

A powerful principle is to assume positive intent

By Anthea Pretorius

When we experience quality relationships, we are happy and deeply satisfied, but when our relationships are strained or break down, we are miserable. Our relationships with family members, friends, partners, neighbours, work or study groups, sporting and other clubs we may belong to, and even the way we relate to strangers and society at large will always influence the quality of our lives.

According to Terri Maxwell, people who do not experience relational joy may be missing a vital ingredient.

How can we improve our relationships?

Accept others as they are. Be more tolerant. Listen with care. Do not assume or presume anything. Check the facts, before you respond.

If we make an effort to identify the things that compromise our relationships, we can avoid those pitfalls and find more productive and rewarding ways to enjoy warm and sincere relationships characterised by mutual trust and respect.

By discovering the barriers that hold us back from the rewarding relationships we desire, we are able to avoid behaviour and attitudes that derail us. Knowing our areas of weakness enables us to approach our relationships in a mature, sensitive and more self-affirming way.

Assume positive intent

This powerful principle implies that no matter what other people say or do, rather than judging, attacking or dismissing them, we assume positive intent. In other words, we assume that they meant well or were doing their best.

Many people have been raised with fear and distrust of others. You may believe others are 'out to get you' and that certain people are dishonest, violent, corrupt, dangerous or untrustworthy, but those beliefs may be completely misguided and twisted. If we believe that others will take advantage of us, it will affect the manner in which we relate to them.

When we are hurt, lied to, betrayed or taken advantage of, we acknowledge that the person is acting from a place of pain and is struggling with his or her own issues.

Fear responses are detrimental to relationships as they cause us to approach others with feelings of suspicion and distrust, rather than with an open and receptive mind.

If you expect a positive outcome, more often than not you will receive exactly that! When you are at the receiving end of negative reactions, do not take it personally, but remember that people are wrestling with their own issues and could be preoccupied, tired, hungry or irritable, and their responses may not be an attack on you.

Assuming positive intent is a simple recipe that could add joy and fulfilment to your life, improve your personal relationships and minimise stress.

Assuming positive intent means that we choose to be more loving, giving, grateful, compassionate and understanding, and to treat others with respect, dignity and grace.

