should apply in their lives that will encourage longevity in their relationships?



Relationships and Communications

We are attracted to each other for various and sundry reasons. Perhaps we see in an individual the inner and quiet strength we long for or we find their ability to make the intellectually tough decisions stimulating. Whatever the reason, if we fail to successfully communicate to each other, the attraction we once found so appealing can easily and quickly become like a noose around the neck.

According to personality type and relationship experts Otto Kroeger and Janet Thuesen (1994), communication is at the very heart of any meaningful relationship. As such, personality differences especially around communication can be the tie that binds or the rope that chokes the love and passion out of the relationship. One of Kroeger and



Thuesen's favorite tools to help couples understand their communication differences is the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®).

In using the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®) as a framework for appreciating inborn preferences for communicating, it becomes clear that what attracts individuals to each other often is also the part of themselves that one might not find particularly appealing. Understanding communication styles helps one come to value these differences and together decide how best to support each other's specific communication needs.

As an example, in an argument, one partner in the relationship may instantly want to talk it out while the other wants time to think before discussing the issue any further. This seemingly small difference can lead the more talkative partner to misinterpret this reticence and feel the other partner simply doesn't care enough to talk about the issue. Yet by understanding the quieter partner's need to go into the inner world of ideas and concepts to work out how they will respond will open the door of communication to an even higher level. It is also important for the less talkative partner to appreciate and value their mate's way of communicating and that there is a need to get feelings, thoughts and ideas quickly to the outside.

Creating understanding in how we communicate to each other is just one way personality differences can be a cornerstone to begin or strengthen a marriage or partner relationship. It is not only the words we say, but how we say them and in what context we say them that helps a relationship grow and evolve. It is never too late to work on new approaches in our communication styles.

Relationships and Conflict Styles



Conflict in a relationship is unavoidable! No one can escape it! Another significant way personality type differences manifest themselves is in how disagreements and conflict is dealt with in the relationship. It is never just a simple matter of one being right and the other being wrong. Our personality preferences can predict how one may react during stress or when in conflict. Thus our differing styles in managing conflict become an element of the conflict itself – confounding resolution!

In looking at just one aspect of how personality type differences play out, take the example of the partner whose MBTI® preference is for Feeling (F). Such a person seeks harmony, is repelled by conflict, and makes important decisions in a subjective and value-centered manner. For this individual, conflict is to be avoided at all costs. Conflict is seen as destructive to the relationship. The conflict itself also takes on personal overtones...it is "taken personally".



In contrast, the partner whose MBTI® preference is for Thinking (T) will usually recognize conflict as a natural element in interpersonal relationships. For this type, while at times conflict is a necessary evil to be dealt with, there are other times when it is seen as quite productive. So rather than trying to avoid the conflict, the Thinking preference partner will often see conflict as something to be pursued and may even do so with the intention of helping the other person understand why they are wrong (in order to help them become a better person, of course). Their natural bent is towards winning all arguments – regardless of personal feelings.

Again, using the MBTI® as a guide, one can easily see how personality preferences play a huge role in how individuals approach, manage and resolve conflict. “The more you can put the dispute into typological (personality type) terms, the greater the chance for a satisfying resolution” (Kroeger & Thuesen, 1994). Some prefer to not deal with the conflict while others want to put it out there...taking care not to allow the conflict to fester into something worse.

On this scale, gender differences also play a significant role in how conflict is dealt with. It is estimated that 68% of men prefer the analytical, objective, non-personal approach to decision making and conflict resolution while 61% of women prefer the subjective, values centered, personal approach to the same issues (Opt, Loffredo, 2000). These natural, inborn preferences for communicating underscore why it is so important to understand and value these differences.

While it is true that conflict in ANY relationship cannot be avoided, conflict can be “managed” in such a way as to prevent it from devastating the relationship. It is in our accepting differences, examining our approach and ability to communicate needs, where satisfaction in conflict resolution may be found. If anything is to be avoided, it is the jumping to conclusions that your partner is just doing these things to make you crazy or to drive you nuts. Personality type differences are real and they impact everyone in very real ways.

Summary

It takes two to make relationships work really well. It is more giving than taking. It is seeking first to understand and then to be understood. Knowing and accepting your own personality type preferences can open the door for greater self-management and the ability to develop skills towards understanding others with whom you have relationships. Whether it is a spouse, significant other, children or individuals you work with...self-awareness offers one the freedom to be who you are...no excuses!

Putting the theory of personality differences to practical use allows individuals to manage themselves more effectively in all forms of interpersonal relationships and find constructive ways to deal with differences. This can create healthy, positive, meaningful and powerful pathways to create balance and give strength to our loved ones.



No one is an island...no one stands alone. Everyone needs understanding in relationships and people need each other. Taking the time to explore one's areas of strengths and weaknesses in a relationship can lead to greater fulfillment. The MBTI© expands the mind and improves the opportunities for self-discovery, thus reaping the benefit overall in many and various relationships.

Much success to you in all of your relationships!

References

Kroeger, Otto & Thuesen, Janet (1994). Sixteen ways to love your lover. New York: Dell Publishing

Opt, S.; Loffredo, D. (2000). Rethinking communication apprehension: A Myers-Briggs perspective. The Journal of Psychology.

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