

P A R T 5

*A*ppreciation



*The deepest principle in human nature
is the craving to be appreciated.*

-William James

The Magical Elixir



*Wise men appreciate all men, for they see the good in each
and know how hard it is to make anything good.*

-Baltasar Gracian

She tried hard to fight back her tears. As her chin quivered, she absent-mindedly rubbed her hands. It was as if she were trying to exorcise every last emotion from her being. The hurt and anger burned white hot in her belly. As she laid in bed, feeling beaten down one more time, she reflected upon the years of futility they had put her through.

Her whole life, she had endured the pain of being discounted. Her feelings, thoughts, and beliefs, all the times she tried to exercise her own choices, washed away in a sea of *kindness* that communicated the cruelest message of all, “I know what’s best for you.”

All those times. She wanted so desperately to just once receive a knowing nod, a kind word, a look of support rather than that G.D. frown. Oh that frown said it all. “I only want what’s best for you, dear.” Somehow that sentiment implied “I’m the only living authority on that subject.” That frown seemed to be a license to meddle, to undermine, to rob her of every sense of individuality that she possessed. That damn frown gave a whole new meaning to that once innocent sentiment, *Father Knows Best*.

Just once she would like to be appreciated for who she was, not what they had tried to mold her into being. Couldn’t they see it, accept it? Why couldn’t they honor her? It was as if she were invisible. Yet, she didn’t know how to fight back.

Self-doubt. Self-loathing. Toxic shame. The war waged on inside of her, the war that tears a child apart when she’s torn between wanting to win her parent’s love

and approval and honor her own desire to be appreciated as a separate adult of value and worth.

The fight always took so much out of her. Standing up to them; afterall, maybe they were right. Whereas you and I look to our parents to provide the emotional sustenance to help create our sense of self, all she got were the toxic double messages that implied, “We will only appreciate you if....”

And so she waged the war that expressed her pain in a hundred different ways, but never resolved the issues between her and her parents. She drank *at them*. Used cocaine *at them*. Sexed *at them*. Last month, she had her third abortion *at them*.

It was the only way she knew how to fight back. It was the only way to break through the deafening silence, the subtle judgments, the crushing blindness.

How could they be so blind to what they were doing to her? The weight of her unexpressed anger made her spirit bow much as if it were an anvil crushing her shoulders. Beneath that anger oozed the hurt from a wound rubbed raw from years of feeling unappreciated, unrecognized, quite simply not valued.

Recognition. Appreciation. Feeling valued. That’s the battlefield upon which much conflict is waged between two people. There’s nothing so tender as our longing to be appreciated by the people in our lives. Whether it’s our actions or our sense of self, we feel so much better when somebody acknowledges the value they hold us in.

I told you about my friend Stephanie Phillips. She has an older sister, Abby. Abby taught me a lesson about how empowering it is for her when I let her know that she’s

worth my time and consideration to help her become who she wants to be.

Last week Abby and I were playing basketball. She was frustrated by the limitations that her age and size imposed on her. She let me know in no uncertain terms that she didn't want to play ever again. So we sat down and talked about what was troubling her.

"I don't want to play anymore, Frischie," Abby adamantly declared.

"Why not?" I asked.

"It's too hard. I just can't make a basket."

"You know, Abby, when I watch you play, I can see how much talent you have for the game, but I know what it's like to feel so discouraged. Would you mind if I tried to help you a little?"

"Really, Frischie, you really think that I'll be able to learn how to play better?" Abby asked, somewhat hopefully.

"Abby, there's no question in my mind. I know it's hard for you to see right now. But if that's what you want, then I want to help you all I can."

"How can you help me?"

"Well, we could practice together, a couple times a week. I can give you some pointers."

"Really? You mean it, Frischie, just you and me? You'd really do that with me?" Abby asked. Her eyes were as big as saucers.

"Absolutely, Ab'. If that's what you want. You're worth it to me."

Feeling appreciated is a tonic for much of what discourages us in our lives. However, sadly enough, in many relationships, appreciation is often held hostage to petti-

ness and spite. Is your relationship a celebration of who your partner is or a never ending chorus of what they are not? It's as simple as the age old question, is the cup half-empty or half-full?

Think about this. Do you dwell on honoring your partner or bemoaning how they have disappointed you? Does your sense of entitlement and self-indulgence override your willingness to honor your partner?

When your urge to withhold overrides your willingness to acknowledge your partner, how does that impact your partner? What does it stir within anyone's soul when they are feeling unappreciated? Most importantly, how do those feelings impact the well-being of your relationship?

How many of us give voice to that ache, our never ending desire to be acknowledged, to be recognized for the person we are and the things that we do? It's such a simple word, appreciation. Yet, it's a sentiment that gets buried in the smoldering resentments, all the unfulfilled needs, the unmet expectations, and the buried fantasies that can overwhelm any of our relationships.

Is there a connection for you between unvoiced disappointments, hurt never expressed, buried feelings from your partner's disapproval, and conflict with your partner?

I see it time and time again. The conflict may be complex but the seeds that give birth to the conflict is simple enough. Appreciation is the heart and soul of what solidifies a relationship. Knowing that there's another soul who's on your side, who will acknowledge all the blood, sweat, and tears that you are expending, makes the game of life a little more simple.

So think about how it may be true for you. Think about how the conflict in your relationship may be a

*B*eaauty's in the Eye of the Beholder



*Over the piano was printed a notice. Please do not
shoot the pianist. He is doing his best.*

-Oscar Wilde

Bridge-Builder's Tip



As you sow the seeds of appreciation for your partner, you will begin to reap a harvest of love and kindness in return.

“Ray, Ray, here, up here, I’m in the office. Come on up, I want to show you something.”

The excitement in Jill’s voice told Ray that something was up. Jill had been acting mysterious all week, however she wouldn’t say what was going on.

But today Jill had finally finished her secret project and now she was just waiting for Ray to come home. She couldn’t wait to show him the story she had written, having worked on it for days while Ray was at work. Writing had been a long forgotten passion she had promised herself she was going to get back to someday. Someday had rolled around last week when she finally sat down at the computer.

Jill was surprised at how good it felt. That’s what was so amazing about writing. The sense of pride that came with creating something from nothing. Unearthing new nuggets about herself from within. Shaping and molding those nuggets into cogent thoughts to be shared with the world. Impacting even one person’s life, it gave her the chills just thinking about it.

But the best feeling of all was being able to share her work with Ray. He was going to be so proud of her. He

was the one who was pushing her to start writing again. So, she couldn’t wait for him to read the story. There was so much in the story about her that she wanted to share with Ray.

“Jill, what’s up? What’s all the commotion about?” Ray asked, huffing and puffing from running up the three flights of stairs.

Without saying a word, Jill handed Ray a folder that contained the twenty pages the story was written on. “I want you to read this.”

“Don’t tell me. You didn’t! When did you do all of this? Jill, you finally... I can’t believe it!”

Ray hugged Jill. He was so proud of her. He had wanted her to do this for so long.

“Go ahead. Sit down and read it. I just finished it an hour ago. I’m sure there are still some typos. Promise me you won’t feel compelled to point those out to me.”

“*Moi*. Never,” he chuckled.

Ray had already begun reading the first page. There was a smile here, a grunt there. His forehead would furrow. Next, his face broke into a big smile. The next page brought complete silence, steadied concentration. Page after page, Jill watched intently, interpreting his every expression and sound.

Finally, ten minutes later, Ray put down the last sheet of paper. As he took his glasses off, Jill noticed for the first time, there were tears streaming down Ray’s cheeks. Those tears said it all for Jill.

Effort. Sacrifice. Talent. Ability. Worth. Value. Who doesn’t want to feel appreciated for what they do, for who they are? You recognize how good it feels when those longings for appreciation have been stroked.

It doesn't matter how big or small the *project* is. It can be something grand like graduating from college or something seemingly trivial like cleaning out a closet.

It doesn't matter how big or small the *gesture* is. It can be something grand like throwing a surprise birthday party or something seemingly trivial like bringing your child's forgotten umbrella to school.

It doesn't matter how big or small the *acknowledgment* is. It can be something grand like a testimonial dinner thrown in your honor for the years of service you provided to your local community or something seemingly trivial like getting your dad an apron with the words *World's Best Chef* printed on it.

Feeling appreciated by the people in our lives is an incredible tonic. Having who we are and what we do acknowledged is a magical feeling. And I'm sure you recognize the devastation you feel when the craving to be acknowledged, to feel appreciated goes unmet. Criticism stings. Being ignored altogether devastates. Yet, all too often people stop taking the time to be kind to one another. The reasons may vary—indifference, being distracted, spite, too many demands and too little time.

Withholding your appreciation can feel like an act of betrayal to your partner. See it from their point of view. Giving so much of yourself, yet you remain blind to those efforts.

Of course there are times when things just get misunderstood. The excitement in your voice isn't enough. The inflection is flat. The words don't match your partner's expectations. Or you don't know what to do or say.

Whatever the reason, no matter the justification, whenever appreciation is held back, however it's held back, the pain becomes forever etched in our soul. We don't soon forget when that special investment in something near and dear to us goes unnoticed. We keep a list. We check it twice. And believe me, that list becomes the source of much of the turmoil and conflict if the hurt doesn't get expressed.

The good news is, things don't have to stay this way forever. What experience has taught me is that most people genuinely are appreciative of their partner. Most of us are able to recognize the uniqueness of our partner. Most people have a good perspective of their partner's qualities that lend so much to the well-being of their relationship.

No, the problem is not being able to recognize those qualities. The problem is the many misunderstandings that are created when we become angry at or disappointed in our partner's words and deeds. You see when that emotional energy takes over the relationship, a different kind of climate takes over that perpetuates ill-will rather than puts out the fire.

Once a climate of ill-will takes over, any feelings of appreciation go right out the window. Once you see your partner as your antagonist, it's impossible to keep the perspective that your partner is a valued friend. When you get to that place where you lose perspective about who your partner is, you need to find a way to balance out your feelings of hurt and betrayal with your other feelings of attraction and appreciation. Let me show you a couple of tools to reestablish equilibrium in order restore a climate of acceptance and appreciation.

Bridge-Builder's Tool



Celebrate rather than evaluate your partner.

Mort was bursting with pride as he walked into my office. He couldn't wait for me to sit down so he could show me what he was holding in his hand.

"Steve, look what I got last night," Mort said.

"What do you have there?" I asked.

"It's a chip, my thirty day chip. I did it. I got it. I finally got it. Thirty days straight without using. Who da thunk it? Me going that long without a drink."

I looked at the chip and then returned it to Mort. "Hey how about that! Congratulations! How does it feel?"

"I can't tell you how good it was to finally get this. It has taken me six months to put together thirty straight days of clean time.

"Everyone was so happy for me at the meeting last night. That's what made it so special—the feedback they gave me."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"No one dwelled on how long it took me to get my thirty day chip. I was scared to go to the meeting last night because I thought I would have to replay every mistake I've made over the last six months. I thought for sure that everyone would offer some remembrance of how I had messed up over and over again."

"I'm guessing that it didn't happen that way," I offered.

"No, it was the strangest thing. People congratulated me. But they also told me how much my coming to the meetings every week for the last six months meant to them. Some people said that knowing me made a difference in their lives. Can you believe it? Me making a difference in somebody else's life? Now there's a switch!

"I felt as if they were telling me that I mattered to them. No one ever tells me that. All I ever hear is how I screwed up, but these people actually made me feel as if I'm all right no matter what I do or how I do it."

Celebrating rather than evaluating a person. Affirming who they are rather than focusing on how well they do something. You tell me, what feels better to you, being affirmed or being evaluated?

Do you see the shift that might be made? Let go of all the hurtful ways you evaluate your partner. Don't confuse who a person is with the actions that person takes. You know the saying, "Hate the sin, love the sinner." That means you need to surrender the need to make you partner out to be good or bad, right or wrong, your way or no way.

Are you ready to make such a shift in your relationship? Are you ready to celebrate the uniqueness of who your partner is? Your partner is going through life the best way they know how. Evaluating that process merely conveys your judgments. Being able to celebrate how that process enables your partner to express the essence of who they are enables your partner to feel appreciated by you.

Bridge-Builder's Tool



Create an energy of gratitude rather than disappointment towards your partner.

"I could never see it before," Mark said.

"See what?" I asked

"See what you meant, see how I burdened Shirley with how deprived I felt, how I was always disappointed in her. I just couldn't look at it any other way. I felt like I wasn't getting what I wanted. I wanted more of her, her attention, her love, her time.

"The more I felt deprived, the more let down I felt, the more I demanded what I wasn't getting. I didn't see the damage it was doing to our relationship," Mark sighed.

"What did you finally realize?" I asked.

"I finally saw how I was sabotaging Shirley. All I could focus on were the things that our relationship wasn't. I never stopped to think how dumping all that energy on Shirley actually made it harder for her to be there for me.

"I saw how she was constantly backpedaling from me. I thought she was punishing me, but I finally realized she was just trying to protect herself.

"Of course by then, she was so angry at me, she felt like everything she did was wrong, there was no way she was going to reach out to me," Mark said, shaking his head at the sheer futility of it all.

"Hindsight is twenty-twenty," I said.

"Yea, that's when I finally decided to try what you suggested. So I sat down and made a list of things that I was grateful for, you know all the wonderful things that Shirley was, all the things I had because of our relationship. The funny thing was, I didn't have to think hard about that at all. I didn't realize how much I had to feel grateful about.

"So after making the list, every day for the next three weeks, I thanked Shirley each night for bringing to my life one of the items from my list."

"How did that work out for you?" I asked.

"I gotta tell you, it was hard at first. I felt funny doing it. I would do the exercise every night before we went to bed. But I felt so self-conscious. You know, I couldn't talk to her without turning out the lights first," Mark said with a sheepish grin on his face.

"That's okay. Did it help?" I asked.

"A little. It still was awkward. And Shirley didn't really trust me at first. She thought I was trying to trick her, I guess.

"But you know what? The funniest thing was that the more I expressed my gratitude, little by little, I didn't feel so disappointed in her anymore.

"I mean, it was weird. Shirley started paying more attention to me. She would do things with me, for me, without me asking. Before, it seemed like if I asked, that was the one way to insure that things would never happen."

"So the moral of the story is?" I asked.

"By expressing gratitude for the fruits of what my relationship bears, I can fill some of the holes that my relationship needs filling."

Do you understand what is being suggested? There are

