

Reaping “The Five Good Things” From Relationships

What are “**The Five Good Things**” that occur in growth fostering relationships? They are:

- Increased knowledge of oneself and the other person in the relationship.
- Increased zest.
- Increased ability to act in that relationship.
- An increased sense of self worth.
- A desire for more connection beyond that particular relationship.

Sounds good, doesn't it? But how do you know if you are in a growth fostering relationship? And how do you increase these things? Let's take the first question first. One way you know if you are in a growth fostering relationship is by the degree to which The Five Good Things are present. Another way is to look at **authenticity**, the extent to which you are really able to be yourself in this relationship. Are there parts of yourself that you think may be unacceptable in this relationship? What happens if you try to bring a little more of yourself into the relationship?

Another aspect of growth fostering relationships is **mutuality**, the extent to which you have an effect on the other person and she or he has an effect on you. In order to have a dynamic relationship, there has to be mutuality. If you are a “people pleaser,” consider how much you like being able to make other people happy. By letting someone make you happy for a change, you are allowing another to have that pleasure as well, and learning to receive as well as to give, a growing experience for you personally and for your relationship.

Let's look at the second question, how do you increase The Five Good Things? The main way to do this is to look at your relationship as if it was a plant. It needs care and tending to flourish. One of the ways to do this is to really pay attention to the other person. We all fall into ruts, where we ask, “How was your day?” but don't really listen to the answer. Next time, stop what you're doing and give 100% of your attention to the answer. Ask follow up questions. Or, look around for something to appreciate. It feels good to hear compliments!

Another good way to check in on your relationship is to consider how connected you feel to the other person *right now*, in this moment. If the answer is, “Not very,” try to figure out why not. Try to take steps to come back into connection, first by owning your piece of what you have contributed to a disconnection. Communicate your desire to improve the connection (grow the plant), not place blame.

If you can take any or all of the above steps, your relationships will begin reaping more and more of The Five Good Things – an abundant harvest of clarity, self-worth, empowerment, zest, and connection! Happy Relational Harvest!

Note: The Five Good Things is a concept developed by Jean Baker Miller of the Stone Center at Wellesley College.