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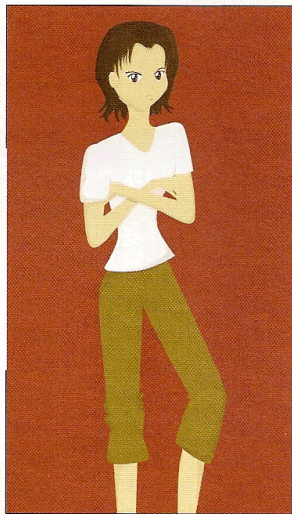
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sabotaging your relationships

DO YOU KNOW YOU'RE DOING IT

By Larry Bilotta



DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR

It's that time of the year again—your husband's annual family reunion. You brace yourself for the upcoming event every year because you know that "she" will be there. You and your mother-in-law have struggled to get along since the first moment you met her. Nothing is ever good enough for her precious baby boy, including you!

But as always, you plan to put your best foot forward and put on a "happy face" despite your real feelings for her. Upon first glance, you catch her eyeing up your outfit looking for the tiniest little flaw to criticize and ridicule you about. This year, you've tried extra hard to appear well dressed and composed. Yet, somehow she still manages to point out a flaw in your wardrobe.

"You know you're missing a button!" she eagerly calls out. Without even realizing it, you roll your eyes and reply, "Oh, gee, thanks" in a sarcastic tone of voice. "Excuse me dear, what was that?" she demands. "Thank you for pointing that out," you quickly reply in an effort to not make a scene.

In a situation like this, it's easy to see it would be very difficult to hide your feelings in an effort to avoid conflict. What you might not know is that regardless of how hard you try to hide your true feelings about any given subject or person, people will see things in you that you just don't realize. Your snippy tone of voice, your folded arms, your cringing brow, none of which you can see because you're too busy delivering it.

In essence, without even realizing it, you could be sabotaging your relationships by giving off hurtful signals to your friends, loved ones and co-workers!

UNINTENTIONAL SIGNALS

At the heart of every relationship is validation and acceptance. But very often, when you disagree with someone's beliefs or values on a particular topic, you unknowingly give off signals of disagreement or disgust for what you're hearing or observing.

The reason for this "relationship sabotage" lies in what is called the B.O. Law. Years ago, there was a deodorant commercial where a young man with body odor entered a room as a group of his friends tried to make every effort to avoid him. The man with body odor suddenly became self-conscious as he felt rejected and worried about the possibility of his less-than-acceptable body odor level.

The commercials were designed to make you realize that when you have body odor, you are the last one to know. This classic deodorant commercial is the perfect example to illustrate the four things—the expression on your face; your body language; the words you say; your tone of voice—that can come out of you in any social situation. These are things you are not aware of, but other people can plainly see.

1. The expression on your face; you can't see it but everyone else can.
2. Your body language; you can't see it but everyone else can.
3. The words you say; though you hear them you're unaware of how they are being received by others.
4. Your tone of voice; you can hear it but you don't have any idea of how you sound to others.

Just think about this for a moment. What are the chances a disgusted look might come over your face in reaction to an idea you disagree with? How often have you unknowingly passed judgment on a friend by using your body language to send a subtle hint of disapproval? This could be something as simple as a raised eye brow, a certain look on your face or even rolling your eyes. As much as we'd like to believe we're in control of the ways people perceive us, this just isn't the case.

A RELATIONSHIP BUFFER

For your most treasured relationships, you need a relationship buffer. Once you have a cooperative relationship with someone and they accept that the B.O. Law exists, try the following technique (called the B.O. Law Procedure) as a way to keep misunderstandings from happening between you and the people close to you.

The B.O. Procedure starts with an accepted "script" that you both agree to use. In effect you are saying to each other, "If anything gets out of hand, we agree to use these words." The more you make this "code" light and fun, the easier it is to use during tense moments to dispel tension.

To use this technique, create a note card for your closest friends and family that says the following:

Please use this if I offend you without realizing it. Ask me the question: "Do you smell something?" Once I hear this, I'll ask "What?" You say "I smell resentment, envy, etc., but I'm sure it's not you. Can you do something about it?"

When you hear these questions, you can reply one of three ways.

- "Yes, I can." Meaning: I'll get rid of this attitude right now.
- "I'll get back to you on that." Meaning: I need some time to get rid of this.
- "No, I can't." Meaning: I'm too stressed right now to care. Give me a break.

The B.O. Procedure works because it's light-hearted, unexpected and it acts as a kind of guarantee that should something go wrong, both of you can refer to the card in a joking fashion, thus moving the issue to the light side. After all, it only takes a little mutual laughter during a tense moment to relieve the pressure.

Remember, if you don't do something now to protect your most important relationships, your negative feelings can build up over time and escalate to an explosive point when it's too late to repair. So why not use this light-hearted tool to show the people you care for that you value your relationship so highly, that you want to protect them from future conflicts?

Invite your friend, family member or coworker to join you today in eliminating relationship sabotage and guarantee a less stressful, rewarding relationship in the future. 📄

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