

The Relentless Introduction of Positivity

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Some marriages or intimate partnerships are ripped apart by the effects of infidelity, chronic dishonesty and deception, alcoholism, or domestic violence. These break ups are sad, but understandable. Everyone knows how destructive the effects that things like affairs, dishonesty and violence can be. But there is another cause of relationship dissolution that happens more frequently than all of these other causes combined. It's much less dramatic and less visible, too – and maybe that's why it's overlooked. The cause is *inattentiveness*... neglecting to take time to really pay attention to your partner each day. Relationship studies confirm that the leading cause of divorce isn't fighting but rather a gradual drifting apart – failing to give attention to the daily feeding and watering of the relationship.



It's not fair, really. Neuroscientists tell us that our brains aren't set up to help us pay attention to our partners – especially when we're stressed. Our brains prompt us to give most attention to things that are threatening – like cutbacks at work, impending deadlines, or how to get all the holiday shopping done on time. As Stephen Covey says, we tend to get caught up in the urgent, but relatively unimportant things that lay claim to our attention.

Studies suggest that partners who have truly enjoyable relationships keep paying attention to each other, even when deadlines loom overhead and life's pressures are high. Years ago, we learned that one of the most powerful ways to prevent the natural drifting apart that happens as life stresses mount is deceptively simple, and can take as little as five minutes each day. The important thing is that it happens *every day*. The exercise involves partner sending emails to each other each day in which they complete four sentences:

1. One thing you did (or said) recently that I appreciated...
2. One recent moment when I felt extra-positive about you or about our relationship...
3. Here are some of the main things occupying my mind today... (or the main things I'll be doing today...)
4. One small thing I did yesterday that I hope made you feel at least a little bit cared for...

It might seem hard to believe that answering these four questions each day could make or break your relationship, but evidence from relationship studies suggest that there is a

cumulative effect when partners are pay attention to the positive things happening in their relationships. It works something like the ancient water torture technique, only in reverse. Recall that the water torture technique is deceptively simple. A small drop of water is dripped on the prisoner slowly, drop after drop. The first few hundred drops seem to have no effect, but when the “harmless” drops continue over time until they number in the thousands, they create excruciating pain. The cumulative effect of attentiveness in relationships works according to the same principle, only in reverse. On any given day, remembering to express appreciation or pay attention to your partner may seem like a relatively insignificant act. But studies confirm the powerful effect that consistently noticing the positive things your partner does, and paying attention to the important things going on in your partner’s life can have.

Think about it. Try it! Just five minutes a day.