

Dignity Conversations: Personal Relationships

CONVERSATIONS THAT LEAD TO INSIGHT AND ACTION

Dr. Donna Hicks, the author of the book *Dignity*, says “*If we violate someone’s dignity repeatedly, we will get a divorce or a war or a revolution because a desire for revenge is an instant response to a dignity violation.*”

- Do you believe that personal relationships and international relations are both affected by the same emotions? Can you think of a personal fight you had and a political fight you were part of that both were fought for reasons of dignity?
- Can you put yourself in the scene of a big fight with a family member? What words or actions started it? What ended it? What role did dignity play in the fight and in the forgiveness? When your dignity was violated, did you feel a desire for revenge? Did you act on it? How?

Dr. John Gottman, the psychologist who studied 2,000 married couples and learned how to predict which couples would stay married and which would divorce, writes that contempt is “the intention to insult and psychologically abuse your partner” and is “perhaps the most corrosive force in marriage.”

- Can you think of a fight you had with a spouse or romantic partner where you were especially hurt? Can you remember the specific words that hurt most? Can you explain the hurt in terms of contempt? Did you respond with contempt of your own?
- When you came out of that fight and began to make up, can you describe that movement in terms of dropping contempt? How did you do it? What took the place of contempt?

Gottman writes, “*When contempt begins to overwhelm your relationship, you tend to forget entirely your partner’s positive qualities.*”

- Can you think of a time when you forgot the positive qualities of a friend or family member? What provoked it? Did they forget yours too?
- If you’ve forgotten their positive qualities, would you agree that you could no longer see them accurately? That suggests that when you have contempt for someone, you’re distorting their personality and acting on a false view of who they are. Does this describe what happens in you when you feel contempt?
- The only way to come back from a fight is through an expression of dignity. Would you agree with that? When you made up with your friend or family member, who took the first step to treat the other with dignity? What did that look like? How did the other partner respond?