

Please Try This at Home

Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life

Would you rather be known or liked?

Have you ever been in a conversation with someone where you are stating your views about something important to you and you'd really like the other person to stop being all polite or passive or something and just tell you what they really think? Then, you could finally buckle down and have a *real* conversation. You could *really* know each other and stop all the smoke and mirrors.

Or maybe you've been on the other end of that conversation. All you want is to have a pleasant interaction where both of you share a bit about what's going on with you and find out what you might have in common in the messy process of bumbling through life. But the other person always wants to debate things. Either you're not really sure what you think about the topic and you don't want to look stupid, or you know perfectly well what you think, but you're not a vigorous debater and would rather not be told you're wrong just because you're not loud. Either way, you'd rather just leave the topic alone and go back to what you have in common.

Chances are that you more often identify with one side of this conversation, though you've felt the frustrations of *both* sides from time to time. I certainly have. I think the hardest part of these different conversational goals and styles are the assumptions about the other person that get attached to these frustrations.

Debaters who thrive on animated exchange of contrasting ideas can feel like the people in their lives who minimize disagreement and mostly focus on commonalities are hiding from them. The debater is thinking: Why won't that other person just say what they think? Am I *that* scary to be with? Don't they care enough about me to take the risk of being real with me here? Is the truth behind their politeness so hideous they think I can't handle it? Where *are* they? I keep reaching out to engage and coming back empty and alone in this. How can I respect them if they won't stand up for what they think?

Meanwhile, folks who thrive on commonality and just being together, rather than engaging around disagreements, can feel attacked by debaters. The commonality lover is thinking: Why can't that person just accept me as I am? Can't they trust that I'm a reasonable, valid thinker even if I'm not always proclaiming my opinions? It's so stressful to not only have to figure out what I think and feel on the spot, but then to have to come up with all the reasons why I do and articulate it in a convincing way. If they cared about me, they would cut me some slack and acknowledge what is sensible and valuable about what I do contribute, rather than challenging me all the time as if they think they know everything and I'm some intellectual infant. Why are they always insisting I do things *their way*?

What makes me so sad about my own relationships and those I observe is that in many cases both people really do want to connect with each other in a way that feels good to both of them. The differences in their understanding of how to do so, though, lead to assumptions that the other person is more interested in controlling the interaction by asserting their agenda than in connecting in a meaningful way. While sometimes that assumption is actually true, often it is simply an ongoing misunderstanding.

The Known vs. the Liked

I heard a talk awhile back that shed some light on this process for me. The speaker was saying that all of us have a deep desire to fully known and to be fully loved (or at least liked). Along the way, we find that it is very difficult and rare for both of these desires to be met at the same time. Usually, we have to choose one over the other.

Those of us who have some early success at being liked or at keeping the peace by figuring out what parts of ourselves to hide in which situations tend to gradually develop relational patterns in which we sacrifice being known in order to be liked. We avoid contentious topics that are likely to bring up conflict. We may enjoy collaborative activities more than competitive ones, or stick to activities where the competition doesn't get personal. In conversation, we're more likely to share related stories from our lives or say things like, "I agree" or "Wow, that's cool" or "Way to go" rather than asking challenging questions or presenting experiences that run counter to what another has shared. What we most want from interactions is the overall feeling that we've got something in common and both of us are okay with each other just as we are today.

Those of us who tried everything we could to be liked or to keep the peace early on, only to fail repeatedly, may choose being known over being liked. If others won't like us whether we act like who we are or whether we try to be someone else, we might as well be known for who we are. So we're more likely to let others know straight up what we think and feel, inviting debate and engagement, rather than expecting commonality and smooth interactions. We're more likely to state an opinion strongly just to try it out to see how others react. After all, we can certainly change what we think if it proves wrong. Since we're trying to let others know us better according to what we're thinking now, not trying to secure their approval, an opinion change is no big deal. Competition feels perfectly fine to us. And our conversation is more likely to feature counter-examples, strongly stated facts, or phrases like, "Actually, it's more like..." or "I disagree..." or "But what about..." What we want most in interactions is to feel like we fully stated what currently feels interesting or valid to us and, though solid engagement with another's differing views, further honed our understanding about what we think and feel.

As you can imagine, when two "Liked" people get together, they tend to have fairly satisfying exchanges, as do two "Known" people. But frustrations are sure to follow when Liked people interact with Known people, or, as often happens, marry each other.

AND: The Conjunction that Really Satisfies

What do we do about those people we love so dearly who are always frustrating our attempts to relate with them in a satisfying way? Probably a good place to start is to use the descriptions above to figure out what the other person is most likely to want from most interactions. Do they want to feel like you both were *real* about where you are coming from, whether or not you agree, or do they want to feel like you had a peaceful time together in which conflict did not make you fear that you have nothing in common? You'll probably want to think through what you typically want from your interactions as well.

Maybe the hardest part about moving toward a more satisfying relationship would be initiating a conversation with the other person in which you describe what you often want from your time together and give them the chance to say what they most often want as well. This may take

several conversations because many of us don't really know what we want off the top of our heads. We may have to think about it for awhile.

If a few conversations about the ways in which you interact shape things up in short order, that's great! If not, you might want to try out the following discussion steps with a topic you often disagree on. This "Listen to Learn" exercise from Heitler and Hirsh's [Win-Win Waltz Video](#) can help both Known and Liked people to get more of what they want:

Person A: States an opinion about something.

Example: I love the snow. I hope it keeps snowing until May!

Person B: First states *something* about what Person A has said that B can agree with. Then, using "and" rather than "but," Person B adds their own differing opinion.

Example: Yeah, snow makes the world look so fresh and clean AND I am so tired of fighting the morning snow storm traffic.

Person A: First states *something* about Person B's differing opinion that A can agree with. Then, using "and" rather than "but," A adds their next differing opinion.

Example: Some drivers really do slow things down AND I like having more time to decompress and listen to the radio when my commute is longer. I feel like I have a little more "me" time before I have to return home to all the kids' needs.

Person B: First states something about what Person A has said that B can agree with and uses "and" to add a new differing opinion.

Example: It must feel nice to know you don't have to do anything but pay attention to the road for a little while AND when I have to drive in traffic, I feel like I have less energy for the kids because I am so frustrated when I get home.

The conversation can continue in this same pattern as long as you like, with the goal of having a discussion where Liked people get to hear that their friend can understand and accept parts of who they are and that there is a foundation of commonality and agreement there. Known people get to say what they really think, while providing the extra safety Liked people need to be able to come out from their shell and say what they really think and feel, rather than hiding for fear of having something vulnerable about them feel disliked and unaccepted.

While relational exercises—like new physical exercises—are usually clunky and awkward at first, practicing with them can begin new relational patterns that help people with different relational goals and styles to finally feel like the other person gets them and cares for them. The fact that another person with a different way of interacting in the world is willing to try something annoying, awkward, and new *just because the relationship matters to them* goes a long way. As both people see each other's effort over time, that helps to erode the negative assumptions that were built up through previous experiences of relational frustration. It becomes possible to trust that the other really does care for us, despite the very different approaches we have to relationship.

If you or someone you know would like help increasing relational satisfaction, free to *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email info@jenniferdiebel.com.*

Thanks for reading!

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