

Put Some ZIP into Your Relationships

By Chris Widener

Relationships are really what makes the world go around, aren't they? I mean, good, positive, healthy and meaningful relationships provide us with the richest experiences we have here on this old earth of ours. Your loving spouse who shares everything with you; that best friend who connects with you like few others do; the people at work who appreciate you and help you to become the best that you can be. These are the things that bring joy to life!

But...relationships can also be the bane of our existence! What really brings more pain in this life than a broken relationship, especially when it isn't just broken, but downright ugly!

So, it behoves us to do all that we can to keep our relationships zipping right along, doesn't it? If we put the very best into our relationships, we can almost guarantee getting the very best out of our relationships!

Through the years, I have spent hundreds of hours working with people in their relationships: marriages, friendships, working relationships, and social relationships. Through it all I have seen some wonderful things and some terrible things. It truly has been the good, the bad, and the ugly!

But I have been able to find three core elements in successful relationships. These are things that, when

done over time, begin to create for us the kinds of relationships that we truly desire. They are the kinds of relationships we have always dreamed of.

The key to remembering these three items is the acronym Z.I.P., which stands for three things you can do—and begin to do immediately—to improve any and all of your relationships. They are:

- Put some ZEST into your relationships,
- Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships,
- Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships.

Let's take a closer look at each of them.

Put some ZEST into your relationships

By zest, I primarily mean fun. Relationships were meant to be fun! We wouldn't have been made with the capacity to have fun if relationships weren't supposed to have a little zest in them!

Think about it: don't you usually start out healthy relationships with a lot of fun times? Whether it is going out to dinner or a ballgame, spending time playing a game, or even just having a lively talk, you usually want fun to be a major part of the relationship. Fun is some of the glue that bonds the relationship.

But as life goes on, specifically in a marriage, but in all relationships really, the fun starts to go by the wayside. More and more it can be about getting the job done, whatever the job may be.

To restore the relationship, to put a little zip into it, we need to reintroduce the idea of 'zest'.

What about you? Have you lost the zest? What can you do to get it back? Think of a specific relationship you have. What were the fun things you did at the beginning of the relationship that acted as the glue that bonded you together? Now, commit to doing those again, and see if your relationship doesn't begin to soar again! If you can, develop new fun things to do together so you can both start an adventure of fun together!

Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships

Let me make a couple of clarifications. First, I don't just mean intimacy in the currently common understanding, that is, sexual intimacy. I mean for all intents and purposes, taking your relationship to a deeper level. Second, I don't mean that you have to start doing group hugs with your workmates, or having revelation sessions where the tears flow freely.

What I do mean is that every relationship that is mutually satisfying has a level of depth to it that provides meaning. This is really what the search is for in our relationships—meaning.

Remember when you first started your relationship, whether with your spouse or friend. All of that time was spent opening up, telling who you are, where you are from, what your likes and dislikes are. There was a deep sense of satisfaction with the relationship—that is why it continued. You liked who they were, and you enjoyed being known by them.

But then something happened. You got to a certain level and the pursuit



of depth ended. You stopped sharing feelings, likes, and dislikes. You stopped sharing joys and dreams and fears. Instead, you settled into routine. The daily grind took over, and you stopped knowing one another and simply existed together.

Now don't get me wrong, every time you get together doesn't have to be deep. Remember, I advocated in the previous paragraphs just having plain old fun sometimes. But there is a need for regular times of intimate connection where we go deeper with others.

This is particularly hard for many of the male species, and it is not only possible, but healthy and necessary! If we want to have the kinds of relationship we were made to have, we have to open ourselves up to having others know us, and for us to know others.

Truly meaningful relationships come when we are loved and accepted for whom we are at our core, not simply for acting the right way in a relationship so as to keep another person in it.

Think about the relationships where you would like to see improvement. Take some time in the coming weeks and months to spend time just talking and getting to a deeper level in those relationships. Specifically, let other people deeper into your world. You can't force others to be more intimate, and you certainly can't say, 'Let's get together and have an intimate conversation', because that would be too contrived. But you can make a decision for yourself that you will let others into your world. Perhaps this will be the catalyst for them doing the same.

You can guard yourself from intimacy but then you won't go much deeper, and you will feel a longing in your heart for more. Or you can begin the deepening process and see your relationships change for the better.

Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships

The most meaningful relationships we have are those that are held together by a common purpose and vision for what the relationship

can accomplish, not only for those involved, but also for a greater good.

Let's face it, when people have a common purpose, they feel like they are part of a team, and they feel bound together in that relationship. Even when people may be disappointed in the people they are in relationship with, if they have a purpose, such as raising the children, they are much more likely to stick it out. Purpose creates bonds.

So what happens if we are proactively involved in seeking out a common purpose with those we want to have a relationship with, or those who we already have a relationship with, but we would like to see it go deeper? Well, it gets better and stronger.

Think about your strongest relationships. Aren't they centred around at least one area of purpose or a common goal?

What about a relationship that has cooled? Think back, and see if perhaps you used to have a common purpose that has gone by the wayside.

And what of your desire to see a relationship grow? Take some time to begin to cultivate a common purpose. Sit down with that person and tell them that you would like to have some common goals, some purposes that you pursue together. As you develop these, you will see your relationship strengthen in ways you never imagined!

Let's recap: You want your relationships to show a little 'zip'? Then put a little ZIP in them:

- ✓ Put some ZEST into your relationships,
- ✓ Cultivate more INTIMACY in your relationships, and
- ✓ Develop a PURPOSE in your relationships.

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