

KEEPING YOUR SANITY BY HONORING THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT

<https://www.2thepointnews.com/keeping-your-sanity-by-honoring-the-most-important-moment/>

A marriage, a friendship, a close family

relationship; all of our important relationships are built on countless moments, innumerable interactions that either build qualities of trust, joy, and respect – or undermine those qualities.

I want to show you what is arguably *the* most important moment for building a trusting, satisfying, loving relationship.

We can often think that what makes a difference in a romantic relationship, or our relationship with our kids, or other friends and relatives, are the big things; the romantic getaway for the weekend, or the great gift that we buy. But there is a moment that packs more leverage, more meaning, and more potential for doing good – or harm – than almost any other:

The moment when someone we care about asks for our attention.

Changing how we respond in that moment can enliven the entire atmosphere of our relationships. To understand why, we must first look at what happens to us when we're ignored.

One of the most severe punishments for a prisoner is solitary confinement; one of the most hurtful things kids do on a playground is to ditch another kid; one of the most frustrating and hurtful things that friends can do to each other is to give "the silent treatment."

These are all experiences of social isolation; and social isolation is the strongest psychological risk factor for disease. More than stress, more than anything else.

Of course the moments I'm talking about are not as severe as total social isolation, but they are threads of the same cloth. Research shows how even mild experiences can have a huge effect:

- Pedestrians who walked past a stranger without getting any acknowledgment from that stranger reported a substantially lower sense of connection to other people – just from that one moment.
- People riding an elevator who were completely ignored by the stranger next to them moved from feelings of happiness toward feelings of hurt.

- In a computer simulation of a game of catch, when people were not thrown the ball for just 5 minutes, they felt more sadness, despair and hostility, and less self-esteem, sense of belonging, sense of control, and meaning in life... in *5 minutes*. With a *stranger*. Even with a stranger *they were told they would not like*.

Imagine how much more intense it is for us to be ignored by somebody we know and care about. And yet most of us are unaware of how often we do this.

It is so easy to get caught up in whatever it is that we're doing, and miss these moments of contact – *the moments when the people we care about ask for our attention*. We usually think that it will be just fine to respond a little later when we're done with our task.

We do this not because we're rotten people, or because we don't care about our partner or our children or our friends, but because these moments can be easy to miss, and we don't realize the power that's contained in them.

Sometimes when I tell my clients about this, they say something to the effect of: "But if I respond, won't I have to do what the other person is asking? What if I'm busy? What if I don't want to do what they're asking? Do I have to always drop everything whenever someone wants my attention?"

Let me clarify something that will make doing this much easier, and much more attractive. When somebody – our partner, our child, a friend – asks for our attention, all we have to do to make a better relationship is *within that actual moment in real time* when we turn toward them and acknowledge their request.

We don't have to do what they're asking us to do. Sure, it's nice if we can, and we want to follow through and be more involved as often as possible; but that's not the most important thing. What's most important is *the initial immediate response*. Note the word immediate.

Say for example your wife asks if you could help her to do a chore, but you have work to finish, and you can't reasonably take the time right now to help her.

Just physically turn toward her, and say something like, "I'd like to help, but I have to finish what I'm doing. I'll be done in about an hour, and I'd be happy to help you then." Or, "I'm sorry honey; I've got my hands full, and I really can't help you now."

Or what if your son wants to tell you about an idea he has, but you're really busy? Turn toward him, make eye contact, and take a moment to say something like, "I really want to hear about your idea, but I have some things I need to take care of right now that I can't put off, could you tell me about it when I'm finished?"

Now, they may be disappointed, but they won't feel ignored.

The moment that matters most is the *initial response*, when we physically turn toward the other person and respond to their request for our attention. In that moment we're communicating volumes. We're saying we care about them, we hear them, we see them, and they matter to us.

On the other hand, when we don't respond, we're saying something more like, "I don't see you, I don't hear you, I don't care about you, and you don't matter to me." *All in a moment*.

One of the most important and gratifying experiences that we give one another in a relationship is *visibility*. The *experience of being seen* is a deep human need, and our closest relationships are where we meet that need. The more we share these moments, the more resilient our relationships become.

When we have the kind of base that's built by countless friendly, kind, and playful interactions, then when the

inevitable hard conflicts or misunderstandings come, they are much less daunting – because they’re exceptions to the overall spirit that we’ve created over time.

These smaller habits are also what build the foundation of trust and joy that can make the bigger positive events much more fun and satisfying.

There’s more to building a great relationship of course. But establishing this simple habit of immediately responding to a request for attention can act as a powerful positive catalyst. It binds with and enhances every other positive thing we do; it can significantly improve your relationships...

And it only takes a *moment*.

PS: *A Master’s Course in Happiness* can help you to take charge of your habits and your life in ways you may not have thought possible; and my new course, *Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions* can help you grow a deep understanding and practical skills for mastering these systems and living well.

And I’m now offering both at a lower price.

Joel F. Wade, Ph.D., is the author of The Virtue of Happiness, Mastering Happiness, his new course, Mastering Emotions, Moods and Reactions, A Master’s Course in Happiness, and The Mastering Happiness Podcast . He is a marriage and family therapist and life coach who works with people around the world via phone and video. You can get a FREE Learning Optimism E-Course if you sign up at his website, www.drjoelwade.com.

Copyright ©2024 **2 The Point News** unless otherwise noted.