

4 Simple Phrases to Help Your Relationships

Most of us were taught as young as children the proper manners and simple phrases we could use to be polite. But somewhere along the line, it seems we've lost the simple art of using these words, and then we wonder why our relationships aren't going the way we want them to go.

Consider this: If you aren't getting what you want out of your relationships, maybe it is because you aren't putting the right things in.

Here are four simple phrases you learned in elementary school that may be the currency you need to improve your relationships as an adult.

1. "Thank you." When someone helps you with something you need, do you thank them? Do you write a card or send a text message or just look them in the eyes and say (directly and explicitly), "Thank you for _____"? I think most of the time, we fail to thank others because we failed to notice what they did for us.

So the answer is to open your eyes to notice. And then practice the words.

- When someone volunteers their time to help you with a project, thank them.
- When someone gives you a gift, thank them.
- When your spouse does something that makes your life easier, thank them.
- When someone offers mentorship or time, thank them.
- When someone opens their network with you to help you get what you need, thank them.

When people feel appreciated for what they've done for you,

they are much more likely to extend their resources to you again in the future. Ask yourself who in your life you need to thank, and take action to thank that person today.

2. “I’m sorry.” Saying “I’m sorry” can be really hard for a few reasons. Sometimes a colleague or family member is angry at us, and we aren’t sure why. (You think to yourself, “What’s his problem?”) Other times we did something we knew was wrong, but it seems like nobody noticed, so we figure we can just skate by.

But unresolved tension, even if one person doesn’t realize it’s there, kills relationships. And when these relationships suffer, so does the rest of your life.

It’s all connected.

Practice the art of saying “I’m sorry.” If your spouse or boss is acting upset with you, don’t be afraid to ask the question, “Are you upset with me about something?” And, “Can we talk about it?” Listen and try to understand so you can own what you’ve done wrong and apologize. If you know you did something wrong, even if it seems like nobody noticed, have the courage to say, “I messed up. I’m sorry.”

It’s really that simple. And your relationships will be more productive for it.

3. “Can you help me?” I don’t know how we got to the place where asking for help makes us feel weak, but we’re not being honest with ourselves. Nobody has ever gotten anywhere in the world without asking for help. And here’s the really weird part: We all like helping people. We like to feel needed.

So if you need help, what are you waiting for? Ask for it.

When you ask for help, try to be as direct as possible. You can’t expect people to solve your problems, but you can expect them to share their resources. When you ask for help, ask for

specific things:

- “I’m looking for a new job in accounting. Do you know of anyone who is hiring?”
- “I’m traveling to Chicago. Can you connect me to your friend who lives there?”
- “I need a ride to the airport on Sunday. Would you be willing to drive me?”

Then, when someone agrees to help, don’t forget to say thank you.

4. “I love you.” We don’t say this phrase nearly often enough to the ones we love, and not only does it leave room for question in our closest relationships, but it is also our biggest source of regret when relationships crumble or when someone close to us dies.

Later, we all wish we would have said “I love you” more often.

No one ever regrets saying it too much.

So, when was the last time you told the people in your life that you love them? Don’t make them wonder. If you love someone—a friend, a family member, whomever—don’t be afraid to say those words explicitly and often.

Which of these phrases is the hardest for you? How can you improve?

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