

A CONSULTANT'S GUIDE TO RELATIONSHIPS

People used to come to me back in the day for advice on what makes a great relationship. I used to be in a ten-year relationship that ultimately failed. However, during the course of that relationship, everyone thought I had relationships down to a science . . . I don't think so . . . I don't think anyone ever really does, honestly. Those couples that you think do are just good at covering up all the problems associated with their relationships.

Problems are always present, they will always haunt our lives, no matter how hard we try to prevent them. The goal of this little blurb isn't to tell you how to prevent these so-called relationship problems from rearing their ugly heads, but rather to better prepare you to cope with the inevitable rough and choppy waters and help couples come out of them relatively unscathed.

So, the prevailing question on everyone's mind is usually, what makes a relationship great, or why am I having so much trouble in my current relationship? What people really should be asking themselves is what makes their own LIFE great. Too many people place an OVEREMPHASIS on their relationship with their significant other without realizing it's just a smidgeon of what makes their lives "perfect. See, a relationship is only one factor in a persons life . . . and it's not even a big factor (it's big, but never more than a total of 1/4 of a person's satisfaction measure)!!! Now imagine a pie chart. There are (in my mind), four facets of a person's life that affect whether or not the person is "satisfied" with his or her life:

1. Family
2. Financial Stability
3. Friends
4. Significant Other

I've listed four. There are undoubtedly more depending on the person, but NEVER less than these. Now imagine that pie chart again, split equally amongst the four modifiers . . . a person's well-being at any one point in their life is actually a specific data plot within that pie. It might lie more in the family aspect, or more in the financial stability aspect . . . for the purposes of this exercise, since we're talking about relationship problems, it lies A LOT more in the significant other category. Now this is bad. Why?

If a person has any less of these particular modifiers, or conversely, doesn't have enough of them, the tendency is to use the modifiers that the person has more share of to compensate for a lack of happiness that said person experiences. This places an unnecessary strain on those modifiers (in this case, the significant other), to take the brunt of the negative forces on their life. Ultimately, this strain may put a damper on that particular facet which may result in detrimental effects to the relationship. Not good at all. Where you want to be is at the dead center of the pie. Therefore, when an unforeseen incident arises, the couple is better prepared to compensate with all of the facets of their existence, therefore lessening the burden on a particular modifier. I believe this is where your Chinese Tao principles come into play . . . now crack open that fortune cookie, cause it's all about balance baby!!

Written by: Jason Bengson, March 6, 2002