

# **How To Succeed At Relationships By Really Trying**



**By**

**Walter E Jacobson, MD**

## How Not Listening and Interrupting Get in the way of Successful Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

Much of the time, when partners are locked in an argument, at least one of them isn't listening to the other person and repeatedly interrupts them. That partner is not interested in considering other perspectives. It's not about trying to be open-minded and consider the possibility that there might be another way to look at the problem. It's not about trying to find common ground. It's all about being right and making the other person wrong.

Let's say we are the partner doing the interrupting. Here's how it works: As soon as the first few words are uttered, we interrupt our partner and respond with our answer. We assume we know exactly what they're going to say when we interrupt them and that we don't need to waste time hearing explanations that continue to defend and attempt to justify their flawed positions.

The reason why we assume we know exactly what they're going to say before they say it actually has nothing to do with what they're going to say. It doesn't really matter to us if our assumptions are correct. All we really want is an excuse that justifies our interrupting them. Assuming we know what they're going to say beforehand fits the bill.

We believe that wanting to "cut to the chase" gives us license to interrupt them, to not let them finish their point and to steamroll our point right back at them. Truth be told, it's not really cutting to the chase that we're after if getting to the truth faster and getting to a resolution faster is its definition.

For us, cutting to the chase means we get to make our point sooner, which involves making it clear to our partner that they are wrong and we are right, that they have injured us, we have not injured them, and that they owe us an apology, we don't owe them one.

This approach will get us nowhere. It behooves us to listen and to not interrupt. It behooves us to be receptive to alternative viewpoints, to be open-minded, and to not make premature decisions prior to collecting and assessing pertinent information.

If we do this, it will engender trust and increase the potential for effective communication to thrive, for individual needs to be addressed, for compromise and common ground to be established, and for a satisfying, successful relationship with our partner to sustain itself.

Even when, amidst an argument, we have no intention of changing our position, it is still a wise choice to listen and not to interrupt. Here's what we do: When our partner has finished talking, we validate that we've heard them and that we understand and appreciate where they're coming from. After that, however, we counterpoint by reiterating our position and why it hasn't changed. By taking this approach of listening and responding with validation and respect, communication will improve. Tension in the relationship will subside. Agreeing to disagree can work.

Ultimately, most relationships will not thrive if they're all about one partner always needing to be right and always needing to get their way and their needs met at the expense of the other partner's joy and dignity. Most successful personal relationships tend to thrive on effective communication, mutual respect, moderation, cooperation, concession and compromise.

## How To Build Successful Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

We need to take our time. We need to pay attention. We need to do the research. We need to look before we leap.

The divorce rate is so high and many relationships are so unsatisfying because we don't do these things. When we meet someone "special" for the first time, there is an infatuation, there is chemistry, there is exhilaration, there are hormones jumping every which way. We feel energized and vitalized, overwhelmed with joy, excitement and sexuality.

When we look into the eyes and face of someone who is as excited about us as we are about them, it makes us feel excited about ourselves. We see our idealized self in the smiling face looking back at us, and all of this contributes to our jumping into bed and jumping into relationships prematurely.

So caught up in the immediate gratification of the moment, we don't consider the long-term consequences. We don't take the time to do our due diligence. We don't take the time to discover the real fabric of the person we have become intimately involved with.

Oftentimes, we see the red flags and warning signs that suggest to us that maybe we shouldn't go down that road, but because we are so enamored, so exhilarated, so charged up with infatuation, chemistry and lust, and having, perhaps, been lonely for a very long time prior to meeting this person, we look the other way, our common sense and intuition go out the window and we sweep the red flags under the rug.

Eventually, sooner or later, the chickens come home to roost. When the chemistry settles down and the infatuation goes away, we are left with a lot of unanswered questions.

Who are these people? What do they really stand for? Do they really care about us? Do they care more about themselves? Are they loyal and trustworthy companions?

All the questions that should have been asked at the beginning are asked after we have committed a great deal of time, money and energy to the relationship.

### **THE SOLUTION IS DELAYED GRATIFICATION**

Taking the time to see what's actually going on before making a commitment is the critical component. We tend not to do this because we are afraid to confront those red flags, to challenge our newly-found partners to explain themselves, to define their ideologies, to detail their backgrounds and previous relationships, for fear that they may get defensive or angry, that they may go away, or that they may tell us something that will be so obvious we will not be able to ignore it and it will force us to go away.

Bottom line: it's best we have the courage to ask these questions before getting involved in a relationship, even if it means our loneliness will linger longer, because it will serve us well in the long run and provide us with the opportunity of finding someone who is worthy of our love and capable of providing us with a stable relationship based on mutual respect and consideration which will sustain us until our end of days.

## How To Deal With Not Getting the Love and Approval We Desire In our Personal Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

Many of us, as adults, do all sorts of things to gain acceptance, approval and love from our parents and other loved ones. In many cases, our efforts go unnoticed or unrewarded. No matter what we do, it's not good enough. No matter what we do, we receive criticism and harsh judgment. No matter what we do, we don't get the same attention and consideration that is shown to others.

The end result is our feeling bad about ourselves. We feel unloved and unlovable. We feel defective and inadequate. We feel rejected and abandoned. It's very painful.

Despite this pain that we cause ourselves by repeatedly putting ourselves in these no-win situations, hoping against hope that somehow something will change, we continue the love-seeking and approval-seeking behaviors that get us nowhere.

When we try to communicate our needs and generate a dialogue in an attempt to learn if there's something we're doing that's getting in the way or pushing them away, these efforts fall on deaf ears. We don't get honest answers. We are left feeling confused, hurt and angry.

And still we seek their love and believe there's an emptiness inside of us that only their love can fill.

Truth be told, we will never feel whole if we are waiting for approval and love from others. We must learn to love ourselves despite how others perceive us and treat us.

One way to begin the process of loving ourselves is to stop victimizing ourselves and beating ourselves up by repeatedly putting ourselves in situations where we get rejected and hurt.

If we have made efforts to break through whatever walls have been put up, and these efforts continue to be ignored, unappreciated, and invalidated, at some point we need to stop making these efforts and accept the fact that we're most likely never going to get the love and approval we desire.

At some point we need to accept the fact that we can't squeeze blood from a stone. At some point we need to appreciate that it's okay to want love from others but not to need it, and that we shouldn't jump through hoops in attempts to get it.

At some point we need to respect ourselves, validate ourselves, nurture ourselves and love ourselves by discontinuing these desperate attempts to achieve the impossible.

Instead, we mourn the relationships that haven't lived up to the potentials we hoped for. We feel sad that we don't have the love that we would like from those relationships. But we don't minimize ourselves anymore. We don't put ourselves in situations that will lead to us feeling neglected and rejected. We stop trying to push the river where it doesn't want to go.

We accept the relationships as they are, with their limitations. We release any anger and resentments we are harboring. We feel good about ourselves for taking care of ourselves, for not living in denial, for not doing the same things and expecting different results. And we look elsewhere for acceptance and love if that is what we desire.

## How To Succeed at Destroying Relationships Without Really Trying

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

Many of us have become very successful at destroying relationships. What starts out bright and beautiful, full of joy, passion and promise, eventually becomes dark and ugly, full of animosity and negativity.

How does this happen? How is it that we repeatedly alienate our partners and sabotage our relationships? It usually comes down to a lack of effective communication.

When red flags appear, they are quickly buried. When resentments begin to build, they are suppressed and disguised in various passive-aggressive forms rather than dealt with openly.

Rather than working through the difficulties that develop, we say and do things that increase the resentments and further estrange the relationship. An example of one of these things which reflects unhealthy communication and is destructive to the relationship is, "I was only kidding."

If we are the ones who say, "I was only kidding" after we have said something to our partner and gotten an angry reaction, we need to stop doing this. We weren't only kidding. It's not an accident that "Many a truth is said in jest" is a well-worn cliché.

We wrap our judgments in jokes, which enables us to attack our partners and then not take responsibility for it. By saying, "I was only kidding," we don't have to be held accountable. After all, how can anyone be mad at us if we didn't really mean what we said?

This is not a good strategy. If we have a need to say something negative to our partner, it behooves us to come out and say it, plain and simple, rather than disguise it as a joke. Our criticism may not be well-received, but it is much better than the alternative of saying "I was only kidding," which prevents any honest dialogue from occurring and generates more resentment and bitterness, making it more difficult for the fractured, disconnected relationship to ever get repaired.

Conversely, if we are the ones who get "I was only kidding" from our partner, rather than getting defensive and angry, we need to get real.

We need to point out that saying, "I was only kidding" is a cop-out. We need to be clear that we don't see any joke, we believe there was truth to what was said, we need to talk about it, and if they're going to take the coward's approach of saying, "I was only kidding," instead of owning up to what they're really feeling and believing about us, then perhaps we should re-think the relationship.



If we do this, instead of resentments building up and communication deteriorating even further, the relationship has the chance to heal, grow stronger and be of enduring value.

## Increasing Self-Esteem and Improving Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MND

When we are doing somebody a favor, it's best we do it graciously. It's best we don't make them feel like they are burdening us or that they are a nuisance because when we do this we are essentially shooting ourselves in the foot.

Despite the fact that we are doing them a favor, when we do it begrudgingly we are actually destroying a substantial amount of good will in the process. At the same time that we are helping them, we are also generating bad feelings.

Basically, what we're saying is that there are conditions to our helping them. We're saying that, "I will help you but I will make you feel bad about it. I will make you feel less than. I will make you feel shamed and guilty. I will make you feel like you owe me something in return for putting me out."

It makes no sense to behave this way. It's much better to maximize the situation so that we come up smelling like roses.

Consequently, if we have decided we will help someone, it behooves us to offer the assistance graciously and joyously. When we do this, we demonstrate how incredibly wonderful, magnanimous, selfless and generous we are, and in the process we strengthen our bond with the person, we advance our reputation in the community as word spreads about our estimable actions, we like ourselves more for truly being a class act, and we increase the odds of people going out of their way to help us in the future should we ever be in need.

### **BUILDING SELF ESTEEM**

Bottom line: No matter what we are doing, whether it be a favor for others, a task at work, or some leisure activity, it always behooves us to do it with grace, a smile, and a positive attitude. In the long run, this will improve our self esteem and serve us well.

## HONORING AND RESPECTING BOUNDARIES IN RELATIONSHIPS

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

When we don't respect another person's boundaries, when our control issues ("I want what I want and I want it now!") move us to disregard the boundaries established by others, we shouldn't wonder why the end result is resentment, anger and distrust.

Even if we believe our intentions and motives are good when we refuse to accept other people's boundaries, we are, nonetheless, invading their space and not taking no for an answer, all of which adds up to our being inappropriate, intrusive, and abusive.

When we don't accept "No means no," it is because of our need to control the situation and manipulate circumstances to get what we want. When we don't accept, "No means no," we're just being selfish, preoccupied with getting our own needs met regardless of the needs of the one setting the boundaries.

When we deny our manipulations and boundary-breaking behaviors or rationalize them with "the ends justify the means" rhetoric, in an attempt to get our way and paint ourselves in a good light, we may get what we think we want in the short-run, but in the long-run, the end result is likely to be something we don't want: a failed relationship which is damaged past the point of repair.

If we wish others to cooperate with us, to synergize their efforts and energies with ours, to maximize the power of unity and purpose, we need to respect boundaries. When we do so, people are more likely to be willing to dialogue and mediate the issues, in order to possibly come up with compromising solutions that all parties can be comfortable with

However, if debate and dialogue are not welcomed, it behooves us to accept this. If we can't accept this, perhaps we should disengage from the relationship rather than engaging in behaviors that will subvert it and diminish ourselves in the process.

Ultimately, it all comes back to the Golden Rule: treating others as we wish to be treated. If we want our boundaries to be respected by others, we need to respect the boundaries of others. If we want to be able to trust others, we need to demonstrate to others that we can be trusted.

## Forcing Change In Our Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

We have the desire to help our loved ones. Seeing clearly the things they are doing that are self-destructive and self-sabotaging, that are getting in the way of their health, happiness and success, we try to enlighten them and guide them to make better choices.

Unfortunately, whether in denial or aware of what they need to do and just unwilling to do it, no commitment to change is made, no actions are undertaken.

Rather than accepting that they are stuck in their own private hell, at a psychological and spiritual level that we do not have the power to dislodge them from, we tend to get depressed, frustrated, and angry with them. More to the point: we don't stop.

Despite their clear and consistent resistance and reluctance to heed our warnings and put positive action plans into play, we persist with a vengeance, we keep poking them with our stick of change in order to force them off their spot.

We feel we have the right to do this because we care for them and we know what's best for them.

As true as this may be, when our efforts repeatedly fall on deaf ears, we need to stop. We need to let it be. We need to appreciate that people move at their own pace and we can't push the river where it doesn't want to go. We need to accept them as they are.

If we continue to berate and badger them over and over again, what we perceive as our constructive criticism and advice becomes abusive behavior. If we continue going at them long after we've made our point and they have taken their position of resistance, we are simply attacking them and doing nothing positive.

In fact, we are, oftentimes, doing quite the opposite. We are hurting our relationship and damaging the potential for them to embrace our agenda sooner rather than later, in the sense that the more we push, the more they tend to resist and the more resentful they tend to get.

Rather than helping them move forward, which is our intention, our behavior makes them more entrenched and oppositional. And it oftentimes comes back at us in the form of irritable, angry, aggressive and passive-aggressive behaviors which weaken the relationship rather than strengthen the bond.

**The Bottom Line**

When we see our loved ones making self-destructive choices, we offer our helpful suggestions. We advise them as to what we think it's best they do. And then we let it go.

After planting the seed in their mind, we water it solely with our love, our role-modeling of the right actions we have been endorsing, and our support when they stumble and fall.

If we find ourselves unable to do this, then it is our ego getting in the way. It is our control issues, more than our desire to help them, that is carrying the torch, in which case it would behoove us to look within and get our own house in order.

## Denying Problems In Our Relationships Won't Improve Our Chances For Success

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

When we meet someone new, our desire for connection and companionship can be very powerful, to the point of our overlooking potential red flags and plowing forward, full steam ahead.

It's a form of denial. Because everything feels so good at the moment, and the hope for a successful relationship is so strong, we don't want any reality raining on our parade. We don't want to face the possibility that the person isn't really right for us and that we'd be better off, in the long run, not getting involved.

And so we dive into the relationship without doing our "due diligence," only to appreciate some time later that it would have been wiser had we chosen to pay attention at the beginning, to look more closely at the person we were getting involved with, and to not go down that road.

Oftentimes, a similar problem occurs when, because we are dissatisfied with our life, we look back nostalgically at a relationship that failed us in the past, and we start wishfully thinking that maybe it wasn't so bad and that maybe it was a mistake that we moved on.

Out of the same longing for love and connection, we conveniently forget much of the emotional pain we endured in our efforts to make the relationship work. We deny all the resentments, the judgments, the lack of respect, compassion and consideration we experienced.

We put on our rose-colored glasses and see the past a whole lot better than it really was. Rather than accept the fact that the relationship wasn't good for us and never will be, and that it's best that we keep looking for love in all the right places, despite how difficult that effort might be, we make excuses for why things didn't work out and we re-engage in the relationship, only to painfully discover at some point that we've wasted more of our time and energy, and are no better off than we were before.

What it comes down to is this: We can't predict that our future will be rosy and happy. But we can predict that the past will not change and that returning to a relationship that was abusive, co-dependent, destructive and/or unsatisfying will not deliver us the life we want.

In summary: Just as it is a mistake to leap into relationships impulsively, without paying attention to red flags and warning signs, without contemplating the pros and cons, it is also a mistake to not look before we leap backwards into past relationships.

If we don't like where we find ourselves in our lives, it behooves us to be proactive, not retroactive, and to not re-engage in something that was a proven failure unless there is

evidence that things will truly be different which could realistically predict the possibility of success the second time around.

## Changing Ourselves and Our Relationships

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

Change isn't easy. When we wish to change ourselves or our relationships, the change will be met with great resistance, from ourselves and others. And it is our responsibility to not waver and backpedal under the pressure of that resistance.

Saying that change is necessary in ourselves and our relationships is not enough. Saying that we want to change ourselves and our relationships is not enough.

Passion, conviction, great hope and great desire will never be enough.

Without consistent, effective actions, our efforts will fail.

Without constant vigilance over our thoughts, our words, our behaviors, our actions and decisions, our efforts will fail.

Without a pushing forward of our ideals despite the resistance, the fear, and the doubts of others, our efforts will fail.

Without truly effective communication that does not waffle, but rather maintains a through line of truth, integrity and honor, our efforts will fail.

Compromise is important in the repair of relationships, but there must be very clear boundaries and deal breakers that cannot be abridged, because if critical aspects of change are not incorporated into the new foundation that is being established, whatever is built up will eventually fall and fail.

### [Be Here Now](#)

If we want to change ourselves, lip service will be eternally insufficient. We must act in the now, make our actions clear and unambiguous, and we must not allow ourselves to be influenced by our ego and the weaker, darker, fearful aspects of ourselves or others.

We must strive to discover our authenticity and mold all our actions such that we are ever moving forward towards our goals to transform ourselves.

Certainly there will be setbacks. Two steps forward, one step back. That's fine. But we must ever be moving forward. We must ever be keeping our eye on the ball, the goal, the end game.

To gloss over or avoid certain changes because they are difficult and meet with opposition within ourselves or others is to sabotage and defeat ourselves in the long run.



If we want to change our relationships, we must communicate effectively with our partner, not tolerating smoke, mirrors, distortions, misinterpretations, misdirections and lies, whether they are promoted intentionally or not.

We must be the leader in the transformation of the relationship, never allowing aggression and intimidation from our partner to deter us from our leadership role which is to forge the way for new rules of communication, behavior, and mutual respect, such that the needs of all parties concerned will be fairly addressed and met.

We must point out in loving and compassionate ways when old patterns are re-engaged, and not tolerate complacency, regression or stagnation. We must acknowledge and validate efforts that are being made, and by no means can we condone abusive behaviors, passive-aggressive or otherwise.

To change ourselves takes a lot of work. It's a lifelong process, but the journey is worth it.

To change our relationships so that they are truly loving and supportive, and nurture our continued growth and spiritual evolution is no simple matter, but it's worth the effort.

If two people come together with a holy purpose of finding and staying on a path of love and peace, it can be done. And in the doing, we role model these behaviors for others, helping them to transform their relationships and, eventually, the whole world in the process.

## Appreciating Our Loved Ones While They're Here

By Walter E Jacobson, MD

We tend to under-appreciate the loved ones in our lives while they're here.

We tend to take them for granted. We tend to assume they'll always be here. We don't express to them nearly enough how much we care for them and how important they are in our lives.

And then, when they're gone, there is an effusion of love, grief and remorse as well, due to feelings that we didn't cherish, respect, value and love them more while they were here.

So what can we do about this?

### Appreciation and Gratitude

Perhaps we need to start missing our loved ones now before they're gone, appreciating the void that would be created in our lives if they were abruptly taken from us.

And then we need to express our gratitude for having them in our lives and demonstrate our love for them while they're still here by maximizing our loving behaviors towards them and minimizing our unloving behaviors.

We need to let go of the petty grievances that we've been holding against them. We need to let go of old resentments and hurts.

If we have a tendency to yell, we stop yelling. If we have a tendency to abuse them in other ways, we stop the abuse.

If our tendency is to exaggerate, misrepresent the truth, lie and deny, we stop these behaviors as well.

We stop being inconsiderate, selfish and self-centered.

We listen. We validate. We respect their boundaries.

We recognize those aspects of ourselves we need to change and we work on making those changes.

We try to anticipate problems and offer solutions, without being asked and without needing to get anything in return.

When the inevitable finally does happen and our loved ones are gone, we will still grieve and miss them deeply, but there will be the satisfaction and the peace of mind knowing that while they were here we did everything we could to create and maintain a loving relationship with them and to let them know and feel the extent of our love, respect and devotion to them.