

# Do you want to be **RIGHT** or have meaningful relationships?

## **You can't have both!**

**by Kelly Bryson, MA, MFT**

"Asshole!!!" She says like a champion dart thrower, throwing a bullseye and then all in one motion, turns on her heel and storms out of the room. Suddenly I felt like a hit and run victim. Shock waves of shame shot through me as the mushroom cloud of my worthlessness rose inside of me.

My female friend had just previously announced to me in a voluminous and highly irritated tone "I want to talk to you right now!!" And I answered, "You know, that tone triggers a lot of fear for me so I want to just continue to lay here looking at the ceiling." How could my sweet childlike honesty trigger such a verbally vile response? I was still laying down on my bed looking up so I decided to project the "inner critic show" going on in my head onto the ceiling. The first character on stage is my original coping mechanism, my Neurotic, who blames himself whenever there is conflict. "Look at you, you're pathetic. Can't even be there for your friend in her hour of need. And you call yourself a teacher of Compassionate Communication."

As I started to put the shattered pieces of my ego back together the roar of righteous indignation rose in my belly. Enter the character of my Character Disorder, who has graduated to blaming others whenever there is conflict. "Who the hell does she think she is?! I'm not putting up with this rude, verbally abusive, boundary invading perpetrator behavior!" It was of some relief to have my inner critic focus on someone else for a moment. Then my education pays off as my Therapist (they're pissed) Complex offers the final analysis: "She is obviously suffering from a pseudo narcissistic personality disorder with paranoid borderline tendencies."

Then I remembered what Dr. Marshall Rosenberg said: "All judgments are the tragic expressions of pain and unmet needs." I think this even applies to my right sophisticated clinical judgments. So I started to look for the pain in my body. Oh there it is - OUTRAGE. And what's the universal human need underneath the outrage? Respect, gentleness and safety. What else is in there, because I know anger never comes alone. There is always hurt or fear or something under it. Now I can feel it - devastating hurt and a need for reassurance that I am valued.

As I lay there giving myself empathy (i.e. paying attention to, and feeling into, what my reaction was all about), I start to feel a relieving shift in my body. I begin to wonder if my friend is possibly experiencing the same thing - hurt and needing reassurance that she is valued. I know that if I had tried to play life guard earlier and save her from drowning in her distress it would have been a double drowning. I know that the undertow of my own unconscious reactions from my unhealed past would have prevented me from really



being present. I had been drowning and needed to get myself to shore first before trying to throw her a line. Or as a wise man from Jerusalem once said, "Get the dirt out of your eye first, so you can see clearly to help someone else do the same." After giving myself empathy I was moved by compassion to go to my friend and see if I could offer her the understanding that would restore our connection. I am glad I waited until my desire to connect with her came from my need to understand and reconnect instead of out of fear of abandonment or guilt about abandoning her. I am glad I remembered the first commandment of nurturing relationships: 1. Me first and only. I want to wait until my giving comes only from my heart without any fear shame or guilt. The energy I want to give from is the same joy and innocence a child has when it feeds bread to a hungry duck.

"When I heard you call me an asshole a while ago, were you feeling angry and hurt because you were really needing reassurance that your need to be heard really mattered?" Her eyes started to fill with tears and a faint outline of a smile started to creep across her lips as she said, "It's about time asshole."

"Yes, I'm guessing that was painful for you and you would have like this quality of listening earlier." I said. "Yes," she said, the tears now flowing freely. "But I am also relieved that you waited till you were really in a position to do so instead of trying to give me empathy from Hell and then resenting me."

How beautiful to finally see the truth behind "asshole." How beautiful to finally hear that my dear friend is in pain and wanting some reassurance from me that she mattered. This allows me to actually enjoy my partner's pain. I don't mean this in the sadistic sense. I mean that there is a distinct joy in the intimacy of feeling the same feeling with another even if it is some type of pain. There is also a sense of relief in the awareness that as I am present to my partner's pain she is being assisted in going deeper into and therefore through her pain. As John Bradshaw says, "The quickest way out of pain is through it." I am glad I gave her my honesty, (that the tone had triggered fear and that I wanted to lay there a while) because it ultimately led to a deeper level of intimacy.

## Intimacy - into me you see through my honesty

When a wound gets triggered by what someone says, I didn't hear them. What I heard was my own inner character disorder voice making them wrong or my neurotic making me wrong or responsible for their pain. How sad that we take so much responsibility for our loved ones' pain. When we do we are completely blocked from being responsive to the feelings or needs of the other. Oh sure we can be reactive to the pain in the other and give them something out of fear, shame or guilt but we cannot be empathetic to the other because we should or because we feel we have to. Also it is not a very joyful giving unless we are being responsive to the need of the other, instead of responsible for them. When I think I am responsible for the hurt of another I am not really present. I am off to Hawaii in my head on a guilt trip.

### Here are some helpful little tips, to avoid fear, shame and guilt trips.

1. **Pack a QTIP - Quit Taking It Personally.** (See a, b, and c below for how to do this)
  - a. When I am listening to the other I want to listen with an awareness that their pain is coming from their unmet need, not from my behavior. People are never angry or upset with us, they are distressed about an unfulfilled need. I want to remember that I may be the detonator but I am never the dynamite. One way of training my consciousness to stay focused on that, is to say either verbally or in my mind to my partner - Are you feeling upset because you were needing reassurance that you matter and want me to agree to call you earlier next time? This prevents me from thinking - Are you feeling hurt because I didn't call you? It is this thinking that punches my ticket to the Hell inside myself. Do not pass go, do not collect 200 kisses, etc.



- b. Make sure you are understanding the universal human need being expressed by your partner instead of jumping to thoughts about solutions. Example: Your girlfriend tells you she is dissatisfied with the sex. Before reading this article you might have jumped to solution and told her, "Well maybe you need to just find somebody new." No, no, try to feel, sense, look into what her need might be. Maybe she is needing some empathy for how scary it is to ask for what she wants in the bedroom.
- c. Remove your grandiose self from your partner's need. She never needs you to take the trash out. Her need is support, her request is that you take the trash out. She does not need you to go to the movie with her, she needs companionship and requests you to fill that need. If I don't keep this straight I start to see my partner's needs as nooses around the neck of my autonomy/freedom. Or I see her needs as burdens I have to fill or suffer the consequences of guilt. One way I keep this in focus is by thinking or saying, "Are you feeling overwhelmed because you're needing some help right now?" If I want to feel as though I have a ball and chain on my leg I think, "Are you feeling overwhelmed because you need me to help you?"

2. **Remember that you have unlimited time outs.** (Unlike a basketball game where you have a set number)
  - a. How to call a time out: Just say I'm \_\_\_\_\_, and then the truth about your present emotion. Like, "I'm scared right now about the tension between us and I want to be alone for a while."
3. **Create and use a password** (just like on the internet). Dr. Rosenberg told me about a couple who uses the word lawnchair. This couple was once making love in a lawnchair when suddenly it collapsed under them. They laughed so hard and felt so connected with each other that the experience stuck in their memory. So now when they are getting really lost in an unfun argument one of them just needs to remember to say lawnchair to remind them of the perspective they really want to have on their relationship. For another couple it was the phrase, "Does that mean you are staying?" He once said to her "Any self respecting man would leave you." To which she answered, "Does that mean you are staying?" They laughed till they cried.

**Now if none of this appeals to you because you prefer a *relationdingy* instead of a *relationship*, here are some suggestion to help you get what you want from life.**

1. **Keep your attention focused at all times on who is right or wrong in a discussion, fair or unfair in a negotiation, selfish or unselfish in their giving** (it helps to keep a list of who has done what for whom), kind or cruel in their tone of voice, rude or polite in their mannerisms, sloppy or neat in their dress, etc. etc. etc. Be careful not to realize that your attempt to be right is really an attempt to protect yourself from thinking you are wrong and then feeling shame.
2. **If you need some support for this I recommend certain self-help groups who can give you the latest scoops on the most powerful politically correct labels with which to overpower and confuse you partner.** They will collude with you in validating that your partner really is a commitment phobic, emotionally unavailable, a counterdependant, typical female or male, overly dependent, needy, spiritually unevolved, codependent, dysfunctional, emotionally immature, judgmental etc. (Please don't mis-



understand, I am deeply grateful for the profound awareness raising work of the 12 step movement and many other groups, especially in my own life.) It is important to keep your consciousness filled with such terminology to prevent any fondness from developing. This also helps in keeping you caught in the "paralysis of analysis" and clueless about what you or your partner are needing from each other..

3. **Adopt this test for love: If your partner really loves you he/she will always know what you want even before you know and then give it to you without your having to ask.** And they do this regardless of the sacrifice to themselves it takes. If they don't give you what you want it means they don't love you.
4. **Ask for what you don't want instead of what you do want.** A good example is a woman I know of that told her husband she didn't want him spending so much time working. The next day he signed up for a golf tournament. Although this triggered a lot of anger for the woman who was wanting more quality time with her spouse, it did protect them from finding out they were incompatible.
5. **In case your relationship starts to grow here are a few torpedo phrases to sink it again:**
  - a. It hurts me when you say that.
  - b. I feel sad because you .....(won't say 'I love you', won't have sex, etc.)
  - c. I'm sorry.
  - d. I need you.

If you really want to choke the life out of any relationship meditate on "d. I need you." Then you'll know how I felt for about 35 years of my life. I felt like a drowning swimmer and I would grab hold of anyone who came near me and try to use them like a life raft. Now I want relationships to be flowers for my table instead of air for my lungs.

When I come gently to you I'd like you to see  
It's not to get myself from you, it's just to give you me.  
And I know that you can't give me me, no matter what you do.  
All I ever want from you is you.  
I know your fear of fences, your pain from prisons past.  
I'm not the first to sense it and I'm plainly not the last.  
The hawk within you heart's not bound to earth by fence of mine,  
Unless you aren't aware that you can fly.  
When I come gently to you I'd like you to know  
I come not to trespass your space, I want to touch and grow.  
When your space and my space meet, each is not less but more.  
We make our space that wasn't space before.

*by Ruth Bebemeyer*



## Additions:

1. If I develop any resentment toward my partner I would like to express my regret to her and acknowledge my complete responsibility for it.
2. We can't deserve love because it is a gift.
3. As long as I am looking for someone else to tell me what I want I won't look inside.
4. Not giving in or up on anything in your relationship is an exercise of faith in the abundance of life and builds confidence in that abundance consciousness.
5. Sometimes my partner is sending me a SOS for help but I am hearing, "Throw me the anchor."
6. If all you think you want is to get what you want – you won't.
7. "I love you" is static, and does not make it clear what we want back from the other. And we always want something back from the other when we speak, even if it is only empathy from our eyes.
8. Usually when someone apologizes it is at the expense of the wounded person.
9. Perfecting your victim-hood — Ask not what you can do for yourself ask what's wrong with your partner.
10. The right path only has room for one. Do you want to be right or connected with another?
11. It's important to develop need consciousness instead of request consciousness because with request consciousness it look like there's only one way to get the need met and this leads to power struggles. When both parties are locked into request consciousness it looks like there's no way to get both requests met and that's when fear arises. Then frequently each party starts to pull for their request in whatever ways they were taught in their family. They either use power over or power under techniques by using anger to trigger shame/fear and submission or using hurt to trigger guilt and submission.

---

**Kelly Bryson MA, MFT**, author of the best selling book, *Don't be Nice, Be Real - Balancing Passion for Self with Compassion for Others (COVER TEXT: A Handbook to Nonviolent Communication™)*, has been featured in Elle and Shape magazines, appeared on many TV and radio shows, lived in an ashram many years, is a humorist, singer and licensed therapist in private practice. He keynotes conventions (national Montessori), is an inspirational speaker and has been an authorized trainer for the international Center for Nonviolent Communication for over 20 years, and has trained thousands in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East. He trains, presents and consults with groups, corporations (Tony Robbins, Paul Mitchell Salons), churches (all flavors), schools (U.Cal.L.B, Body/Mind College), clubs and all types of organizations. He also studied with E. Stanley Jones, Gandhi's concierge and friend. Learn more about his work or information about his private or phone-based sessions, visit his website at [www.LanguageOfCompassion.com](http://www.LanguageOfCompassion.com) or contact him directly at 831-462-EARS (3277) (most insurance accepted). To purchase Kelly's book *Don't be Nice, Be Real* or other related CD's, audio tapes & books, or to read chapters from his book click <http://www.languageofcompassion.com/Publications.htm>

---

For more information on Nonviolent Communication visit the PuddleDancer Press website at [www.NonviolentCommunication.com](http://www.NonviolentCommunication.com)  
For more information about the Center for Nonviolent Communication please visit [www.CNVC.org](http://www.CNVC.org)