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5 keys to a successful relationship

Despite my... let's call them varied experiences with dating, I have never had a conversation with my exes like the one I had with my girlfriend last night. At the beginning of said conversation, Xo (my boo) very pragmatically said to me, "I'm not impressed."Ironically, a few days ago my mother texted me, "Not everybody is going to be honest with you, but you can count on me!" after I sent her a selfie to convince her that everybody liked my hair but her.The Universe must be trying to keep me humble.Xo and I talked for hours about the importance of being honest with each other about our intentions and desires within our relationship—about observing (and ending) our own patterns of compromising our needs on behalf of the people we love. We talked about what it means to "do the work" a successful relationship requires and how much energy we're willing to commit to that work. We talked about navigating each other's learning curves without sacrificing our own journey. (Spoiler alert: I'm the one with the learning curve.) Needless to say, this conversation wasn't easy. Despite how uncomfortable it was for me (read: my ego) to hear all the ways that I had failed the person I love, doing so felt radical.I realized that in all of my past relationships, we only had conversations about the relationship itself when there was tension. We only gave each other critical feedback when we were unhappy. We never talked about "us" unless "we" had a problem.Don't get me wrong, my exes and I talked about our futures together to the extent that human beings follow the impulse to indulge the theater of our lives, but weren't having intentional, thoughtful, critical, transparent, difficult conversations unless there was an obvious reason to do so.Xo made it clear that she wasn't bringing these things up as reasons to end our relationship, but because she sees our relationship like a house — an ongoing project that requires our constant and sometimes tedious attention.She said there are certain things we can do to keep our house clean — to reduce mess, clutter, and chaos. There are things we can do, like repairs and renovations, to help the house appreciate in value over time. There are things we can do to adorn our house — burn incense, put up artwork, grow plants — to make it beautiful. Things we can do to make our shared space more joyful to occupy.You know when you look back on all your failed relationships — on however many months or years of your life spent you spent with your ex — and ask yourself, "What was I thinking?" This conversation with Xo made me ask that very question, and then shortly thereafter realize the truth: I wasn't.My past relationships didn't appear dysfunctional when I was in them because I wasn't thinking about them. I don't mean to say that I never considered the status and nature of my relationships, but that I wasn't thinking critically about them as as creative, collaborative projects with a shared vision whose likelihood of success (and/or failure) depended largely on intentional, mutual, and critical analysis between me and my partner.You know?As a person who prides myself on my capacity to #staywoke, it is particularly painful to accept that I have a very consistent pattern of exiting my consciousness within intimate relationships.How had I allowed myself to become so complacent?When had I gotten so content to sit back and let my relationships happen?Where had this pattern begun?The Problem With #RelationshipGoalsGrowing up, I had very few models of successful real relationships. My idea of #RelationshipGoals came from Disney movies and TV sitcoms. It was hard — dare I say impossible —not to buy into the cultural myth that a woman's greatest accomplishment in life was getting a man to love her.I understand it is dangerous to make sweeping statements about gender, and as a cisgendered woman I certainly don't wish to erase the reality of gender as a vast and complex spectrum, but it occurs to me that so much of what I have learned about how to be in a relationship is a reflection of what I have learned about how to be a woman.Girls, femmes, and women are taught from a young age to accommodate the male ego. We are taught to avoid anything that might not allow a "man" to feel like a man. "Let your man be the man," we're advised. "Boys will be boys," they say.We are taught not to be too critical of men, lest we embarrass them, or worse, make them look incapable. We are raised to believe that one of the greatest crimes we can commit is to emasculate a man. We are taught not to pursue men, but to allow ourselves to be pursued. We are told not to be "too picky," told to be grateful when a man is generous enough to put up with us, told we should do whatever it takes to keep him by our side.The toxic and oppressive lessons that I had internalized about how to exist within heteronormative relationships had crept into my relationship with Xo without me even realizing it.I had become content to ride quietly in the back seat of my relationships because it never occurred to me that I could be the driver. I had become content with being a passenger on my own journey, even when I knew the car was going the wrong way. I didn't think about where my relationships were going until they had gone past the place I wanted to go. I didn't think about my relationships until I felt like I had no other choice but to exit them quickly.In hindsight, it's clear to me that in a subconscious effort to maintain my autonomy, I kept my relationships at arms length — peripheral (at worst) and parallel (at best) to my own life. They became isolated entities — floating islands right off the coast of the rest of my lived experience. I had allowed myself to be passive within them. I wasn't consciously looking at them as endeavors whose outcomes were within my control.I rarely gave myself permission to name my wants and needs within these relationships. Instead, I allowed my desires to become fantasies — visions that I was content to simply play over and over in my mind and never actually pursue.In other words: I tried to make my relationships work by pretending that nothing was wrong with them.Putting in the WorkBeing honest when you aren't satisfied with someone you love might be a hard pill for both of you to swallow, but it's good and necessary medicine. It might seem romanceless to schedule sit-downs with your lover to point out all the varied ways that you "aren't impressed" with each other, but that's the work.20 Bad Habits That Could Hurt Your RelationshipsSuccessful relationships (platonic, romantic, hetero, queer, or otherwise) are all partnerships — people working together on a project called us. They require you to identify the things you want and need, to listen to what the other person wants and needs, to see where there's overlap, be honest about when there's not, and then adjust accordingly.They require conversations that demand you pull up two chairs to the table, one for yourself, and one for your ego. Saying the difficult things might not always be pleasant, but it will always be worth it. Your house will either appreciate in value or you'll know (sooner than later) that you need to move out.And who knows. You might be able to make a home you can live in forever. You might be able to build yourself a mansion.This post originally appeared on JamilaReddy.com and was republished with the author's permission. Follow Jamila on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. It goes without saying that you can't be successful if you don't do anything, but blogger Charlie Hoehn details how important failing and trying new things—even if it doesn't fit any set path—is to success.Photo by Nima Badiiey.I've failed more times than I can remember. I've tried starting up several businesses, tried patenting inventions, tried starting up online communities, tried building several websites, tried to win contests... and failed almost every single time. But I never chalked any of them up as failures in my head, because I learned so much in the process each time.And therein lies the best career advice I could possibly dispense: just DO things. Chase after the things that interest you and make you happy. Stop acting like you have a set path, because you don't. No one does. You shouldn't be trying to check off the boxes of life; they aren't real and they were created by other people, not you.This line of thought is reminiscent of Ze Frank's great brain crack video, so if you need a little motivation to execute one of your half-baked ideas, we'd recommend giving it a watch, too. Feel the same as Hoehn? Disagree? Share your sage advice on the subject in the comments. Ze Frank knows steady output, and the iconic video blogger knows why we put off acting on our... Read moreThoughts on tour [Charlie Hoehn via Kotike, Simple Dollar] Medically reviewed by Scientific Advisory Board — Written by Ahmed Raza on November 14, 2015Love is undoubtedly the most important aspect of any relationship, but it is not enough by itself. To become trusted and loving partners for life, both of you have to put in considerable time and effort. Below are some tips that can get you started.Relationships come with ups and downs. Don't expect to be happy all the time. Be open to disappointments, too, and use them as an opportunity to know your partner better. This is particularly relevant for long-distance relationships, as lack of physical presence increases friction. A positive attitude during such difficult times leads to happier relationships.Understand, accept and appreciate. Make sure you put in the time and effort to understand your partner. Know what the other person likes to do, and also keep in mind that preferences and priorities change. Accept your partner the way he or she is, and appreciate their actions. According to David Richo, the author of How to Be an Adult in a Relationship: the Five Keys to Mindful Loving, the two essential ingredients for a loving relationship are acceptance and appreciation. He says, "We do not tell a birch tree to look like an elm. We face it with no agenda, only appreciation." Relationships work the same way. In a true relationship, mindfully and non-intrusively accept your partner with all of his or her positive and negative qualities.It is "we," not "you" or "I." When you refer to you and your partner as "we", you are subconsciously considering both of you to be a single entity. This simple word enhances bonding and trust in a big way - even if your partner is not physically around. In fact, a study conducted by the University of California, Berkeley shows that couples who used the word "we" tend to be calmer, happier and more satisfied with their relationship when compared to those who use "you" or "I."Gratitude helps. When you start feeling grateful for the things that your partner says and does, your relationship is sure to blossom. Research shows that gratitude reduces feelings of hate and pain as you tend to focus only on the positive side of your partner. In a study conducted by Rita Watson of Yale University, 77 heterosexual couples were asked to follow a three-day gratitude plan, and at the end of it, they felt more vitalized and positive about their partner. Such positive feelings go a long way in maintaining relationships.Explore new avenues. Problems start creeping into relationships when one or both get bored of the routine. To invigorate your relationship, explore new places, try new activities together, laugh with each other, do something ridiculous or do just about anything together that makes both of you happy. Such actions create a sense of excitement that you and your partner will look forward to.Exhibit physical affection. Get physical with your partner, such as kissing, holding hands, scratching the back or giving a hug, just to let your partner know that you love and care about them. A study by Arizona State University shows that such physical affection increases the feel-good hormones, improves mood and releases stress. If you are in a long-distance relationship, call frequently and let the other person know that you are thinking of him or her.Provide support. No human being is perfect! When your partner makes mistakes or is going through a hard time at work, show your physical and emotional support. Talk to your partner, give compliments often, listen when he or she is upset and help with work if you can. At the same time, don't get too bossy and overbearing.Create milestones together. When you and your partner work toward the same cause, you are more likely to focus on each other's positive side. Set common goals such as saving toward a vacation, your children's college funds or anything else that is meaningful to both of you. Working harmoniously toward such goals can further strengthen your relationship.Fulfill your obligations. Relationships come with obligations. Be aware of them, and fulfill them to make your partner happy. At the same time, ensure that you're not sacrificing your private space; you have to be happy, too. If you're not comfortable with doing some things, talk about it with your partner.Communicate. Human beings are social animals, and communication is an innate need. Talk, text and message each other frequently to build a strong relationship. Be a good listener too, when your partner wants to share his or her day with you.In short, strong relationships do not just happen. Rather, you have to build them with love, passion, understanding, tolerance, acceptance and appreciation. Start today to become loving partners for life!Happy couple photo available from Shutterstock Last medically reviewed on November 14, 2015 All strong relationships have three things in common, according to Meredith Hansen, Psy.D, a psychologist and relationship expert: trust, commitment and vulnerability. "Trust allows a couple to know that their partner is there for them, truly cares about them, is coming from a good place, and supports them," she said.It means keeping your word and putting your relationship first, especially when you're confronting a decision that might compromise it, she said. A minor example of following through is calling your spouse to tell them you're safe if they worry when you're running late, she said. And it means "demonstrating good character," she said.Commitment means "We're in this together no matter what," Hansen said. As a couple, you work on finding a solution, not walking away, she said. Building a commitment also happens on your end. Hansen suggested engaging in activities that connect you to your commitment every day.For instance, have a playlist in the car that reminds you of your partner and schedule regular date nights, she said. If you're married, have a playlist that reminds you of your wedding, frame your vows to remind you of your promises, discuss your growth as a couple on anniversaries, watch your wedding video and look through your photos, she said."Vulnerability is all about taking the risk to be your real, genuine self [with your partner]," Hansen said. For instance, being vulnerable includes sharing your feelings, not your thoughts, she said. Instead of saying "I feel like you did this on purpose" or "It seems you don't love me anymore," you explain, "I feel hurt, disappointed, worried or scared," she said."Vulnerability requires trust and safety in the relationship, but if you can truly make the effort to reveal your softer side, then you'll continue [to] grow closer as a couple," Hansen said.What Doesn't WorkPeople think that strong relationships require communication training, Hansen said. While communication is important, it's not much help if your trust is shattered, a partner is emotionally distant or a partner is unsure about staying in the relationship, she said.Communication actually naturally improves, according to Hansen, after couples start reconnecting and stop defending themselves. In fact, her first goal with couples clients is to help them strengthen their connection and feel emotionally safe, she said.Nurturing Your Bond DailyRelationships require "small amounts of effort every day to nurture the bond between the two of you," Hansen said. For instance, she suggested a variety of ways to strengthen your bond, including: kissing daily; sending sweet text messages; unplugging during dinner time; walking together; touching often; listening often; asking your partner about their big meeting, their happiness, goals and dreams; making love; making eye contact; sharing your feelings and putting your partner first.It's also important to be able to pay attention and acknowledge the effect your fears and insecurities have on your relationship, she said. "Remember that relationship satisfaction will continually ebb and flow, but if you practice coming back to your 'why' — why am I in this relationship, why does this relationship matter to me — you'll easily get back on track," Hansen said.

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