



Embracing change with
power and purpose

The Relationship Dance

Stephen Harrison, PMP

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Abstract: There is a new dance to learn with each relationship but there are some basic moves that enable dance to get started, four of which are explored in this article.

With each new relationship formed, whether personal or professional, you must learn a new dance. Professional relationships do function within a more restricted space and are focused on specific purposes (usually) so the steps required to form and maintain them are somewhat more routine than personal relationships, but in all cases there are some specifics that need be addressed for a successful relationship to develop.

Ensure the purpose and vision of the relationship is aligned. When there is a lack of alignment one or both of the parties may experience disappointment, frustration, and resentment. They recognise there is a mismatch between where they are placing their energy and focus and that of the other party. Without resolving this, sooner rather than later, a lot of energy can be expended and the relationship may be unnecessarily damaged.

In a business environment, a customer may be clear about the project they are pursuing, and seek the involvement of a supplier. If the supplier either does not fully understand the project, fails to appreciate the significance of the effort required, or leaves unexplored any number of other matters then a mismatch is likely to arise that leaves one or both wondering about the motivation and intent of the other.

When two people come together in a personal relationship, understanding the purpose and intent of each other is useful, but this may also be under continuous change. Picture two people, one interested in romance, the other in friendship. Their approach to the relationship is likely to be quite different. If that difference is not dealt with all sorts of misunderstandings are likely to arise, and those may lead to what many would call a natural breakdown in the connection. This is true with any mismatch, even when both parties want the relationship to work.

Establish mutual trust. Trust is something we offer others, and is based on our assessment of the intent and behaviour of the other. It usually takes a relatively long time to develop, and can be lost in an instant through a single action. Generally trust is offered a little at a time. Each increment offered allows greater closeness/intimacy with the other party, involves self-disclosure, and leaves us more exposed and vulnerable in the process.

Remove barriers to connection. Vulnerability naturally leads to fears arising, based on our experience, that act as barriers to a thriving relationship, and they may even place us into flight mode, with us fleeing what is a perfectly good situation. Our fears often arise from what we have encountered in past relationships, and may have little to do with the current one. Working through and resolving those issues can free us to be fully present to what is available and on offer to us in the current relationship. That is one major reason relationships are often considered as healing, because as we stay present to the current relationship, own the issues that arise for us, and resolve them, we are healing in situ.

The problem is you may have experienced in the past situations where you have opened up, and the other party, whether in a business or personal setting, has manipulated or taken advantage of you. As you seek to work through your issues, you often have to learn to trust yourself again, as much as you learn to trust the other. Working through your issues with the other party, being clear about concerns you face, and their source, can aid the development of the current relationship, and deepen the connection.

Also, it is worth observing and noting any behaviours you exhibit that cut the budding connection. For example, I have noticed with myself that with new connections, if I strike fear I tend to break eye contact abruptly and the connection is severed or strongly impaired. The fear arises from within me, may be barely visible to me, but the reaction happens, and that relationship is marred. With some consciousness of that mechanism I am now better able to monitor myself and stay present to what exists between me and the other person. I have found this to be of particular significance in working with groups in a facilitation role which is all about relationships formed and strengthened in the moment.

Authentically Offer More Of Yourself. The more you offer of yourself the more the other party is likely to reciprocate. This is not suggesting you become a doormat to be walked on. Use your intuition and be aware of what is happening between the two of you. In a relationship there are three entities: the two parties and the conduit between through which value is exchanged. Offer more of yourself, and you'll soon know the quality and nature of what the other party is offering. The exchange will blossom in a beautiful fashion when both parties are truly present, available and engaged with each other in an open and authentic manner.

The dance of relationship involves so much more that evolves over time, but miss any of these steps, and getting started in a meaningful manner is nigh on impossible.