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## Three Secrets for Building Happier, More Meaningful Relationships

I frequently talk about relationships as one of the most important contributors to your health and happiness. And it's not just your closest relationships - the number of social contacts you have in your daily life, period (including the bank teller and your neighbor down the street) are directly associated with your well-being. Last week at church, the sermon was about three elements that are required to create a better relationship with the divine. Listening, I realized it was good advice about creating a better relationship with anyone who is important to you.

I'm an introvert and could happily spend long stretches of time working and hanging out at home, without interacting with anyone other than my husband and our dog. Though I love people and deeply appreciate my friends, I don't have a strong drive to regularly reach out to others. I'm terrible about calling people, and can easily let long stretches of time go by without connecting. This hasn't got anything to do with whether or not I like them, I'm just not very socially oriented. That said, I'm increasingly aware that given the health and happiness benefits of time with other people, it's in my best interest to override my anti-social tendencies and spend more time with others.

Here are the three points, with my take on them:

### 1) Notice and act on your desire to connect with others

Whenever you think of someone, or spend time with someone, and feel a desire to spend more time with them in the future, make note of it. You might meet someone new who you really like, or hear a song on the radio that's your uncle's favorite, or maybe you run into an old friend on the street. In that moment, you may be struck by how much you enjoy that person and feel a desire to see them again soon. What do you do when that happens? Like me, do you file it away in your mind, forget and then after five years pass by, ask yourself: "Has it really been five years since I last saw Jenny??" When you feel that desire to spend more time with someone, act on it. Make a date for lunch, even if the next possible opportunity is a couple of months or a year away. Pick up the phone and call them when you think of them, just to say hello. Send a quick Facebook message to let them know you were thinking of them.

### 2) Spend "real" time together

Speaking of Facebook, I heard someone comment the other day that though it's so easy to "keep in touch" with people these days through social media comments, emails or text messages, it's not the same as real time. Don't let the fact that you've had regular brief contact with someone online replace face-to-face or voice-to-voice time. If you find it hard to find time, get a Bluetooth headset or speaker for your cell phone and make calls to friends from your car while you're driving to and from work. Take it from me - you'll wonder why you ever spent so many hours listening to that rush hour radio program!

### 3) Make a special effort that demonstrates your commitment and caring

Life moves so quickly these days and though we may network or socialize with many people, we don't necessarily get to know them on a deeper level. As our pastor said in his sermon: "Relationships don't develop automatically and don't deepen on their own - it takes effort". Be conscious of this in your relationships, and think about what efforts you can make to deepen your connection with people who matter to you. What kind of effort would be most significant to each individual? Some people don't care about birthdays (or actually hate being reminded of them), while others feel slighted if they don't get a phone call or an e-card. Pay close attention to what other people value, and make the effort to connect with them on that level.

Make time for people in your life, especially the ones that you love the most and the ones that make you laugh the most. If a hermit like me can do it, you certainly can. In fact, last night after a long day of work and flamenco dance rehearsals, I dragged myself all the way back into town to go to a friend's birthday party because I know that her birthday is important to her. A group of us had dinner, ate heaps of rich flourless chocolate cake, and then went out dancing. I had the time of my life. In retrospect it's quite funny that I thought I was making the effort just to please my friend. When we're good to our friends and family, we're really taking care of ourselves.

#### About Dr. Biali

Audiences and clients have described Dr. Susan Biali, an award-winning medical doctor, media wellness expert, author, speaker, life coach and flamenco dancer, as "passionate", "real", and "powerful". Formerly a sick, depressed Emergency Medicine resident, Dr. Biali took back her own life and health by learning how to balance her life, listen to her body, and create a life truly worth living. For the past four years, Dr. Biali commuted between her professional life in Canada and her passionate life in Los Cabos, Mexico, where she performed as a professional flamenco dancer for celebrities and exclusive audiences. She and her Latin husband, Armando, even taught Pink how to salsa dance! Today, Dr. Biali teaches others how to discover themselves, create vibrant health, and design the life of their dreams. Frequently featured in media across North America, Dr. Biali is a blogger for Psychology Today, is the weekly wellness expert for the national television program The Daily, and is currently developing her own television show with a team of producers. She has appeared on MSNBC, The Good Life Network, and in Self, Fitness and Hello! magazines, and was even invited to perform flamenco dance on E! Entertainment Television. Her book, Live a Life You Love: 7 Steps to a Happier, Healthier, More Passionate You, will be released by New York's Beaufort Books in January 2010. [www.susanbiali.com](http://www.susanbiali.com)