

## **I Can Relate!**

The monthly missalette on Relational Practice

By Louise Phipps Senft

### **What's love got to do with it?**

Tina Turner belted out in her 1984 lyric, What's love got to do with it? You remember, right? The sizzly song about the crazy confusing experience of strong emotional and physical desires butting up against the rational protect yourself mental act. We can bet that when our Relational Mindset is in alignment with our behavior and actions that we too will experience that crazy push-pull. Well, maybe not quite as steamy as Tina Turner but definitely real, with our active mental processes chiding us to do things safely, to protect our hearts and our egos, while our heart, the source of our emotional intelligence, is whispering to us urging us in a different direction. So, what's love got to do with it? Everything!

Are we courageous enough to act from the heart? When our Relational Mindset informs our behavior, it's a relational practice. When we act relationally, our hearts are more open and we are able to receive data and information we may have otherwise missed in a transactional world. But to act relationally often takes courage, strong enough to be open to our hearts and strong enough to be vulnerable. Who wants to be vulnerable? If we choose to practice relationally, we run the risk of tapping into our hearts and exposing our egos. But this risk doesn't mean we lose our intellects; it doesn't mean we lose our ability to think clearly. It means that the lens through which we view the world just got wider; we are more connected with our reality and others. We actually become more expansive in our thinking. And that leads to better interactions, better decisions and better outcomes. But do we have the strength to be vulnerable like this?

Transactional thinking and actions surround us in law practice, ADR practice, business and life. You know, getting what you can, even at the expense of another; holding firm that your view is better than another's. How about those transactional tendencies when you advise your clients how to protect themselves, assuming the worst about others, or when you advise your clients how to maximize their needs over another's and even to the exclusion of the other's, or even to the annihilation of the other's needs. Or outside the office when you pass along information that is not fully truthful for the sake of a chuckle or a tittle, or you don't speak up when someone is belittled. Or even when you are moving too fast to stop and hold the door for the person behind you... yes, transactional thinking and behavior permeates our everyday lives, especially for us as lawyers and advocates. And it doesn't mean we have acted in a bad way necessarily. It's rather that there is something else, another way, a relational way.

What would it be like if you had the courage, the resolve, the love, the care to do even one of these acts differently today. Just one. For instance, when you hear a comment from another that you really disagree with, what if you responded, Maybe... and maybe not and then added your view, leaving the space open for dialogue, open for their view, open to have your thinking expand and even sharpened. What if when you talked with your client

instead of strategizing how to maximize what you can get for him, instead you asked, What is it that you think the other party wants and needs, and is that something you might consider giving them while we request x for you? What if when you knew of a colleague's or a community member's ill fate and someone asked you about the status and instead of passing along that they are probably still in treatment or still crazy or still estranged or whatever, you instead said, I'm not sure but I hope they are better, got the help they needed, have a second chance. What if you paused today at one entry way, one elevator, and looked at the person behind you and held the door open for them with a, Have a nice day. What if....

These are Relational Practices. And that's what love has to do with it. Strong enough to care for others while not losing yourself. Strong enough to be vulnerable.

It creates greater well-being for the whole, doesn't it? It feels good to them. And it feels good for you, right? You literally can feel well-being. That's what I call *Relational Reciprocity*. Relational practices are motivated by a desire to create more well-being for ourselves and others, at the same time, in the same interaction, in the same choice. And the more we act from the heart, the stronger we become. The more relational you are with others, the more relational they will be with you.

What do you think about a Relational Approach? If you have any reactions or stories you'd like to share re this article, please send them to [Louise@BaltimoreMediation.com](mailto:Louise@BaltimoreMediation.com). Your views and stories are welcomed.

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