

SIMON ON RELATING LONG-TERM

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Simon On Relating Long-Term

Simon says, "Let's go down this road together." It is worth considering. Going down the road with you could be just fine. There are a couple of questions, though. What will it be like with you, what is your idea of a successful long-term relationship? That is important but there is an even more important question. It takes two committed people to make such a relationship work. What is your commitment?

Simon says, "My commitment is to be the best I can, every day, in every way. I cannot promise you happiness, fulfillment, or satisfaction; but I do promise you the highest quality interpersonal experience of which I am capable. You must also know I have expectations of you. Just as I commit to my best, every day, I expect you to make the same commitment. If our relationship can rest on our mutual commitments, it then will be a serious challenge for each of us and a wonderful, shared opportunity. To help you in your decision, let me share what I think quality long-term relationships are like and how we should understand our commitment and responsibilities to each other. Once you have considered these ideas, you then need to thoughtfully decide whether you want to make the journey with me. It is and will continue to be your choice."

Simon says, "If you are in the relationship for the long-term, be consistent and predictable."

Does this make you think your old friend Simon is a boring person? Does hanging around with Simon sound like about as much fun as watching paint dry? Does being consistent and predictable conger up images only slightly more stimulating than snuggling up with a turtle? Well, maybe "Yes," and maybe "No." Either way, That is not quite Simon's point.

Simon is referring more to people who are friendly one time you are with them and standoffish the next. They are interested in what you have to say this afternoon but may not be tonight. Sometimes they are warm and sensitive and other times even a grizzly bear would be reluctant to give them a hug. There is just no predicting how they are going to be whenever you see them.

If they are really on a roll, their unpredictability extends beyond their mood and attitude to include their interests, how they talk, their appearance, and anything else you associate with them. You enjoy them at times but do not want to be within a country mile of them at other times. Even you have trouble reading them. It is a wonder they have any friends, if they actually have any other than you; and you even have doubts yourself now and then.

Everyone likes a surprise once in a while and no one expects anyone to be exactly the

same all the time; but there are limits to everything. The key in long-term relationships is staying inside those limits most all the time. The key is also in what Simon calls "selected sameness." There are situations where the limits are very narrow and you consistently stay within those limits. The situations have a lot to do with personal preference and vary a lot but include things like serious conversations, when someone is ill, business appointments, restaurants and parties, or any situation where you are expected to look, behave, and conduct yourself as you have other times. Your significant other wants the real you most of the time; and the more long-term your relationship, the more important predictability and consistency become. That is what their having a relationship with you is about and why they go to the time and bother to keep it.

Simon says, "Be fun to be around."

In the short-term, "fun" usually does not matter much. Simon spends time with this or that person and gives little thought to it one way or the other. He certainly notices those who are particularly pleasant or especially abrasive; but most people are merely there, doing whatever they do, being whomever they are. In these relationships, Simon takes care not to be unpleasant or abrasive himself; but "fun" is not a high priority. For the long-haul, though, fun matters.

You know consistency and predictability matter but that could be a good news/bad news kind of thing. Some rather weird people are consistent and very predictable. They are always odd ducks. The same holds for people with no feelings, bummed-out types who are in a chronic bad mood, those whose social life consists of gossip and feeding the rumor mill, ME people for whom anything is an excuse to talk about themselves, and on and on. These folks all raise boring to gold metal status. Do you think it might be fair to conclude they just are not any fun? Sure it is; and therein lies Simon's point.

Simon says, "Be attractive."

You undoubtedly know pretty is as pretty does and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Do you suppose someone also once said, "A robin won't sit on an empty nest," or perhaps, "A moth isn't drawn to a dampened flame?" If so, it may have been Simon making another simple point. "Attractiveness is a today thing." The egg has to be there today to tempt the robin; the flame must be burning brightly to attract the moth.

Inside Simon's simple point are a couple of small but important nuggets. Just as the moth is not attracted to the nest, egg or no egg, the robin is not attracted to the flame, dampened or not. Like the moth and the robin, different people are attracted to different things.

Within long-term relationships, there certainly needs to be an attraction. Your task is to decide what that is, whether you want to be that type of attraction, and if you do, how you stay attractive. Whatever the nature of the relationship, attraction is the bond; and being attractive

today is the tie that binds.

Simon says, "Give the relationship your best shot."

You know Simon well enough by now to know he would not recommend anything less. Doing the right things right, the first time, on time, every time may indeed be his theme song. It likely comes as no surprise he is now singing that old song in reference to long-term relationships. "Relate the best you know how, every chance you get."

A long-term relationship is not a now-and-then, if you feel like it or have time proposition. Neither is it a place where less than your best will do, unless you do not care about risking the relationship. Sure, that level of effort and commitment benefits your significant other. You do it for them; and that is certainly thoughtful of you. More to the point, though, giving it your best shot every time is in your very personal self-interest. Do it for you.

Simon says, "Be attentive and self-disciplined."

There that Simon goes again. What does he think, that you are out of control or something? You are consistent and predictable and are certainly attractive and fun to be around. You give your relationship your best shot as well. Now what is he talking about with this being attentive and self-disciplined stuff?

Simon assumes you are responsible, considerate, reliable, thoughtful, and all of those kinds of things. There is a potential glitch, though. In quality, long-term relationships, your comfort zone increases, you are very familiar with your significant other, and there is little need to consciously attend to the relationship. It is not something you think about much and there is minimal need to "stay sharp." You assuredly are in a safe place. Nonetheless, you need to beware of what Simon calls "attention drift."

Here is the problem. In a long-term relationship, you and your significant other gradually adjust and accommodate to each other. You are each attractive to the other and pay little to no attention to quirks, habits, and behavior that is slightly annoying or irritating. You get used to each other.

All would be fine were it not that you both change over time. Each of you behaves a little differently here and has a slightly shifted attitude there. For a while, you just accommodate with no conscious awareness of doing so. At some point, you become aware but do not make an issue of it. More time passes and annoyance and irritation appear with no specific focus. This grows and begins to take on more importance than your attraction to each other. You have drifted apart.

What happened? One or both of you were not attentive enough to your changing behavior

and attitudes. You experienced attention drift. The result is that your relationship is in jeopardy.

What is Simon's strategy for preventing attention drift? Have the self-discipline needed to continuously be attentive to subtle changes and shifts and to deal with them immediately.

Simon says, "Be value compatible."

They say that opposites attract. They are also the people who say that there is no accounting for taste. Who knows? That may be the same bunch that observed that if you spend enough time with most anyone, you will figure out some way to get along. Whatever the attraction, "values" are at the heart of it. For you and your significant other, there is something that keeps each of you in the relationship. Whatever it is, that is the attraction, what you value.

Although these points of attraction certainly represent values, They are not the value compatibility Simon is talking about. He is referring to those old fashioned values that preachers and politicians are so fond of discussing. What is right and what is wrong? What is good and what is evil? What do ethical people condone and what do they abhor? Simon's simple point is that value compatibility is important and value incompatibility forecasts serious problems for anyone in a long-term relationship.

Simon extends his compatible value point to cover life goals, personal priorities, and what is really important. That Simon, he does have a way of going straight to the nub of the matter. Moral values are certainly important: good and evil, right and wrong. You and your significant other are well-served by at least being on the same page with these kinds of things; but life goals, personal priorities, and opinions about what is really important are the issues over which value incompatibility plays itself out.

Simon's strategy is not complicated, although it can be a continuous, lifelong journey. Compatible life goals, compatible personal priorities, and a compatible sense of what is really important are keys to successful, long-term relationships. Simon is not saying that these "values" have to be the same. He is only saying that both of you are well-served if they are compatible, can exist comfortably together.

- If your individual life goals can be pursued at the same time, all is well.
- If your individual personal priorities can be pursued at the same time, all is well.
- If your individual sense of what is really important can be respected at the same time, all is well.
- If either of you needs to compromise or set aside your individual life goals, personal priorities, or that individual sense of what is really important, all is not

well.

Just as you need to be on the same page with your moral values, you need to be sure that you are in the same chapter of the same book about life goals, personal priorities, and what is really important. Be value compatible.

Simon says, "Be someone by whom your significant other would want to be judged."

You are known by the company you keep. "So what? I don't care what people think about me." Well, good for you. If that is equally true for your significant other, you can skip this little gem from Simon. But you surely jest. Your commitment to PPS (Proactive Personal Style) lets everyone know you care what people think, at least what some people think. Simon's point is that your significant other cares too.

Within quality, long-term relationships, the opinions and perceptions of other people matter and what they think about each of you makes an important difference. What may be easily overlooked is that people think of the two of you together. Their feelings and judgments about each of you are applied to both of you. For this reason, your reputation is important for you and for your significant other. Simon is saying that, just as you carefully attend to your reputation for your sake, you need to attend to it for your significant other's sake as well.

Great news! You need only keep focus on the PPS basics and strive to do the right things right, the first time, on time, every time. If you do, your reputation will take care of itself and so will the part you play in the reputation of your significant other.

Simon says, "Have compatible expectations."

If you do not expect much, you will not be disappointed. That may be what people have in mind when they talk about meaningless relationships. It would seem to follow that high expectations come with meaningful relationships. You and your significant other each have expectations for the other and for your relationship. The question is, then, "What do you expect and are your expectations compatible?"

It will be useful to take time to consider what you expect from each other. You are only interested here in whether the expectations are compatible. Whether either of you wishes to meet a specific expectation is another discussion. The issue now is whether any of the expectations conflict.

For example, if you expect your significant other to be ready to drop everything and go with you at a moment's notice, there is a potential conflict, especially if you also expect everything

completed on schedule, every time. Neither of you can reasonably expect the other to do the impossible.

There are a lot of potential compatibility problems for each of you with what you expect. Simon's thought here is a little less obvious, though. It is getting at the point where expectations either blend or conflict. For example, if there is an area of responsibility where each of you expects the other person to take care of it, there is a compatibility problem. If you do not agree about how to deal with a problem, compatibility is an issue.

More personally, things like how to communicate and when, how to behave in particular situations, when to consult and when to go ahead on your own, and the like are areas fraught with incompatibility potential. Simon's point is to not assume that your expectations are compatible until you have discussed them. Better safe than sorry. "Check with me first, please," is an old idea well-worth a new look. Compatible expectations are key to successful relationships of any kind and especially to quality, long-term relationships.

Simon says, "See your relationship as your exclusive opportunity and responsibility."

"Relationships are a 50/50 proposition," and "Getting along is a two-way-street," are ideas that go around a lot. You may have heard them once or twice yourself. Well, Simon has heard them too and respectfully disagrees. "Relate the best you know how, every chance you get." You do recall that verse of Simon's theme song, do you not? Well, he is singing it again.

You are and can only be accountable for how you manage your side of your relationship. What's more, your side of the relationship is your exclusive opportunity and responsibility. You and your significant other may share a lot but not this. No one can do it for you; no one can prevent you from doing it.

"I would be different if you were different." Have you ever heard that old excuse for a whiner's less than best effort in a relationship? It takes but a minute's thought to see the logic. "Since you are not the way I think you should be, I am justified in being less than I am capable of being."

Interestingly, the reverse logic is sometimes used as a compliment of sorts. "You bring out the best in me." Give this reasoning another minute's thought and you will see the apparent point. "Although I usually don't give things my best shot, being around you causes me to behave abnormally. I am at my best only when I am with you." Well, how can you proactively respond to a pronouncement like that?

Perhaps your only appropriate option is to say, "That's a real shame. I didn't know that you are so fundamentally incompetent. My ability to compensate for your inadequacies even

surprises me. You certainly disguise them quite well; but of course, I only see you when I am there to prop you up."

Yes, you are right. Simon is just having a little fun with you. Relationships really can bog you down to the point where being at your best may not seem worth the effort it takes. The same is true for some people. They push on the edge of tolerance and it is hard to control the urge to behave as inappropriately as they do; but just because someone acts like the trailing end of a fast-moving horse, you are not justified in responding in kind.

If Simon can be permitted to sing his song one more time without being accused of being a broken record, "Do the right things right, the first time, on time, every time." That is your exclusive opportunity and responsibility. It applies to every thing you do, including your long-term relationship. Your significant other can appropriately expect no more; you will give no less.

Simon says, "Do not make demands of your significant other or set one-sided conditions on your relationship."

Simon is at it again. He makes it nearly impossible to resist sharing an old saying or two. "It's my way or the highway." "Do it or else." Oh well, the temptation is just too much. "If you don't, you'll be sorry." "You are going to get exactly what you deserve." Maybe Simon should have just cut to the chase with, "Don't threaten." After all, making threats is what demands and one-sided conditions really are.

"But Simon," you ask, "What about give-and-take, compromise, and negotiation? Don't those interpersonal strategies have their places in quality, long-term relationships?"

Simon certainly did not just come into town on a load of logs. He has been there too. Long-term relationships that really are a quality experience for both people are based on creative give-and-take, compromise, and negotiation. The people in the relationship have, in fact, carefully perfected their use of all three. Their skills with these essential strategies are, in part, why their relationship has survived long-term.

Here is another way of thinking about Simon's point. You want your relationship and your significant other to continue as important ingredients in your life. You value the person and your relationship. Suppose your demand or one-sided condition is met. That causes a change in the relationship, even if slight. It also changes how you are perceived. Your relationship is now, to some extent, more one-sided. Even more importantly, you are less equal than before. The two of you are also now less close than prior to your having your demand or one-sided condition met. As you see, demands and one-sided conditions are destructive and chip away at your relationship. What you want to strengthen is weakened.

There is a hidden conclusion here. You, of course, should not make demands or set one-sided conditions. That is clear. You also should not capitulate to demands or go along with one-sided conditions either. The damage to your relationship is the same no matter which of you caves-in. Simply say, "I won't go along with your demand or condition, even though I may be tempted. I won't do that kind of damage to our relationship. What's more, I sincerely hope you won't either."

Simon says, "Be dependable and keep your commitments."

On the face of it, Simon's point here seems like another one of those no-brainers. "Be as good as your word." "Do what you say you will do." Certainly, loyalty is also part of the package as is faithfulness, to the extent that promises have been made. It would seem that this is simply a further example of predictability, "You can count on me."

For Simon, though, dependability and keeping commitments go beyond these types of usual, "the way you deal with everyone" behavior. Within long-term relationships, they have a more intimate dimension. They are an important ingredient in the tie that binds, are part of what makes the relationship special.

- You are there for each other when either of you needs support, encouragement, or someone to scratch the itch, so to speak.
- You are truly interested in and want to know about each other's activities, thoughts, and personal issues.
- You are happy and excited when things go well for either of you and feel badly when they do not.
- You share in each other's lives and are available, good times, bad times, and all.

This level of dependability is what Simon has in mind; and understanding that it represents your personal commitment to each other is your individual challenge and shared opportunity.

Simon says, "Do not become competitive."

How might you and your significant other become competitive? Actually, it is much more subtle than you might think. Even less obviously, you may not see it as competition and might deny that you are competing, if asked.

Do you recall, "Relationships are a 50/50 proposition?" Well, therein lies the source of most of the competition Simon has in mind. If relationships are supposed to be 50/50, then it is

reasonable to rate yourself and each other. Who is ahead or behind?

- "I do all of the work and you spend your time laying around."
- "I'm getting tired of doing my work and yours too."
- "I'm there for you but you are never around when I need you."
- "I hold up my end of things but you just do whatever you feel like doing."

Do you see the pattern? "I am doing fine and you are screwing up." Although this is most always the pattern, it can work the other way. "I know that you are getting the short end of things but. . . ." Either way, the race is on, you and your significant other have become competitive.

The first order of business for you is to do today's business today, every day. Whether your significant other is or is not doing likewise is not the issue here. For you, your relationship needs to be a 100%/100% proposition. The only course you have, your only responsibility is to be sure that you are doing your 100%. If both of you use the same approach, all is well. If not, it is time to re-negotiate.

Of course, you do not start with, "This is unfair. I am getting fed up with your not doing your share." You also do not open with, "If you are not going to do your stuff, I'm going to stop doing mine." It is not a fairness issue nor is it a time to start threatening. It is, however, definitely time to sit down and reconsider the distribution of responsibilities.

Sure, there may come a time when you want to do a cost/benefit analysis of your staying in the relationship; but it is not yet time to put that old dog in the truck and take it on down-the-road. To totally mix the metaphor, it is time for some serious horse-trading.

- Start with your list of activities and services that you think need to be handled but are not. You each will likely have your individual list.
- Eliminate everything where you disagree. If you do not both think it is important, then the one who does will have to take care of it.
- Next, eliminate everything where "We agree that it is important but disagree about whose responsibility it should be." Those are the disputed points.
- You are left with those things that are important and you agree about whose business it is. For those, it is a matter of each of you doing today's business today, every day. If either of you will not or cannot do that, you have a quite different problem that needs your immediate attention.

For those remaining disputed points, you horse-trade, understanding that there will usually

be a few disputed points that are a continuing source of discussion and tension in your relationship. The key is in seeing that it is not a matter of competition, who is doing more and who is doing less. It is simply an opportunity to creatively resolve the disagreement you are having.

Simon says, "Have faith."

"I think you are fine just the way you are, trust you with that which is mine, and believe that you give everything you do your best effort." There you go, "faith" in a nutshell. Are you honestly able to say that to your significant other? If so, you have faith. If not, there may be a problem.

"You are fine just the way you are." If you can say this, you have put the first building block of faith into place. Each of you undoubtedly sees areas where you could personally improve, things you could do better. You certainly believe in continuous improvement. The key is that you each apply it to yourself but not to each other. Your relationship is not about judging or criticizing. It is about respect, trust, and mutual acceptance. You are not into changing each other, although each can expect the other's support if the individual chooses to change.

"I trust you with that which is mine." You have put the second building block into place. It includes material things but also holds things that are more personal. You have much of real value on this block. It holds your feelings, a piece of who you are and who you want to be, a part of your life that you cannot recover if it is lost. You have entrusted these intangibles freely and without reservation. You have committed an act of faith and expect nothing in return beyond having your faith reciprocated.

"You give everything you do your best effort." The third building block of faith may be the most important, since the first two depend on it. Would you say, "You are fine just the way you are," and "I trust you with that which is mine," if you knew that you were not going to get "best effort?" Not on your life, especially since your life is partially what is at risk.

Simon's point is simple. Faith is built from acceptance and trust but rests on believing that each of you is getting the best the other has to offer, every day, in every way. Sensitive Simon will not sing his theme song for you here; but please feel free to hum a verse or two should you have the urge.

Simon says, "Talk and share."

Have you ever played Twenty Questions? Someone is thinking of something. There usually is a category or some other limitation; but you need to guess what the person has in mind. You can ask up to twenty questions that can be answered "Yes," or "No." If you figure it out, you

win. If not, the other person gives you the answer and is the winner.

Imagine how it would be to play this game if you had no idea what the category was. Now imagine how you would feel if, after your twenty questions, you were never told the answer. Do you think that you would keep playing? It is doubtful.

Relationships where one or both people do not talk and share are like the Twenty Question game. At first, whoever is most socially inclined asks the questions. The answers are non-responsive and vague. There is just not much useful feedback. Maybe sooner and maybe later, the twenty questions decrease to fifteen. The game is too frustrating and is getting boring. Fifteen decreases to ten and then to five. It is really exasperating and not worth the effort. Besides, who cares anyway? Five becomes four and the game fizzles out. No one is talking and sharing and no one cares.

Even without talking and sharing, you both continue your lives, are growing and changing. You each are having new experiences, are having new thoughts, see things differently, and are becoming different people. If this continues long enough, neither of you knows the other anymore.

What about your relationship? There is no relationship to be concerned about. You may still be going through the motions; but what you had together is gone. Perhaps you can have a renewed relationship eventually; but not any time soon. You would have to start building it all over again, if there is any interest or motivation for that sort of thing.

Simon's advice is simple. Talk and Share. Do it for each other, do it for today. Also, do it for tomorrow, unless you just like starting things over again. Whatever your choice, understand the cost of your silence.

Simon says, "Encourage involvement with each other's activities and friends."

"We each do our own thing." Well, good for you. If you just concentrate on that approach, you will eventually not be doing anything with each other. In fact, it will not take all that much concentration. It will just happen and neither of you will have a clue why. "We used to do so much together. It is a really busy life. There isn't much time left for us anymore. You know how it goes."

If things have gotten to where either of you are putting your relationship and "You know how it goes," together in the same breath, it has likely already gone. You may understand "how it goes" but exactly where and when it went may be harder to fathom.

Oh well, you could always fall back on, "We've just drifted apart."

That would be easier than, "At first, we did a lot together, had mutual friends, and enjoyed shared activities. It's a good news/bad news situation; but we each met new people, developed our own friendships, and got involved in different activities. We gradually spent less time together and more time with other people and our new commitments. Neither of us gave much thought to what was happening with us. By the time we did, there wasn't much 'us' left. We should have seen it coming but didn't. We simply woke up one day and 'us' was gone."

This probably has something to do with cows and barn doors and with commitment and priorities as well. From Simon's perspective, though, it mostly has to do with active vs. proactive. Within any long-term relationship, both people have responsibilities and interests beyond each other. Those can be very demanding and perhaps even seductive. Whatever the attraction, it competes with their relationship.

Especially if you are active and involved people, being proactive is the necessary ounce of prevention. Know that you can drift apart if you do not proactively counteract the natural course of social and business events.

How do you do this? You involve each other with your friends and activities. No, that does not mean that you need to do everything together. Actually, Simon would suggest that you avoid doing that. You certainly can get too much of a good thing; but you also can get too little. Some regularly shared time being involved with each other's lives outside of your relationship is Simon's secret prescription for preventing the "we drifted apart," condition. If you need additional incentive, Simon can absolutely assure you that the condition is unequivocally easier to prevent than to cure. Even better, the medicine is smooth and full-flavored going down and the results can be most gratifying.

Simon says, "Value, understand, support, and encourage your significant other."

"A major part of my attraction to you is your valuing who I am, my interests, and my priorities. You understand my needs, goals, and what I want for me. Beyond this, you support and encourage those activities and involvements I value outside of our relationship."

That Simon. He does have a way of putting complex ideas into compact packages. "Value who I am, my interests, and my priorities." Is this a message worth sending to your significant other? Sure it is; and Simon's suggestion is simple. "Value before asking to be valued." There you go. It is another version of one of the PPS basics. "Concentrate more on being a better lover than on being loved better." Your job is to value your significant other. Whether you are valued depends on how attractive you are. How well you do your job of valuing is, for what it is worth, an important dimension of your attractiveness.

Do you get it? Undoubtedly you do. You are only responsible for your side of your relationship. You are committed to PPS and relate the best you can, whenever you can. Just as you apply the principle to valuing, you also apply it to understanding, supporting, and encouraging; but there is an old myth that Simon needs to debunk here and now.

The notion of "unconditional love" is nonsense. It does not exist between parent and child, lover and beloved, nor between friends. Love certainly can survive a lot of abuse and even more neglect; but love has its limits. People may still go through the motions for duty or from habit. They may even continue to call it love; but love it is not. Whatever the emotion has become, it is but a figment of that which they first called love. Perhaps it is merely the memory of love passing itself off as the genuine article.

Simon's point is simple. Valuing, understanding, supporting, and encouraging can survive less abuse and neglect than can love. They are among the first attachment behavior to go when your relationship is going down the tube. As with other things in your relationship, the ounce of prevention is much easier and much more certain than any amount or kind of cure. Value, understand, support, and encourage. Do it for your significant other; do it for you.

Simon says, "Be open to your significant other's feelings, point of view, and opinions."

"Listen and learn." Now, where did you hear that before? Is your old friend Simon repeating himself? Go figure. It is beginning to seem like there are only a few principles that you need to adopt to be a fully competent participant in a long-term relationship. Could it be that you only need to do the right things right, the first time, on time, every time?

Congratulations! You have got it; and "Listen and learn," is certainly one of those right things to do. The key is knowing how and when to listen and then understanding what you need to learn.

If this is not always easy for you, it may help to know that:

- Some people have a high Cognitive Quotient (CQ). They catch on unusually quickly to opinions and concepts.
- Others have a high Social Quotient (SQ). They are extraordinarily quick to see perspective and point of view.
- Others have a high Emotional Quotient (EQ). They have an uncommon ability to accurately interpret the feelings and inner experiences of others.

Keeping in mind that none of the quotients has anything to do with intelligence, most

everyone is high on one quotient, some on two, but few are high on all three. Your first step is to honestly admit to yourself which of the three is your highest quotient and, with equal candor, which is your lowest. That is where increasing your Listening/Learning Quotient (LLQ) starts.

Start with your lowest quotient:

- If your CQ is lowest, you can easily miss the point, not really understand your significant other's opinion. You might even fail to see that there is anything important to be understood.
- If your SQ is lowest, you can easily overlook the fact that your significant other's perspective or point of view is different than yours. For you, everyone sees everything as you do, from your perspective.
- If your EQ is lowest, you can be unaware that there are any feelings or emotions to consider. Your significant other may "act" upset; but you do not have any idea why or how bad it truly is.

Simon's point is that, no matter how receptive you think you are, there is always at least one of the three areas where you probably do not have a clue. Call this your interpersonal blind spot.

Now, honestly focus on your highest quotient. Call this your interpersonal antenna. The hidden point is that this is your nemesis. Most people think that their interpersonal blind spot is the source of their relationship difficulties. To the contrary, their "communication problems" usually have to do more with the receptive strength of their interpersonal antenna. It picks up such strong signals that other signals do not stand a chance.

For example:

- If your CQ is highest, those signals overpower emotions and point of view.
- If your EQ is highest, those signals are so strong that opinions and perspective are obliterated.
- If your SQ is highest, you are so concerned about how others see you that you push away feelings and important thoughts.

If you choose to follow Simon's guidance, being open to your significant other's feelings, point of view, and opinions is important to you. You now also know that you have a blind spot with at least one of the three (CQ, EQ, SQ); but it is your interpersonal antenna that is the source of the problem. Knowing this, you need to turn down your antenna.

If your CQ is highest, coach yourself to silently say three times,

- "The ideas and opinions here are not as important as I think they are. Feelings and point of view are more important than they appear to me."

If your SQ is highest, silently say three times,

- "Seeing everyone's point of view and perspective is less important than I think. Feelings and what people think are more critical than they seem to me."

If your EQ is highest, silently say three times,

- "This is not nearly so much of a feeling thing as it seems to me. What people think and where they are coming from need higher priority than I am giving them."

Simon's point is this. If you want to be open to your significant other, listen and learn to turn down your interpersonal antenna. How low should it go? Low enough that the other two interpersonal areas are coming through as loud and clear as the one your antenna prefers. Keep tuning until you have the signals into harmonious balance. Your significant other will gladly let you know when you get it right.

Simon says, "Be patient and gentle."

From the PPS basics, you will recall the importance of not letting people mess with your monkey, taking care of yourself since no one else is going to do it for you, and being assertive with people. These certainly do not sound much like patient and gentle behavior; and they sometimes are not. Does Simon think that your relationship with your significant other is an exception to these PPS principles? Well, not exactly but sort of, in a way, at times.

"Come on Simon," you say. "Either it is or it isn't."

That's the way to call the question. You are cutting straight to the point. You are not about to let Simon get away with that kind of fence sitting.

Thank you for being so clear about your impression and perspective. It likely seems that Simon is talking out of both sides of his mouth. "Be assertive and hold people accountable," vs. "Be gentle and patient."

It would appear that way until you see that Simon is suggesting that you do both, concurrently. The strategy assuredly applies to your significant other but is one you can also use with everyone, every time. Simon's point is to take extra care to use it consistently within your relationship with your significant other.

Being patient means that you do not push, do not demand, do not rush, do not behave as if your patience is quickly being exhausted. You do not yell, get noticeably upset, or pout and withdraw. When you feel your patience slipping, you make an extra effort to stay calm and positive, to be helpful, and to avoid critical comments and behavior. Here is the key. With your significant other, you simply assume that you are getting "best effort," given the situation and circumstances. Since you are getting "best effort," your impatience is not justified and is, in fact, unreasonable.

Now for being gentle. Seeing that your impatience is a product of your being unreasonable, being gentle will come much easier. You certainly want to be assertive, want to have things happen more timely, and want to get responses more consistent with your expectations. The difference now is that the problem is not someone's fault and most certainly is not your significant other's fault.

You can firmly discuss how it looks from your perspective and consider what you can do to make it easier and more appealing for your significant other to meet your expectations. Through the discussion, you may also decide to modify your expectations to be more consistent with what your significant other wants and needs. Whatever the outcome, it is a gentle, working things out together kind of thing, free from blame and finger pointing.

Simon says, "Be very specific when criticizing or saying anything negative."

This point goes with being patient and gentle. You understand that your impatience is usually unreasonable and that being gentle is an important aspect of your PPS commitment; but there are those times when criticizing or offering a negative comment is both appropriate and necessary.

A combination strategy works well when criticizing or making negative comments to your significant other. Using it starts with being clear about what you want to say and equally clear about what you want the outcome to be.

- If you want a hostile, angry reaction, say what you have to say sharply and without any thought or consideration. Just blurt it out.
- If you want silence and a closed off reaction, just say what is on your mind, whenever the thought pops up, however it comes out.
- If you do not care what the reaction is, it does not matter what you say, when you say it, or where you are when it comes rushing out.
- If you do not care what your significant other thinks or feels about you and what

you say, just let it all hang out and spew forth.

Simon knows you a little better than that, though. You do care what your significant other thinks and feels. You care as well about what kind of reaction you get. The challenge is remembering that you do care when you are frustrated, feeling negative, or overwhelmed with the urge to criticize. At those times, the impulse to let go with whatever thought is there is hard to control and good alternatives are harder to see.

Retrieve Simon's earlier comments about self-discipline. The need to be attentive and self-disciplined applies here as well. With criticism and negative comments, the second step is to exercise the self-discipline to censor what comes out of your mouth. Actually, there is a step that needs to precede censorship. You need to stop long enough to think about what you are going to say before you need to censor it. Just as "listen and learn" requires that you listen before you learn, "think and talk" means that you should think about what you are going to say before you say it. It takes attention and self-discipline to listen and learn and even more to think and talk, especially when you are about to be negative or critical.

You have all of the interpersonal tools you need when you are tempted to be negative or critical:

- Listen and learn. Be sure you understand the situation before proceeding.
- Be self-disciplined and attentive with your feelings, thoughts, and reactions. Evaluate what you want the outcome to be. What do you hope will happen?
- Think and talk. Understand what you want to say and what outcome you want before saying whatever you choose to say.
- Be specific. Do not say more than you want to say or less than you need to say. It will help if you are careful only to comment on the immediate situation or circumstance. You are headed down the wrong track if you bring up things from the past or let your focus drift to other issues. Stick to your point.
- Be patient and gentle as you say what you have to say and especially as you receive whatever reaction or feedback you get. This is the time to go back to the "listen and learn" step and apply the steps in the strategy, with special attention to "think and talk."

Simon says, "Accept and deal constructively with the ups-and-downs in your relationship."

Have you ever been on a roll, experienced those times when everything comes up aces? It

is likely safe to say that you had little trouble accepting and dealing constructively with the good times. Long-term relationships have those "ups" too and they are equally easy to handle. In the ups-and-downs world of relationships, though, there is a most challenging aspect: the down times, times when there is conflict, times when things are not going well. Were it not for this tiny glitch, having a quality long-term relationship would be so simple that everyone could manage it on a problem-free basis, every time.

It is true too that this tiny glitch would not be there if you and your significant other would just stop growing and changing, if things always worked out as expected, and if the big world would only settle down and behave itself. Therein lies the problem. People and circumstances keep changing and that screws things up. Granted, sameness would soon get rather boring but it would have its up-side. You would not have all those problems to deal with and the ups-and-downs would be a meaningless concept.

Alas, change is here to stay. You and your significant other will have to just continue working on those problems that keep coming up from time-to-time. It does look like Simon could have a better strategy for you here but he does not. If you ignore the problems and issues that come up now and then, they will worsen and eventually force you to deal with them. Should you choose to walk away, that will not eliminate the difficulty either. The problems will follow you; and if they do not, you will run into new ones that may be more exasperating than the ones you left behind.

It is worth knowing that people tend to manage most problems quite well, all things considered. Even if they are not able to achieve a positive resolution, they accept the situation and go on. The exception is when nagging problems lead to tension and conflict. Simon's advice is neither miraculous nor surprising. "Hang-in there when there is tension and conflict in your relationship." Hang-in patiently and gently, listen and learn, think and talk, be attentive and self-disciplined, and do not forget that you really are getting "best effort."

Simon says, "Proactively manage those times when your significant other is upset or in a bad mood."

During the best of times, life's seas are smooth and picture-perfect blue to the horizon. This special blue is sometimes calm and dark and at other times sparkling and full of energy. Either way and through all the various shades of blue that lay between the extremes, life is easy and happiness abounds. Think of these as your "blue flag" times.

There are also red flag, yellow flag, and black flag times for you and for your significant other. The red flag is for frustration and anger. The yellow flag is for stress and apprehension. The black flag is for depression and feeling bummed-out. As you listen and learn, your task is to identify which flag is flying, understanding that the flag can change quickly and with little to no notice. More specifically, you need to know which flag you are flying before you are ready to

detect your significant other's flag.

Assuming that you know which flag you have out, your first task is to keep your flag under control. If you are flying your red flag, your responsibility is to contain your anger and frustration so it does not spill onto your significant other. Do not take it out on anyone else.

If your yellow flag is out, your responsibility is to share your feelings with your significant other, knowing that you may not know exactly why you are so up-tight. Importantly, do not play twenty questions, even if your significant other tries to play. Say, "I really do not know why I'm so upset. It will help more if you just let me talk and try to be patient. This will pass." Of course, if you do know why, talk specifically about that.

If your black flag is up, talk, even though that may be the last thing you want to do. Withdrawing or going off by yourself only makes things worse. You would be pushing your significant other away and reducing your emotional resources. As surprising as it may be, you will find that your underlying issue is anger and frustration. Your black flag is a red flag in disguise. The goal is to responsibly let the anger and frustration out where you and your significant other can deal with it together. The two of you can handle it much better than you can by yourself.

If you are a responsible manager of your flags, you are ready to constructively deal with your significant other's flags. If the flag is red, do not react with anger and frustration of your own. A medium blue flag is needed. You need to stay calm and open to whatever is being said. Your main task is to let the anger subside; and it will. Once your significant other is a little calmer and more settled, you can discuss the issues. Just take care not to give much importance to whatever was said in anger or out of frustration. It is usually not true that those were the real feelings. What you hear when things are calmer are the real feelings. Do not lose that perspective.

If your significant other's flag is yellow, see that the feelings of stress and apprehension are very uncomfortable and may even be painful. You are seeing a person who is hurting. If you keep that perspective, it will likely be easy to respond appropriately. A light shade of blue is needed, one with energy and compassion. As you actively listen, you can deepen your blue flag, slowing down and calming down as you talk. Your significant other needs held, emotionally and perhaps physically. Certainly, you are just the right person for the job.

If you are seeing a black flag, beware. Recall that it is a red flag in disguise. There is intense anger and frustration there; and it can spontaneously blow in any direction and onto anyone, including your significant other. When such angry feelings are turned in, suicide, among other things, is a potential outcome. Your response needs to be dark blue, with your emphasis on listening and learning. Just being there may be all you can do. Trying to push your significant other to talk is not the way to go. Be there and ready to talk, though.

Flag management rests on managing your personal flags. It then mostly has to do with responding to your significant other's flags in caring and concerned shades of blue, avoiding raising red or yellow flags of your own. As Simon puts it, "Listen to me, hug me, be there for me,

and don't get too bent out of shape just because I do. If you will do that for me, I will give you my 'best effort' to keep my blue flag flying for you."

Simon says, "Snap back from disappointments or when things do not go your way."

Sure, this point goes with the last one about flag management. Whatever flag you wave when you are disappointed or do not get your way, Simon is rather certain that it is not blue. If you are like most people, it is usually red but might tend toward the black. Should yours happen to be blue at times like that, it is possible that you are out of touch or just do not get it. Some pouting or maybe even a very little temper tantrum are understandable even if such behavior is slightly childish. Letting the small child who lives within you out once in a while is okay. The only requirement is that you do not let your inner child get out of hand.

Okay, you have expressed your disappointment and your significant other now knows how you feel about not getting your way. If you have expressed yourself responsibly and the childish side of you did not get carried away, there is likely no harm done. Just do not press your luck. It is now time to carefully and conscientiously listen and learn. Your good friend Simon says, "Get over it."

Simon says, "Always give your significant other the benefit of the doubt."

There is a bottom-line issue here that is not negotiable. You and your significant other do not blame each other or accuse each other of things you did not do.

"Simon," you say, "I'm shocked. I cannot believe that you might think that I would ever blame my significant other or make accusations without solid reasons for saying what I say."

Well, that is certainly true. Simon never thought you would. Nonetheless, you may not yet get the point. You do not blame or accuse, solid reasons or not. You simply do not do it.

If you know something to be a fact, it is reasonable to tell your significant other exactly what you know and how you know it is true; but you only have your perspective. You do recall SQ (Social Quotient) do you not. When you are about to blame or accuse, you can be reasonably sure that your emotional antenna is turned up abnormally high. It is up so high that even you are reacting to the noise. That is a big part of why you are upset. You think it is because of what you think you know; but your EQ (Emotional Quotient) is playing a major role.

Simon's advice should seem like familiar stuff by now. Turn down your emotional antenna. Now be sure that your cognitive antenna is also turned down. You want the signal from your

social antenna to come through loud and clear. If what you hear needs some thought and feeling work, you can do that later. For now, you want to clearly hear how the events and circumstances look from your significant other's point of view.

When you have your antennae in proper balance, remind yourself to think and talk. Calmly tell your significant other what you think may be true. This may be something fairly minor or potentially very significant. Either way, the approach is the same.

- Be specific.
- Be as factual as you can.
- Calmly share your tentative conclusion.
- Stop talking and wait for a response.
- Listen and learn.

If your significant other believes that the facts are right as you presented them and agrees that your conclusion is correct and justified, the two of you can then discuss the implications of this "fact." If instead, there is a different view of the facts or an alternative conclusion offered, it is time for "faith" to kick-in.

Your significant other sees the situation or circumstances from another perspective. From that vantage, the facts and the conclusion are contrary to what you know or think you know. The question is, "Which perspective is correct?" Yes, the issue has changed. It now focuses on who had the best point of view. Since your significant other was personally in the picture and you were not, the benefit of the doubt clearly goes to your significant other. Actually, it turns out to be another one of those no-brainers.

It is true. Simon did try to lead you down the rosy path just a little. These kinds of conflicts and disagreements are seldom so simple. Nonetheless, the point stays unchanged. Your significant other deserves the benefit of the doubt. That is a small thing for someone who is just as committed to the relationship as you are, for someone from whom you always get "best effort." Simon is tempted to sing a verse of his theme song but will let the point go with, "Giving the benefit of the doubt is the right thing to do."

Simon says, "Take the first step to make things better or to improve things within your relationship."

Have you ever been at a football game and seen a ball skillfully thrown far down the field? Two receivers go toward the ball about to catch the perfect pass. Suppose that they both hold

back, assuming that the other will get this one. After the play, they each tell the coach, "It wasn't my turn. I got the last one. I'm getting tired of always being the one to go after the ball." What do you think the coach will have to say about that? Is it safe to figure that, among his other comments, there will be one about taking turns having nothing to do with it? He will likely also make the point that each play stands on its own. He might even point out that it matters not how the ball got there either. It was there and both players had a responsibility to work together to be sure that the ball was caught.

Simon's final point about long-term relationships is no more complicated than this.

- "Once the ball drops, it no longer matters whose fault it was or whose turn it was."

If you can take the first step to improve things or to make things better in your relationship, take it. It's the right thing to do.