

Mediocre Relationship Health Check

We've all had one. Maybe you're in one right now? The mediocre relationship. It isn't great, but it isn't bad either. It's the type of relationship you want to maintain despite the fact that you know it could be better. It might be a romantic relationship, or a relationship with a family member, colleague or friend. There is a lot of information out there about managing the 'toxic' relationship. But where is the advice for improving the mediocre relationship? Well, here it is!

Throughout life, we start to realise that some relationships are just much easier than others. Even with people with whom we get on well, there can still be regular bouts of difficulty or boredom. According to those in the know, that is to be expected. Our awareness of the fragility of modern relationships has even created a whole new trend in entertainment. Notice the shift in popular TV shows over the last 25 years or so. Gone are *The Waltons*, *The Brady Bunch* and *Leave It To Beaver*. With everything from *Seinfeld*, *The Office* and *Modern Family*, we now embrace the real, flawed relationships that we can identify with, because we've had some of those experiences ourselves.

It was recently suggested by one reality TV personality, that 'as long as a relationship is 51% good, it's a good relationship'. Ouch! That's 49% bad! Surely, that's pretty bad? Apparently, not to some. Despite being flooded with constant imagery of 'semi-ok' relationships, the good news is, we can aim for more for ourselves in real life.

The bad news is, as an individual, you can only work on *your* strategy. You have no real control over the other person in your mediocre relationship. However, what you are likely to find is that a small change in the way you relate to others can lead to small changes in the way others relate to you. Over time, this can lead to big changes in levels of satisfaction on both sides of the relationship.

Let's look at three strategies you can implement immediately to improve your mediocre relationship.

1. Look for the good.

Sounds very simple, but so many relationships are lacking this basic and vital component. Unfortunately, our brains are hard wired to focus initially on those things that 'threaten' us. Where this was useful in caveman times, it now fosters the type of thinking that can fragment relationships. 'Threats' in modern society are things that

cause us hurt – disagreements, different priorities, and sometimes simply two diverse perspectives. It's handy to be aware of our instinctive sway towards the negative, so that we can counterbalance it in our relationships. We have to make the effort to look for, and appreciate, the good. Actively remind yourself why this person is significant in your life, and what is good about them. Importantly, tell that person the things you appreciate about them. We are often quick to convey our dissatisfaction. Positive feedback can be easily forgotten.

2. De-personalise feedback.

In any relationship there will be times when you need to communicate how something affected you and how you would like it to change for the future. When giving feedback within your various relationships, make sure the feedback is constructive. The person needs to feel that it is not an attack. Instead, you are simply giving them specifics on how to avoid a negative impact on you in future. Keep the focus on the behaviour, not the person. Give information on how the behaviour made you feel, and make time to listen to the perspective of the other person. Their intention may have been totally different to your perception of events. You making time to understand the intention of others is just as important as others making time to understand the impact it had on you. Everyone needs to feel heard and understood.

3. Lead by example.

You can't be responsible for anyone else's behaviour. However, you always have a choice in how you behave in any situation. There is no person or situation that can 'make' you respond in a certain way. You choose how you respond to triggers in your environment, and we can all practice those responses that are most likely to work for us and our relationships. One way to do this is to think of the outcome you want in any given situation, *before*

reacting. If your sister says something a bit harsh at the family BBQ, think about what you want to achieve at the time and long term, before striking back. Moreover, consider how you can handle yourself in the best possible way. How do you be the best sister/partner/friend/parent/child, etc, that you can be? Bring the best of yourself to your mediocre relationship and, at the same time, model the behaviour you want to see coming back to you in the future. In most cases, you will get out what you put in.

Turning your mediocre relationship into a great one won't happen overnight. It takes time for people to adjust to a 'new you' as much as it does for you to practice and adjust to thinking, and focusing on, the positive. It requires time, energy and persistence. Moreover, to improve those mediocre relationships long term, we need to persevere even in the face of rocky terrain. However, the benefits are really worthwhile. Remember, these are the relationships you want to keep, but that you deserve to more consistently enjoy. If you make the effort, it is likely that over time, you will nudge your mediocre relationship to a new level of enjoyment. Never settle for mediocre when it could very well be great. 💡

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