Trust & Honesty

August 22, 2008 By Kate Ferguson

How much trust should you give a person at the beginning of a relationship, especially since you can be misled?

I used to think that when I entered a relationship, the way to handle trust was to give it until the person did something that proved to me he or she couldn't be trusted. So I'd keep getting burned all the time. I'd trust the person, thinking this was the way not to bring previous baggage into the relationship, but that person wouldn't have done anything to prove he was worthy of me placing my trust in him. In hindsight, the process now seems backward.

Also linked to trust, honesty is a huge issue in relationships. Just how honest should we be? And how much honesty is too much in a relationship?

Unlike trust, honesty is an issue which calls for us to make critical judments based on the nature of a specific set of circumstances and variables. Trust has more to do with absorbing and relying on a certain set of beliefs which we take on faith. It is based on an inner certainty and outer predictability, two factors basic to trust which a respected psychologist named Erik Erikson proposed was how infants learned to first establish this feeling.

His example was universal. Trust is a child's first social achievement, when he or she is unable to see its mother yet remains unperturbed. The child trusts because it is certain of its mother's presence--the outer predictability. Without this certainty, says Erikson, the feeling of trust cannot exist. It is the same dynamic in a love relationship.

But back to honesty. More subjective, due to a certain set of circumstances, being honest is often a value judgment that we make. To be honest means preparing for certain consequences. When we are either honest or dishonest, other people are often affected by what we choose to disclose--or not. the rightness or wrongness of our choice, however, may be excused or explained. Sometimes, it is a matter of diplomacy. We may choose to lie to spare someone pain.

If you think about it, we can trust someone who we know has been dishonest. Why? Because we trust that they are not always liars. And, when they do lie, we feel they must have a very good reason. Our basic ability to trust them, then, is not affected.

Honesty is not a state of being. Really, it is an act which may be selfless or selfish. We may wish to disclose certain facts to a partner or wish to have him disclose certain facts to us for many

reasons. These facts may or may not be relevant to our relationship with that person. Our desire for honesty may simply be motivated by selfishness; we simply want the satisfaction of knowing the truth.

If we are the ones who disclose because we say we want to be honest, there are reasons for that which may not be totally altruistic. Maybe we're trying to lay a guilt trip on someone or simply dumping emotional baggage from a previous relationship on the new person who came into our life.

Before being honest in this way, however, ask yourself these questions: What is it that I need to be honest about and why?

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