2016 Motivational Minutes on Relationships

(Also see Building Up Others, Character, Communication, Forgiveness, Kindness and Self-Worth.)

1. The Lack Luster Opal

 

Quote of the day:

“It takes so little to make people happy—just a touch, if we know how to give it, just a word fitly spoken, or a slight readjustment of some bolt or pin or bearing in the delicate machinery of a human soul.” — Frank Crane

Reflection:

*Someone tells of going into a jeweler’s store to look at certain gems. Among other stones he was shown an opal. As it lay there, however, it appeared dull and altogether to lack luster. Then the jeweler took it in his hand and held it for some moments, and again showed it to his customer. Now it gleamed and flashed with all the glories of the rainbow. It needed the touch and warmth of a human hand to bring out its iridescence.*

There are human lives all around us that have hidden potential of beauty and glory. No gems or jewels are so precious; but as we see them in their earthly condition, they appear to be dull and lusterless, lacking brightness or loveliness. Perhaps they are even covered with stain and tarnished by discouragement. Yet they need only be touched by the hand of encouragement to bring out the radiance and beauty of the divine image in them. You and I can be the hand of encouragement to these drab or stained lives. Touching them with our warm love, the sleeping splendor that is in them will yet shine out again.

Are there any people in your life that need to be touched by the hand of encouragement?

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1. Triple Filter Test

 

Quote of the day:

“Before you speak ask yourself if what you are going to say is true, is kind, is necessary, is helpful. If the answer is no, maybe what you are about to say should be left unsaid.” — Bernard Meltzer

Reflection:

I think this quote has good advice, in addition to the story below, which expounds on the subject even more.

*In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said, “Do you know what I just heard about your friend?”*

*“Hold on a minute,” Socrates replied. “Before telling me anything I’d like you to pass a little test. It’s called the Triple Filter Test.”*

*“Triple filter?”*

*“That’s right,” Socrates continued. “Before you talk to me about my friend, it might be a good idea to take a moment and filter what you’re going to say. That’s why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?”*

*“No,” the man said, “Actually I just heard about it and...”*

*“All right,” said Socrates. “So you don’t really know if it’s true or not. Now let’s try the second filter, the filter of goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?”*

*“No, on the contrary…”*

*“So,” Socrates continued, “you want to tell me something bad about him, but you’re not certain it’s true. You may still pass the test though, because there’s one filter left: the filter of usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?”*

*“No, not really…”*

*“Well,” concluded Socrates, “if what you want to tell me is neither true nor good nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?”*

Let’s take a lesson from these quotes and put our words through the Triple Filter Test before saying them.

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3. Unconscious Helpfulness

 

Quote of the day:

"A tree is known by its fruit; a man by his deeds. A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.” —Saint Basil

Reflection:

*A young woman, speaking of the way different people had been a comfort to her in a great sorrow, said, "I wish some people knew just how much their faces can comfort others." Then she told of an old gentleman she sometimes sat beside in the subway. He did not know her—but she was always helped by just being near to him and seeing his face.*

There is a great deal of this *unconscious helpfulness* in the world. Indeed, many of the best things we do—we do without knowing we are doing them. If we are full of love, we will be helping others wherever we go; and the things we do not plan to do when we go out in the morning, will be the best things of the whole day.

Not only is the life of personal helpfulness most worthwhile in the measure of good it does, but in its influence upon *others*—no other life brings back to *itself* such rewards of peace, of strength, of comfort, of joy.

Does your unconscious helpfulness comfort others?

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1. Japanese Magazine

 

Quote of the day:

"Gratitude is something of which none of us can give too much. For on the smiles, the thanks we give, our little gestures of appreciation, our neighbors build their philosophy of life.” — A. J. Cronin

Reflection:

I saw an interesting thing in a Japanese magazine. It was a picture of a butterfly. Its color was dull gray until warmed by someone's hand. The tender touch of someone’s hand caused special inks in the printing to react. When touched by a human hand, the lack luster gray was transformed into the brilliant colors of the rainbow. Often, this is how people are. In this hurting world people are hungry for a personal touch—the touch of someone who sincerely cares.

 I'd like to encourage you to step out and try this exercise: Make a list of people you do not particularly feel drawn to. Show them acts of kindness and appreciation. Stand back and see what happens. See if they don’t transform from *dull gray* into the vibrant colors of the rainbow.

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1. Appreciate the Good in Others

 

Quote of the day:

"Kindness is in our power even if fondness is not.” – Samuel Johnson

Reflection:

*A young couple had a baby who was physically perfect except for one thing. She was born with no ears. The parents of this young child were extremely worried about how difficult life would be for their offspring. They feared the ridicule that would surely occur when she was old enough to attend school. They wanted to introduce their daughter to other children before that dreaded day in order to see what the reaction would be. They asked a neighbor to bring her little girls to the house and let them look at the baby. Instead of showing up with her daughters, the neighbor showed up with her eight-year-old son who was known for his mean mouth. If someone had bad breath he wouldn't simply say it, he would fall to the floor and faint! With many reservations they introduced their daughter to the little boy and waited for a reply. He looked at her lying in the crib. Finally he asked, "Are her eyes good?" "Yes, why?" asked the concerned parents. "Because she's going to have a hard time wearing glasses.”*

Even the brattiest, most obnoxious person doesn't have to say something mean. Why notice everything that is wrong with people? Instead, try to see the positive side. If you look a little closer than first appearances you'll find it. Chances are they already know what's wrong. They have heard the ridicule and scorn already. Surprise them by saying something nice.

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1. Temper

 

Quote of the day:

“Anger dwells only in the bosom of fools.” — Albert Einstein

Reflection:

*There once was a little boy who had a bad temper.  His Father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the back of the fence.*

*The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks, as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to drive those nails into the fence.  Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all.*

*He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.*

*The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said, “You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence.  The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one. You can put a knife in a man and draw it out.  But it won't matter how many times you say ‘I'm sorry’, the wound will still be there.  A verbal wound is as bad as a physical one.”*

The next time you are tempted to lose your temper and say something you shouldn’t, remember this story, and think about the wounds you may never be able to repair. Is it worth it?

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1. Kiss That Frog

 

Quote of the day:

"Sometimes it’s not the pain that makes you suffer it’s your own negative thoughts that make things seem worse.” – Author Unknown

Reflection:

*Once upon a time there was a little girl who spent her days sitting beside a pond, watching a frog on a lily pad. The little girl knew that the frog was probably a prince, and the frog—who was indeed a prince—knew that the little girl could kiss his nose and break the magic spell that a wicked witch had cast on him. But the little girl on the bank of the pond was too shy to begin a conversation with the frog, and the frog simply could not bring himself to tell her how badly he wanted her to kiss him. So the little girl went on sitting there, watching the frog. And that is the end of the story.*

Sadly, this sort of thing happens all the time in real life. Think of all the beautiful relationships that could have blossomed but never did, the Romeos that never embraced their Juliets because both of them were too afraid to make the first move. No one wants to be met by a cold stare of rejection, but if you spend your life listening to your own negative self chatter and trying to avoid rejection, you will never accomplish much or get very far in life.

Some people are naturally open and can talk a blue streak, while others are more introverted, withdrawn, and reticent and suffer from negative self-chatter. They don’t want to be that way. They would like to be able to interact with others more freely, but it is very hard for them to break away from their negative thoughts about themselves or what might happen.

Don’t be like the couple in the story. Combat your negative thoughts and step out. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

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1. It’s a Privilege to Be a Giver of Kindness

 

Quote of the day:

“It’s a privilege to be a giver of kindness.” – Author Unknown

Reflection:

Everyone craves encouragement. If you feel like you have no time, no energy, no expertise, no money, or too little, to give, don’t worry; that’s common to many of us. But we can all give through our words of encouragement. In just a few minutes, we can make a difference at a bus stop, on the metro, crossing the street, at the shop, at work, at school, online, on a walk, and the list goes on. Our words don’t need to be profound or eloquent—just simple words that meet a person’s need for love, hope, significance, or comfort.

A friend of mine told me the following story:

*On a flight I took some months ago, there was a little girl sitting in the catty-cornered seat from me. She had a beautiful new coloring book that her mother had obviously brought especially for the flight. Occupying the same row was another girl about the same age whose father was seated behind her. This girl had no coloring book, and in fact, didn’t seem to have anything to occupy her time. The girl with the coloring book was soon busily coloring with her crayons spread out on the tray table, while the other girl was looking longingly at them. I felt bad for the girl who had none, so I prayed that the first child would feel moved to tear out a page from her nice coloring book and share it. Sure enough, after a while I saw that she had indeed torn a page out and had given it to her seatmate and was sharing her crayons with her. I leaned forward across the aisle and told the girl that sharing her coloring book was such a nice thing to do. She brightened up and was obviously pleased that someone had noticed. I don’t know how far that little exchange will go, but I would like to think that the next time she has to make a choice whether to share something or not, she will be reminded of the woman who was proud of her because she made the right decision.*

Everyone appreciates knowing that they count, that they’re valuable, and that they’re doing something worthwhile. Our words of encouragement can make a difference in another’s life. At times we see the results of our encouragement. Likewise there are times when in this life, we will never see the results. But the important thing is that we are givers. Love never fails! So even if our words don’t result in someone getting the point right away, it doesn’t really matter. What does matter is that people feel loved, appreciated, and valued.

Ask yourself this question: What can I say to people that will help them in some way? Something to lift their spirits, brighten their day, make them feel good about themselves, help them feel appreciated, valued, worthwhile, and that what they’re doing counts?

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1. Burnt Biscuits



Quote of the day:

“You will find, as you look back upon your life, that the moments when you really lived are the moments when you have done things in the spirit of love.” — Henry Drummond

Reflection:

Someone sent me this story. I apologize as I don’t know where it is originally from but it reflects a wonderful lesson about gratitude and appreciation.

*When I was a kid, my mom liked to make breakfast food for dinner every now and then. And I remember one night in particular when she had made breakfast after a long, hard day at work. On that evening so long ago, my mom placed a plate of eggs, sausage and extremely burned biscuits in front of my dad. I remember waiting to see if anyone noticed! Yet all my dad did was reach for his biscuit, smile at my mom and ask me how my day was at school. I don't remember what I told him that night, but I do remember watching him smear butter and jelly on that biscuit and eat every bite! When I got up from the table that evening, I remember hearing my mom apologize to my dad for burning the biscuits. And I'll never forget what he said: "Honey, I love burned biscuits." Later that night, I went to kiss Daddy good night and I asked him if he really liked his biscuits burned. He wrapped me in his arms and said, "Your Momma****put in a hard day at work today and she's real tired. And besides - a little burnt biscuit never hurt anyone!"***

**Life is full of imperfect things and imperfect people. Learning to accept each other’s faults, and choosing to celebrate each other’s differences, is one of the most important keys to creating healthy, growing, and lasting relationships.**

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Quote of the day:

“Carry out a random act of kindness, with no expectation of reward, safe in the knowledge that one day someone might do the same for you.” — Diana, Princess of Wales

Reflection:

I’d like to do more to improve things around me, but I don’t feel there’s a lot I can do. Changing the world seems like such a huge task even to know where to start. Have you ever thought something similar? I read this article in the Activated Magazine by Abi May that might have some answers.

*You don’t need to be someone powerful or famous to make a difference. Each positive change—no matter how small—is changing the world for the better. We can change the world by improving the lives of those around us, through deeds of kindness and consideration, and by showing faith in them. Here are some practical tips to help get you started.*

*• Build up excellence. Try to think of at least one thing that you find outstanding in a person, and then make it your task to let them know.*

*• Share the responsibility. Give others responsibility in the areas in which they are strong. Make them feel trusted, needed, and appreciated.*

*• Appreciate who they are. Appreciating others for what they do is important. People like to be thanked and acknowledged, but being appreciated for a personal trait feels a lot nicer than only being appreciated for the outcome of that trait.*

*• Keep appreciation simple and doable. Don’t feel that you need to have wonderfully warm feelings about a person, or be their best friend and really know them deeply before you can make a difference in someone’s life. You can be a near stranger and still have a marvelous effect on someone.*

*• Slow down. It takes time to see people in a new light. Go slower in your interactions with people.*

*• Let go of the past. Everyone dislikes being labeled or put in a box. Be willing to see who the person is today or the potential of what they can be tomorrow. Don’t let your view be marred by your past experiences.*

Did you find any of these points helpful? If so, don’t hesitate; start putting that point into practice today and then move on to the others.

1. Be Grateful To People You Meet

 

Quote of the day:

"Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.” — Marcel Proust

Reflection:

The Japanese have a wonderful custom that when they meet again, they thank the person for the last experience: “Konaidawa, domo arigato gozaimasu,” which means, “Thank you for the last time.”

In Iceland they have a similar saying, “*Takk fyrir siðast*” which is a common greeting. It also means “Thank you for last time,” and people say it in the same breath as “Hello”. Even if there wasn’t a particularly meaningful exchange the last time the two met, saying this puts the current conversation within the larger framework of their long-term interactions and starts it on a positive note.

I’m sure there are similar sayings in other languages and I’d be happy to know what they are if you want to send them to me. No matter what language you speak, or if you have a similar saying or not, let us be grateful to the people we meet as there are no *random meetings* in our lives. Everyone we touch and who touches us has been put in our path for a reason.

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1. How’s Your Mental Health?



Quote of the day:

“Patience strengthens the spirit, sweetens the temper, stifles anger, extinguishes envy, subdues pride, bridles the tongue, restrains the hand, and tramples upon temptations.” —George Horne

Reflection:

I don’t know if it is just me, or if anyone else is noticing that more and more people these days seem to be angry and have really short fuses.

This got me to thinking about the words *longsuffering* and *patience*. When I looked into the Greek word makrothumia, the word translated as “longsuffering” or patient I saw that there was another facet. Makro means “long” (no revelation there), and thumia means temper, which was eye-opening. So a more precise translation of makrothumia may be long-tempered, the opposite of short-tempered.

At a conference a while back, one of the speakers had said that spontaneously flying off the handle is now referred to as Intermittent Explosive Disorder (IED). If sudden short-temperedness is now regarded as a mental disorder, then it makes sense that long-temperedness would be a sign of mental well-being. The speaker went on to say that IED is reaching alarming proportions, so I’m not the only one noticing this.

All that to say it might behoove us to check our mental health by how long-tempered or patient we are.

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1. The Power of Touch

 

Quote of the day:

"A hug is a great gift . . . One size fits all, and it's easy to exchange.” –Author Unknown

Reflection:

Touching has many values. Besides benefiting the immune system, many studies have shown that touch can lower depression and hostility, and even boost survival rates of patients with some diseases. Neurologist Shekar Raman, in Richmond, Virginia, explains: “A hug, a pat on the back, and even a friendly handshake are processed by the reward center in the central nervous system, which is why it can have a powerful impact on the human psyche, making us feel happiness and joy. It doesn’t matter if you’re the *toucher* or the *touchee*. The more you connect with others—on even the smallest physical level—the happier you’ll be.” Research suggests that touch is fundamental to human communication, bonding, and health.

Dacher Keltner, PhD, when speaking about the benefits of touch said, “The benefits start from the moment we’re born. A review of research, conducted by Tiffany Field, a leader in the field of touch, found that preterm newborns who received just three 15-minute sessions of touch therapy each day for 5–10 days gained 47 percent more weight than premature infants who’d received standard medical treatment.” Studies show that touching patients with Alzheimer’s can have huge effects on helping them to relax, make emotional connections with others, and reduce their symptoms of depression.

Never under estimate the *power of touch* both for yourself and others.

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14. Forgiveness Enlarges the Future



Quote of the day:

 “Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.” —Paul Boese

Reflection:

*Tony Compal tells a story about President Clinton first meeting with Nelson Mandela. In his conversation with this great leader of South Africa, the president said, "When you were released from prison, Mr. Mandela, I woke my daughter at three o'clock in the morning. I wanted her to see this historic event. As you marched from the cellblock across the yard to the gate of the prison, the camera focused in on your face. I have never seen such anger, and even hatred, in any man as was expressed on your face at that time. That's not the Nelson Mandela I know today. What was that all about?"*

*Mandela answered, "I'm surprised that you saw that, and I regret that the cameras caught my anger. As I walked across the courtyard that day I thought to myself, “They've taken everything from you that matters. Your cause is dead. Your family is gone. Your friends have been killed. Now they're releasing you, but there's nothing left for you out-there. And I hated them for what they had taken from me. Then, I sensed an inner voice saying to me, `Nelson! For twenty-seven years you were their prisoner, but you were always a free man! Don't allow them to make you into a free man, only to turn you into their prisoner!'"*

An unforgiving spirit creates bitterness in our souls and imprisons our spirits. Failure to forgive imprisons us. If Mandela can forgive so can you.

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15. The Power of Forgiveness



Quote of the day:

"Love is an act of endless forgiveness.” – Author Unknown

Reflection:

*Victor Hugo’s literary classic Les Misérables tells the story of Jean Valjean, whose already difficult life is brought down by one lone decision when he steals a loaf of bread to feed his sister’s starving children. As a consequence, he spends the next 19 years in the notorious Bagne of Toulon prison. Unable to find work after his release because he is an ex-convict, Valjean begs at the home of the Bishop of Digne, who feeds him and gives him a bed for the night. But Valjean, overcome by despair at what seems an impossibly bleak future, yields to temptation, steals some of the Bishop’s silver, and slips away in the night. He doesn’t get far, however, before he is arrested with the silver on his person, and is hauled back to face the Bishop. Knowing what will happen to Valjean if he is convicted a second time, the kind Bishop takes a chance on Valjean. He tells the police, “I gave him the silver.” From that moment on he is a changed man.*

*Les Misérables* is a great story packed full of lessons, one being the moving portrayal of the redeeming power of forgiveness. Is there someone in your life you need to forgive granting them a second chance?

**16. The Law of the Garbage Truck**

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Quote of the day:

"Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune." —William James

Reflection:

I came upon this great story and wanted to share it with you.

*One day I hopped in a taxi to go to the airport. We were driving in the right lane when suddenly a black car pulled out of a parking space right in front of us. My taxi driver slammed on his brakes, skidded, and missed the other car by just inches! The driver of the other car whipped his head around and started yelling at us. My taxi driver just smiled and waved at the guy. And I mean, he was really friendly.*

*I asked, “Why did you just do that? This guy almost ruined your car and nearly sent us to the hospital!”*

*This is when my taxi driver taught me what I now call, “The Law of the Garbage Truck.”*

*He explained that many people are like garbage trucks. They run around full of garbage, full of frustration, full of anger, and full of disappointment. As their garbage piles up, they need a place to dump it, and sometimes they’ll dump it on you. Don’t take it personally. Just smile, wave, wish them well, and move on. Don’t take their garbage and spread it to other people at work, at home, or on the streets.*

The bottom line is to not let *garbage trucks* take over your day. Life is too short to wake up in the morning with regrets. Be thankful for the people who treat you right and pray for those who don't.

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17. Durian



Quote of the day:

“A true friend knows your weaknesses but shows you your strengths; feels your fears but fortifies your faith; sees your anxieties but frees your spirit; recognizes your disabilities but emphasizes your possibilities.” —William Arthur Ward

Reflection:

I lived in South East Asia for many years. You can find many exotic and interesting things there, one of which is a fruit called *durian*. For those of you who don’t know what a durian is, it is a delicious savory fruit. Durian has, however, a thick, prickly outer cover and a very distinct pungent smell.

Seeing the good and possibilities in others can be likened to loving durian. Durian is an acquired taste, and yet there are people fanatically dedicated to durian.

What makes people crave a fruit like durian? What makes them elevate it to a "king of fruits" status? Why do they light up when they see clumps of those prickly, greenish-brown husks hanging liberally from vendor stalls? How do they get past the pungent, even revolting odor? What makes them fight their way through the thick, prickly outer husk in order to reach the inside? What makes them obsessed with this fruit that smells like—as some people describe it—dirty socks? They've fallen in love with what's inside those prickly green husks. They've made it past the prickly outer shell, past the foul smell, and they have tasted the exquisite center.

Loving people and seeing the good and possibilities in others can sometimes be similar to getting to the heart of a durian. People can sometimes be prickly. They can have thick, crusty outer shells. Their presence can sometimes repel rather than attract. People can sometimes be stinky—when they do and say unpleasant things. But to the true *people-lover*, those barriers and obstacles merely add to the challenge and excitement of reaching that heart of gold—that sweet center of the inner person that you know is there. If it were any easier to get close to people, some of the excitement would be lost, and some of the allure of the adventure would be missing.

Anyone who has reached inside another's heart, and who has seen what lies beneath the often crusty, prickly shell, has seen the soft and often hurting center. Within that center lies great potential. Within that center lies good. Within that center lies possibility that just needs to be believed in and highlighted.

Once you have touched the heart of someone, and then someone else, and then someone else, you start to see that beneath all the layers and tough exterior, everyone has that special place inside that needs to be loved, that needs to be believed in, that needs to be encouraged and appreciated.

People need passionate and dedicated friends and family who love them, who know that there is good and possibility deep inside of them, and who will do anything to reach that beautiful core. Are you that friend?