

# **Life Balance: Be the Person You Want to Find**

*By Cheri Huber*

**Looking for that special someone? Wishing you could change the person you're with? You may need to start by taking a good long look in the mirror.**

Many books on relationships will tell you how to find and keep the right person, how to develop your communication skills — even how to properly “brand” yourself with the right set of attributes to attract a partner. While these resources offer plenty of helpful advice, they tend to overlook one important fact: The quest for an ideal partner invariably begins with a long look inward.

You can practice communication techniques, make endless lists of the characteristics you look for in a partner and resolve to be more understanding, but until you're willing to give yourself the love and attention you long to get from someone else, and until you can lay claim to the very characteristics you're seeking in another, the chances are good that you'll remain unsatisfied in practically any relationship.

Life is as good as your relationship with yourself. That's because no one is more qualified to give you what you really want and need. Only you know your heart's deepest desires. Only you know exactly what you want to hear and feel and do.

## **Wish List**

Here are some items you might find on a typical “wish list” for an ideal mate:

- Respects me
- Understands me
- Loves me unconditionally
- Wants to spend time with me
- Supports me in what I want to do

Sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But what if you were able to enthusiastically and reliably deliver all the items on this list for yourself? Imagine, for a moment, the dynamics of attraction and connection that might exist between two people who were already adept at fulfilling their own needs, and already secure in their understanding and appreciation of themselves. That would be a pretty amazing relationship, right?

The fact is, if you want a partner who respects you, then you must first respect yourself. If you want someone who understands you, you must first understand yourself. Coming from a place of emotional security and self-respect reduces our temptation to get involved in a romantic relationship simply to fill in our emotional gaps. It allows us to approach potential relationships from a position of wholeness and strength, rather than from a position of neediness, loneliness or desperation.

Ironically, possessing this kind of integrity and self-confidence will also make you dramatically more appealing to the very type of person you're hoping to attract. It will improve your emotional instincts, allowing you to safely risk being more vulnerable, accessible and compassionate. It will also help you build the skills and awareness required to really love and appreciate another person.

As a result, if you're seeking a partner, you'll have more luck attracting a healthy, whole,

well-balanced individual — someone interested in building a real relationship, not in playing the save-and-be-saved game. If you're already with someone, you'll be better able to see his or her strengths, and he or she will be far more likely to share them with you.

### **Love the One You're With**

There's a sort of magnetism that exists between people of like values, characteristics and capacities. One good way to begin developing more of the characteristics you'd like to see in your partner is to reframe relationship-oriented requests and desires so that they reflect an inward focus rather than an outward one.

For example, instead of saying, "I wish I had a partner who was \_\_\_\_\_" (fill in the blank), you might try saying "I wish that I could be \_\_\_\_\_" and seeing if that sentiment rings true in any way, or if that sort of evolution might be possible for you. This is important because, unconsciously, we tend to seek out characteristics and attributes in others that are as yet undeveloped in ourselves. That goes for everything from creativity and athleticism to confidence and professional success.

Another way to shift perspective: Take full ownership of your own issues. If you're in a relationship where communication is challenging, instead of asking, "How can we understand each other better?" you might ask, "How can I understand myself better — so that I can take responsibility for my own 'stuff'?" Rather than ask, "How can we be more sensitive to each other's needs?" you may instead ask, "How can I know what I really want and need? Can I give that to myself instead of just demanding it from my partner?"

It can seem counterintuitive to look inside for what you so obviously want from someone else. You might think, "But I don't want to love myself, I want someone else to love me. I want someone else to meet my needs." On some level, most of us feel this way. Thanks to fairy tales, popular love songs and TV, we've grown up on a steady diet of "happily ever after" stories. We think that if we can just find the right person, we won't have to do anything — just relax and be adored unconditionally. But would we really find that passive mindset attractive in a good friend or potential partner? Probably not. Common sense and experience tell us that this simply doesn't work.

The greatest advantage to becoming the person you want to find is that, even if you do find yourself flying solo for a while, you'll still have many of the components of the relationship you've always desired. And that makes being solo a lot more fun.

### **Looking Inward**

So how can you become the person you want to find? Here are two processes that help develop your ability to look inward, learn to accept what you see and then embrace yourself with open-hearted compassion. Each one helps you assess and improve how you function in all aspects of your life, not just in a romantic relationship. But each one will also help you perceive and appreciate the very best in your partner.

Examine your unconscious beliefs and assumptions. For most of us, our parents' relationship is the paradigm we hold for all relationships. Whether it was good or bad (or something in between) doesn't matter; it's what was modeled for us and it's what we learned.

You might not believe that the model of a relationship imprinted on your unconscious decades ago can affect your relationships now, but it does. The way you relate to yourself and, subsequently, the way you relate with others, are both strongly influenced by that

imprinted standard. Until you can recognize it and move beyond it, you're unlikely to find your highest choices being met.

For example, if you believe that loving and accepting yourself unconditionally is selfish or conceited, you will never be open to receiving unconditional love from another person. If you are closed to yourself, then you are closed, period.

Sit down with a journal, or go for a long walk, and review your beliefs and assumptions about the whole concept of "relationship." Consider how the models you learned in childhood might be stacking the deck against you. Once you understand how your ingrained ideas about relationships might be operating at a subconscious level, your conscious efforts to do things differently will be much more successful.

Own your projections. Just as we are likely to find attractive in others the very attributes and abilities we most want to develop in ourselves, we are also constantly projecting our own ideas, feelings and motivations onto other people. Recognizing this tendency when it occurs, and observing it with compassion (as opposed to a lot of self-judgments), can help you take giant strides toward self-acceptance and self-awareness.

One of our strongest beliefs is that we can know for certain what is motivating someone else. For example, say your spouse spends more time pursuing his hobby than he does with you, and you project that this means he doesn't value your relationship very much. You probably feel hurt, ignored, angry and abandoned. But you may be projecting a meaning onto your partner's behavior that has nothing to do with his actual feelings or motivations.

Are you really afraid that he values his hobby more than you? Do you value some aspect of your life more highly than your relationship? Or could it be that you wish you had a passion that you cared so much about? Your emotional response may have more to do with your reaction to your own projections than with the reality itself. When this new awareness emerges, so does the possibility of an honest examination in which no one is blamed.

Keep in mind that relationships are, by their very nature, reflective. We are here, and in a relationship with each other, in order to help each other learn. It can be very helpful to perceive that each person in our midst is in some way a reflection of an aspect of ourself. Whatever we find to envy, covet, long for or loathe in another is very likely something calling for our attention right here at home.

Cheri Huber is the author of several books, including *When You're Falling, Dive; There's Nothing Wrong With You*; and *Be the Person You Want to Find* (Keep It Simple Books, 1997) from which this article was adapted. She has taught for many years at A Center for the Practice of Zen Buddhist Meditation in Mountain View, Calif., and at the Zen Monastery Practice Center in Murphys, Calif. She is a frequent contributor to *Experience Life*.

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