

The Relationship Check

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The Relationship Check came out of my original partnership interviews when I asked Focusing partners to experientially check to see what their partnership meant to themselves and what their partner meant to them. And it comes from a question I ask myself, "Why is it so important to know how I am seen and held in a relationship?" Where does this great curiosity come from? It seems universal. If it is universal then perhaps we should pay attention to it. It should have some survival value. It should be important to evolution. In this instance, it is important to the survival and evolution of relationships.¹

The relationship check is the forbidden question in all ships carrying relationships: friendships, love-ships, personal and business partnerships. It seems to be tacitly forbidden to overtly question where we are in our relationship right now. How do I feel about you after you are telling me all that about yourself? How do you feel about me now that I have revealed all of that to you? And where am I with myself? How do I feel about me inside of myself right now after revealing all of that to you and to myself?

Again, this was from personal wanting. I always wanted to know what other people thought of me but was too timid or too polite or too frightened to risk asking. Now that I was a Focuser, I wanted to know how other people felt about me. One day, during an Interaction I had the courage to ask. It became a full time part of the model from then on. It is very valuable information. It makes the relationship feel much safer when I know how I stand with the other person. I have had great agreement from the people I share Interactive sessions with. We want to know the current shape of the relationship.

Honesty leads to Truth

The Relationship Check is another tile in the mosaic of truth. We are asked, again, to have the courage to reveal ourselves. The entire process to this point has been a challenge to our ability and strength to be honest. It is through these incremental steps of honest revelation that we arrive at our truths. Discovering our truths may seem like a single, 'aha' moment, but we can usually trace this epiphany back through an accumulation of curiosity and hard work.

In the 1860s, the German chemist Friedrich Kekule is attributed to having a dream that

¹ What follows is from from the first seminar paper, "A Brief History and Hallmarks of the Interactive: The Relationship Check", Section 6

spontaneously revealed the structure of the benzene ring which, until then, had been a problem thought to be without solution. Prior to his dream, however, he had spent years and years investigating this phenomenon.

Right now

Every couples therapist will tell you of cases where one or the other partner didn't have a clue to the status of the relationship. The wife will say, He just didn't come home one day. Or the husband will say, I never knew how she really felt about me. Did she love me?

Ask yourself, How is my relationship right now? My guess is that you will experience some discomfort. If you dare be honest with yourself, you are probably thinking, I really don't know.

This 'unknowing' isn't healthy for ongoing relationships. It falls within the realm of denial and delusion. A relationship must be strong enough for the truth. That is what the relationship check is after. And, in this model, it comes at a critical point, in the wake of honest disclosure. This is a perfect time to check in with one another. You have loosened the constraints of your habitual way of being with each other.

We often have Interactions with someone with whom we are not in an ongoing relationship. Why is self-disclosure about how we are with one another and how we are with ourselves important in these instances. Relationship isn't about quantity; it is about quality. Every relationship, even if for an hour, is a window into our relationship soul. It helps us establish our maturity level because maturity is about expanding beyond our narcissistic selves and taking in the other. It helps us with ongoing relationships. It is unto itself, and it is practice for other relationships. There does appear to be a relationship muscle that is enlarged and strengthened with practice.

Sharing our stories; being empathically heard; these are bonding experiences. Checking on the status of the relationship in the present moment and revealing it to one another is cementing.

It is like the gas gauge in a car. If we don't know how much gas we have we are likely to run out of gas on a lonely, deserted country road. We want to know the current shape of the relationship. We need to know the current shape of the relationship. It keeps us safe. It builds trust.

The Relationship Check Question

Where we are in our relationship right now. How do I feel about you after you telling me all that about yourself? How do you feel about me now that I have revealed all of that to

you? And where am I with myself? How do I feel about me inside of myself right now after revealing all of that to you and to myself?²

We completed our Interaction by sharing how we felt about one another and about ourselves. I went first. About how I was with Aida now that we had processed together, I told Aida I imagined two women walking arm in arm as they do in Europe. You can tell they have been friends forever or they were meant to be friends. About myself, I was relieved I had the courage to talk about my fears. She gave me the feeling it would be okay to tell her. I trusted her.

Aida felt much the same. There was bonding and trust. She liked that we could reveal meaningful things to each other. She often felt critical of the constant, almost expected, obsessive talk of health as we age. It didn't feel like that to her. It was about our health, but it was much more.

² What follows is from From Seminar Paper 4: The Interactive Response, an example of the Relationship Check. Part 5, The Relationship Check