



Loving *Life* Fully

A FEW THOUGHTS FROM DR. HERB SENNETT

SPEAKING WITH SINCERITY

CARRYING ON CONVERSATIONS CORRECTLY

The great British comedian and satirist of last century, Oscar Wilde, once wrote, “Ultimately, the bond of all companionship, whether in marriage or in friendship, is conversation.”

Whether you like it or not, to have a good relationship with another person, you must talk to one another. And if that be true, then we need to speak to one another in a way that will foster the relationship and help each person to grow closer with fondness toward each other.

It is my contention that there is a duality within an enjoyable conversation: honesty and sincerity. Without either of these, conversations tend to be flat, uninteresting, and may even result in a barrier between the friends. Of course, the next question is, “How do I go about making my conversations more honest and sincere?” Allow me to answer that question.

FIRST, CONSIDER THE OTHER’S VIEWS AND EMOTIONS

The wisest person I have ever known was my mother. She had a way of putting thoughts together that made sense and seemed absolutely true. One thing she said to me many years ago was, “When you are talking to people, be considerate. Remember, you don’t have to agree with them, but you do owe them the courtesy of letting them speak.”

Over the years, I have learned just how true that statement by my mother really was. I also discovered that considerate conversations involved a lot more than being considerate. It involves allowing the other person to have their own views and emotions. It is not my place to correct or complain about their viewpoints and the way they feel about ideas. It is okay to disagree, but never be disagreeable about it.

On my first date with the young lady who later became my wife, I almost lost out on what has ended up being a wonderful, fruitful, and amazing relationship that has lasted more than fifty years. Let me explain.

One evening prior to this date, I was in a conversation with a group of fraternity friends. One guy said how hilarious it would be to actually ask a girl to be your steady on the first date. I said that I was the kind of guy that would do something that stupid. The others in the room bet me that I would never do that. I told them about the date I had on Sunday that was a first date. They bet

me a case of beer that I wouldn't do it. Well, on that Sunday evening, at the end of our evening together, I asked her to be my steady and wear my fraternity drop necklace. She took it. I went back to the dorm and told the guys that they owed me a case of beer.

Unfortunately for me, the girl kept what I had done a secret from her friends and sorority sisters. So, when my friends called to verify my actions, no one in the girls' dorm knew anything. So, my buddies refused to get me the beer. I had been outsmarted and defeated in my actions.

SECOND, CAPITALIZE ON YOUR SIMILARITIES

The French philosopher, Albert Camus, once wrote, "Don't walk in front of me, I may not follow. Don't walk behind me, I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend." In building a relationship through conversation, the key element is to focus on the similarities that you share. Build on those elements and accept the fact that you also have your differences. But, those are not as important as the similarities.

To continue with the story, in the days after that mistake, I realized just how much I enjoyed being with this young lady. We had become friends during the first several months of that school year. I liked her very much. We spent time together at lunch and dinner in the college cafeteria. We had so many thoughts, ideas, and interests in common. She was an ideal friend. And it was in that realization that I knew I needed to mend the rift I had created.

So, several days after that first date, I met with her and apologized for what I had done. I had not considered her viewpoint or emotions in the matter. It was a terrible mistake. But, because we were already friends before the date, she gave me the benefit of the doubt. And eight months later we were engaged.

THIRD, CONSENT TO YOUR DIFFERENCES

Perhaps the most awkward thing to do these days is to agree to disagree and to disagree without being disagreeable. In so many ways, our recent political environment has leaked into the daily lives of the American public. Someone I thought was a good friend recently said to me that he could not feel comfortable being around me because we had such diverse political views. He said it didn't feel right being my friend if I was going to support a particular presidential candidate that he vehemently opposed.

My mother had another piece of advice that has stuck with me over the years. She explained to me just what I needed to know if I really wanted to marry the young lady I was about to propose to. She asked me to write on a piece of paper everything I liked about her. Then she had me write on another sheet of paper all the things I didn't like about her.

After I was finished with the two sheets of paper, she took the one with all the things I liked about that girl and tore it in little pieces as she said, "These things are not that important." Then she picked up the short list of things that I had written that I thought I didn't like about her. She held it up to my face and asked me, "Can you live with these things for the rest of your life?"

I was stunned. I had never thought about that before. It had never occurred to me that I need to consider that everything I didn't like about her would still be a part of her after we were married. I looked closely at the list, paused for several moments, then said, "I think I can."

She smiled and said, "Then marry her. You've found the right girl."

Guess what! Everything on that list of things that I didn't like about my wife are still present. Even though I still don't like them after all these years, I have accepted that those traits are part of who she is. And if I love her, then I must accept those as part of the package that I married.

So, I have come to realize that the dating process involves discovering the differences between you and the other person. Marriage follows only after accepting the differences between you as part of who both of you are. Every human is made up of both positives and negatives. Those make us who we are. If you can get along with the differences as well as the similarities, then you have a chance for a long, healthy, and prosperous relationship.

Beverly and I became good friends. Then I fell in love with her. We spent many months together getting to know each other. Then I asked her to marry me. During the engagement period, she found out more about me. I found out more about her. We got married anyway because we both accepted the good and the bad.

Okay, we still disagree on many things. She still drives me crazy with some of the things she does that irritate me. And the last fifty years have been an amazing journey. Even if I had the chance to do it all over again, I wouldn't change a thing.