

THE AGE OF CONSENSUS RELATIONSHIPS

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This ought to be the era of consensus relationships. Yet most men and women do not want to negotiate the terms and content of their affairs, leading to a consensus relationship.

The traditional form of relationships did not need much of a consensus. The rules, rights and obligations were very clear cut. The man was the family's sole provider; culture and religion determined that man was the main power head of the family. As long as he discharged his sole provision obligations, the woman had to follow his dictates.

However, in modern societies, man is no longer the sole provider in the family. Some women earn more than their men. In fact, most women do provide financial support to their men. The "sole provider" factor is no longer applicable as a source of male dominance. Similarly, cultural and religious considerations are now subjected to rational and logical critique and successfully challenged.

The power gap between man and modern woman has drastically narrowed. In the modern society, both man and women go to work. They both run business. They are both managers at work and executives in their business. They both suffer similar time pressures. This requires that couples negotiated the nature, content, and direction of their engagement and build a consensus based relationship.

Given that both partners lead hectic lives, the time they spend on each other is diminished. Moreover, there is fatigue which cuts down on the quality of the time they spend together. Thus, expectations they have of each other is adversely affected. The ensuing danger is that they will end up doing things as a matter of obligation. That is, they have to comply to each other.

This situation, demands that both parties speak to each other about the nature, content, and substance of the relationship. Firstly, they need to own up to each other how they feel about each other. That is, determine the essence of their relationship. Once the value of the relationship to each other is established, then it should be easy to determine the means through which the relationship will be pursued, enhanced and sustained. For example; both parties could commit that at least twice a year, on each other's birthdays – they will go on holiday. They can undertake to have dinner out at least three times a month. Or even agree when to have kids, and how many.

The essence of this negotiation is to ensure that both partners dedicate quality time for each other. Contrary to popular opinion, it is not only the woman who wants to feel that "my man has time for me"; the man also wants to feel "my woman is there for me". Given that the biggest consequence of professional couples is time loss to each other, it is therefore logical that such negotiations must focus on time for each other, and the quality of this time to each other.

This approach could reduce the number of successful women casualties. Most successful women: academically, professionally and businesswise, struggle to remain in decent relationships. Either with men they support, or fellow professionals.

The main cause is the fact that man want to remain “the man” to their women. That is, regardless of the dynamic changes to the nature of current relations between man and woman, the man largely still expects the modern woman to behave and deliver in the same manner as women did fifty years ago.

Similarly, material self reliance has led some women to develop “don’t care” attitudes towards men. This is largely a result of misconception about material sustainability and the need to be in a relationship. Hence, the decision to break up on both sides, is made far much easier and quicker than otherwise should be. It is only with advanced age and better reflection that both the man and woman realise that sustainable relationships are an essential element of a well rounded individual.

This can be averted by negotiating relationships as stipulated above. Unfortunately, most men are uncomfortable discussing their relationships. The ego of a man tells him hat “he is in charge”. Things “must just happen”. Moreover, the relationship must unfold as per the prescript that our forefathers have determined. The fact that circumstances have changed is of little consequence.

The biggest challenge therefore to consensus relationships is men’s patriarchal tendencies. Interestingly, no matter how educated and professional most men are, when it comes to relationships, they resort to outdated patriarchal treatment of their women. The rational logical element of such men, simply falls out of the window. The “I am the man” remains the rallying cry.

Women, who wish to pursue consensus relationships, must be very diplomatic in introducing the matter to their men. They must avoid alienating their men even before the negotiations start. I suspect though that if the subject matter was initiated by the man, the woman would accede too many things to the man. This maybe based on the fact that she would like to assure the man that she is a “real woman”. That is, she can still play the “roles” expected of a woman in a relationship.

Either way, the benefits of consensus relationships are far much greater than who would have initiated the negotiations. The sooner the modern man and woman accept that circumstances demand that relationships be negotiated and consensus be built – the better!

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