

Relationships – Forgiveness

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Once trust has been established in a relationship it is important to know there will be times when it will be tested. There will be times when all of us make mistakes and our trustworthiness will be questioned. It is at these times that relationships will deepen through forgiveness. For this reason, forgiveness is the second element in the Relationship Quotient (RQ).



Forgiveness means that you “give-for” the relationship to exist and function. Forgiveness rebuilds trust.

Forgiveness allows us to heal and grow. It is not the part of us that has been hurt or injured that can provide the forgiveness. We need to call upon a larger sense of ourselves or who we are, in order to forgive. Being forgiving allows us to look beyond ourselves to the “greater good” for ourselves and others.

We all have been called upon to forgive. Who among us, has never been hurt, let down or disappointed by other people. If we were truly unable to forgive we would be very lonely indeed.

Similarly we have all been forgiven. We have all upset people, hurt another's feelings, said something unwarranted or hurtful or let down a friend. Anyone who has parents has been at some stage been forgiven by them. Anyone with friends has at some time, been forgiven by them.

By acknowledging that we all have flaws helps us to see the flaws in others and forgive them.

Forgiveness is showing mercy to others and ourselves. Forgiveness is not conditional – it is transformational.

"Forgiveness gives us the capacity to make a new start... And forgiveness is the grace by which you enable the other person to get up, and get up with dignity, to begin anew... In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to change." Archbishop Desmond Tutu, October 2012

We all hope our friends will forgive our acts of thoughtlessness and carelessness. It is only through forgiving others that we can repair relationships and rebuild trust. Without it we can only have disconnection, loss and separation.

When you forgive someone, the person who benefits most is you. It is not weakness. It is not forgetting. It is not even acceptance. It is acknowledgement of what has happened and choosing to move on. Forgiveness allows us not to be defined by the person who has harmed us.

If we don't transform pain, we transmit it. If we hold on to anger, hurt and resentment we afflict our lives. Even worse we can define our lives by the harmful thing that has happened to us.

The pain can then be transmitted to our loved ones who may feel powerless to help or perhaps guilty that they haven't suffered as we have. It can also be transmitted deep within ourselves where it can burn a dark hole in our hearts. Bitterness is unforgiveness fermented.

The pain can fester and develop a life of its own. You no longer need someone else to inflict the pain upon you; you are now doing it repeatedly to yourself.

This is why forgiveness is an act of self-compassion. It frees you. Through forgiveness we rebuild ourselves.

Forgiveness is giving-for the relationship. Even if the other person does not see they have caused hurt or pain, even if they show no sign of remorse or regret, it is still worth freeing yourself through forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a way of saying, "Although I have been hurt I need to move on. I need to give to myself and to the person or persons who have hurt me so we can all move beyond this. I can restore dignity for myself and assist the other person to do so".

To repair we have to give something. We can all put ourselves in the position of having been wronged but that places us in the role of victim. Seeing ourselves as victims may feel justified in the short term but if we stay there we stagnate and never grow beyond the hurts that have been inflicted upon us. Being a victim is not a place of growth.

Forgiveness is not easy. It is a gift to ourselves and others. Emotionally it can take some time before we feel strong enough to give.

It is important to take time for ourselves to overcome the hurt, the shame, the damage and the loss. As painful as this can feel at times, forgiveness is our only way forward. It releases us to move beyond this event.

It is always important to have our voice and our pain be heard and understood. This begins the process of healing and repair. The pain can only be transformed when we have healed enough to forgive and have forgiven.

Forgiveness allows a gathering together of the parts of us that have not been damaged or hurt to gain strength and heal the parts that have been hurt. We become whole again. To move towards wholeness and healing we have to move through forgiveness to acting powerfully with integrity in our own lives and leads us towards hope for our lives.

Integrity takes the qualities of trust and forgiveness and puts them into dependable actions that improve our relationships and our lives. Integrity is a form of caring and is the next element in the Relationship Quotient.

As Mpho Tutu puts it:

"We can only take care of this world by taking care of each other. It is as simple and as difficult as that."