

FIVE PRINCIPLES IN BUILDING RELATIONSHIP

Here are five principles to help you in building relationships. Principles are guidelines rather than rules. Let them be a help rather than rule over you.

1. TAKE THE INITIATIVE AND CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

In a relationship, someone needs to make the first move. You can be the one who takes the initiative. In our busy society, most people seem to be caught up in a whirl of activities. However, many are dying for genuine, caring relationships. They stay busy to cover their loneliness.

If you want to develop a relationship, then you need to make it your priority. Ring the person up. Spend casual times together. Have fun together. Play sports together. Think of anything — look for opportunities to spend time together.

A concept that has been used by many people (e.g. Stephen Covey¹) is that the human relationship is like a bank account. We build or deplete our “Relationship Bank Account” just as we do an ordinary bank account: by making deposits and withdrawals. Deposits increase the balance, while withdrawals reduce it. Deposits are things that we do that increase trust in relationship: small kindness and courtesies, keeping promises, etc. Withdrawals are acts that decrease trust.

When the balance is built up in a relationship, then we feel good about one another and trust is strong. This will allow for more effective communication and enhances your feelings of goodwill and closeness towards one another. When the balance is very small, an unfortunate withdrawal may cause “bankruptcy” in the relationship. Therefore, it is very important that we continually deposit in the Relationship Bank Account.

To deposit in the account, there are some basic rules:

- a. The deposit needs to be sincere — not something we do for the sake of depositing. The best deposit is unconditional love — showing of love with no strings attached. *“Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow man has fulfilled the law.” (Romans 13:8)*
- b. The deposit has to be regular. This bank account is not like ordinary bank accounts. It needs to be maintained regularly. If there is no deposit for a time, the balance will automatically begin to decrease. Therefore, we need to continuously deposit into it to maintain the balance in the account.

¹ “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” by Stephen Covey, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989

- c. The small deposits are what count. The key is that the deposits need to be regular. When there has been no deposit for a long time, but when during the person's birthday, or some important but infrequent events, a large deposit is made, the effect is not long lasting. It's what you do daily or regularly that makes the difference.
- d. When the person has problems or crises, the deposit and withdrawal takes on extra meaning. Therefore, these occasions are opportunities to build relationships faster than usual.

It is important to remember that, in a relationship, we cannot control others, but we can influence others. What we can control is our own deposits and withdrawals. When we make sincere deposits, we set up conditions that allow us to influence, but we do not gain control of the other person.

One day, at a youth cell leaders' camp, I happened to be sitting next to a Cell Leader at a barbecue. This was the first time that I have chatted with her, but she said, "Ben, I want to thank you for really caring for me and looking after me. I sense that you love us, young people, and also love me. You are such a good pastor"

It amazes me that a person whom I have not ever had a conversation with is now thanking me for caring for her. She senses that I really loved her. Why is this?

The reason is that I have constantly deposited into her Relationship Bank Account. I have on numerous occasions seen this young person in the church office and every time I have made sure that she knew that I noticed her. I would smile at her; pat her on the back; punch her lightly; look at her; smile at her; mess up her hair; and so on. It only took a few seconds. Now her feelings towards me became so rich that on the first occasion she had to express it, she told me how grateful she was.

Depositing in the Relationship Bank Accounts of the people that we associate with is very powerful. **The idea is to do little things consistently.** It is the regularity that creates the power, not the size of the deposit.

2. MAKE YOUR RELATIONSHIP A PRIORITY

We are busy people. There are so many things to do. Unless you make your relationship with the person a priority, it will not happen. It takes both time and patience to develop a relationship. You will not develop a lasting, meaningful relationship in three appointments. Relationships will not always be smooth. The person may not always be responsive. That is why you must make it a priority in order for you to persevere in this relationship building.

Be interested in more than his "spiritual" life. We can sometimes become too concerned about the "spiritual" side of a person's life and forget that life is a totality. Each individual is made up of many parts that form a single whole with all of the parts inter-related. The physical affects the social, the social affects the spiritual, and the spiritual affects the physical. This inter-relation is found in every area of a person's life. Therefore, we need to care for more than the spiritual needs of a person.

3. LOOK FOR COMMON INTERESTS

People are often attracted to each other around common interests and activities. As you interact with the person, discern the common interests that you have. When you find them, begin to focus on them as the attractive forces between you. This is especially important in the early part of your relationship.

It is interesting to note that, for the most part, men's friendships revolve around activities while women's revolve around sharing. Generally speaking, women talk about trust and confidentiality, while men describe a friend as "someone I go out with" or "someone whose company I enjoy." A man may describe as "my best friend" someone he plays ball with regularly. They do not usually feel they need to be sharing a lot about their lives. Although they need to break through this fear of being vulnerable, men generally are more activity-oriented.

Pay attention in the interests of the person. Let him teach you new things. Be a learner. Everyone likes to talk about himself. Be a listener and learn.

Jesus said, *"In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you"*
(Matthew 7:12).

Dale Carnegie gave us six rules in his book, *"How To Win Friends And Influence People."* These can be helpful tips for you:

- a. Become genuinely interested in other people.
- b. Smile.
- c. Remember that a man's name is to him the sweetest sound in any language.
- d. Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves.
- e. Talk in terms of the other man's interest.
- f. Make the other person feel important — and do it sincerely.

4. BE OPEN AND HONEST — BE TRANSPARENT

Friendship is a mutual thing. It is not one-way traffic. This means that not only would the person need to **be opened** to you, but also you need to open up to the person. Jesus said in John 15:15, *"I call you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I **have made known** to you."* With friends, you share not only information, but also those things that are on your heart — your needs, burdens, feelings, struggles and weaknesses. You would even confess your sins to each other.

People generally have a fear to open up and be transparent. Basic to this fear is the fear for rejection. "If I tell you who I really am like, you may not like what you see, and will not want to be my friend." We are convinced that if people ever see us as we see ourselves, the sight would repel them.

However, each person has a deep need in his heart which is crying out to be met. This is the need to know and be known. We all need to be understood and hence loved. When we open up our lives, people are actually drawn to us rather than

repelled. People are more lenient with us than we are with ourselves. A strange thing happens when we have told another our deepest secrets. We begin to understand ourselves better. The world is looking for transparent people so that they can open up themselves and satisfy this strong urge to be understood. **People are sick of being a fake. The invitation to transparency is really an invitation to authenticity.**

None of us can love a mask. We can only love a real person. However, most people are wearing a mask. The call to be transparent is the call to take off our masks. In fact, the word "hypocrite" comes from a Greek word meaning a mask. Let's learn to take off our masks.

A famous psychiatrist has a secret of getting a new patient to talk about the most private things during the first session without having to ask a question. His secret is simply this: He begins the session by revealing to the patient something personal about himself – a secret with which the patient might damage the doctor by breaking the confidence. This inevitably releases the patient to talk.

If you will dare to take the initiative in self-revelation, the other person is much more likely to reveal his real person to you. There is no substitute for transparency in drawing out a person. Openness elicits openness.

5. COMMUNICATE LOVE AND AFFECTION

"God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus"
(Philippians 1:8).

What a statement! Pray that this will be how you feel for the person you are building relationship with. Through prayer God will give you this type of affection. There is something about interceding for a person that increases your love for him.

Jesus freely declared His affection for His people. He said in a hundred different ways that He loved His disciples. Paul is a person who has great affection for the people he is caring for. He tells them that he "longs for them," and how he "has them on his heart." Why are we then so reluctant at times to show openly that we care for one another? Let us break out of this and become an affectionate and caring people.

Communicating love and affection is always harder for the Asians than it is for the Westerners. However, we Asians, too, need love and affection. Sometimes we need it so badly that we are hurting inside from the craving of affirmation and acceptance.

One day, the Lord led me to do something that I have not done before and am not comfortable doing. God told me to hug the men in my church. Previously, I have spent many years in the West, but have never got used to being hugged. I feel so awkward that I just don't know what to do when others hug me.

One Sunday a man came forward to be prayed for. During my praying for this person, I felt the Holy Spirit telling me hug him. I have never hugged a Chinese man before, but I obeyed. He began to cry and could not stop for many minutes. Then it occurred to me that this man may have never been hugged before in his life.

Since then, the Holy Spirit led me to build an affectionate church. I have hugged many men since then. Some cried on my shoulder like babies. God showed me that people are dying to be loved.

It is important to have an accepting love. This is even when the person failed. The atmosphere you need to create is one of unconditional acceptance and love. This doesn't mean overlooking his sinfulness, but rather, it means accepting him in the face of his failings and showing him how to deal with any problems he has.