

# Social Intelligence Can Brighten Lives

Sonja sighs cynically as she reads the statement that relationships are central to living well because, frankly, the people in her world are her greatest source of frustration. No matter that she constantly pushes them to excel, they continue to make the same mistakes. She's troubled when she considers that perhaps it is she rather than they who need to change.

The book that turns around her thinking is Daniel Goleman's book on social intelligence. After reading the studies that indicate the importance of good human relationships to optimal functioning, she realizes she needs to develop her relationship skills. She pours through relationship and organizational literature and finds what she determines to be the two most powerful tools available.

Sonja knows exactly where she wants to use the tools. She wants to improve her most important and least satisfying relationship – her marriage which is largely characterized by apathy, criticism, and small annoyances. To increase passion, engagement, and joy would be beyond her wildest dreams. Her goal is simply to feel a bit happier.

The first tool Sonja finds she calls her Michelangelo action, which includes recalling 1-3 virtues of her husband and writing about them. Every day for the next two weeks, she intends to look for these virtues and comment on them sincerely. For example she might say, "Stan, I've always admired your perseverance since the time I saw you digging the truck out of the ditch for over three hours. I'm noticing that your stick-to-it-ness just keeps growing. Look at how you worked on that leaky faucet even when you were tired after dinner."

Michelangelo saw the image of a beautiful sculpture in a block of marble; seeing virtues in others helps bring out their best. Researchers have noted that very happy couples see virtues in each other and consequently build those strengths in one another.

The second tool she calls her Losado Line action. Sonja plans to keep her positive to negative behaviors in a ratio of 5 to 1 and to phrase any criticism or complaint as a want.

For example if her husband is late for dinner, she says something like, "Stan I would like for you to be on time for dinner."

She also will aim to notice 5 of his behaviors throughout the day that she appreciates and let him know about them (or do five behaviors which he would consider kind such as watching part of a basketball game with him).

The mathematician-psychologist Marcial Losado noted that high performing organizations have a specific ratio of positive to negative talk (between 6-11 positive to 1 negative). Flourishing organizations and very happy couples have many more positive than negative interactions.

After two weeks Sonja confesses that she didn't do all she was going to do. She didn't need to.

After three days of accepting that she could change some of her behaviors to become more socially intelligent, by bringing to mind only one of her husband's virtues and commenting about it to him, the world changed.

Spring seemed to arrive, the sun's rays warmed her bedroom, the buds appeared on the apple trees, and her bursitis seemed better. Somehow her children and employees had become a lot less sloppy and Stan was on time for dinner.

Social intelligence, when used to bring out the best in others, can be a true act of social responsibility with as much impact as feeding and clothing the poor. When we bring out the best in others they are more engaged, motivated, and happy - so are we. Relationships hugely affect our emotions, vitality, and even our biology. Strong relationships are an essential feature of the good life.