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**Forgiveness is Not the Same as Trust**

**By Susan Dunn**

**Forgiveness is Not the Same as Trust by Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach**

In a presentation the other day which rambled over topics of self-help, the speaker at one point asked the group, "Why do we forgive?"

"For ourselves," the group muttered.

"You're only the third group I've spoken to who's known that," the speaker replied.

**FORGIVE FOR YOURSELF**

Most of us do realize these days that we forgive for ourselves. The perpetrator of the act requiring forgiveness has done what they've done, which largely can't be undone, and probably are getting on with their life. If we continue to harbor rancor and resentment, we make ourselves doubly the victim. Whether or not we forgive the other person makes the difference mostly to us, not them. If we do forgive, we can then, like them, get on with our lives.

Forgiveness, then, can be unilateral. While sometimes we will do this with another person, listening to their explanation and/or accepting their apology, and saying the words, "I forgive you," we can also do this without the other. We can do this on paper, journaling or writing the person a letter we never send, in a therapist's office, confiding in a trusted friend, in our own minds, or in prayer or meditation.

**TRUST IS BILATERAL**

Trust, however, is another thing.

Whether the act requiring forgiveness is a lie, 10 years of drinking, or an extramarital affair, if the relationship with the other person is to continue, forgiveness is just the beginning. Regained trust is the goal, and another beginning.

## Forgiveness is Not the Same as Trust

When you seek to forgive a person who's harmed you and to continue in the relationship, you need to work on the trust aspects. Understand that this, unlike forgiveness, is not a "given." You can grant the forgiveness. The other must earn back the trust, and you have a right to expect this be done.

Haven't you heard someone who's had an affair saying, "It's like she doesn't trust me. I told her it was over. I don't understand why she's so suspicious." And then they go on to name the acts of the offended spouse they consider "paranoid," such as monitoring cell phone bills, checking on time away from home, and watching closely at social functions.

Trust is hard to build, very hard to rebuild once shattered. If you want to earn back trust, here are some things you will have to do, consistently and over time. The onus is on you to over-communicate and over-act until the fragile thread of trust becomes stronger.

1. Remove yourself from further sources of temptation and let it be known that you have. Don't go where you used to go, and don't hang out with people you used to hang out with, and avoid people who do what you want to avoid doing.

2. Be particularly careful of your behavior when with the person you've harmed. For instance, if you have an affair on your husband, when in social situations, patently ignore members of the opposite sex and stick by the side of your husband.

3. If embarrassment has been caused and/or temptation remains, be willing to relocate - get another job if you had an affair at the office, or move to another neighborhood if it was with a neighbor.

4. Over-communicate. If you used to sneak off to drink or gamble saying you were working late, or meeting a friend, announce where you're going, with whom you're going, and when you'll be back. Give a phone number and an invitation for them to check in with you (i.e., check up on you). Better yet, YOU call. (Don't whine. This is a consequence of your actions you must deal with if you want to regain trust.)

5. Be meticulous about keeping your word. If you say you'll meet him at 5:00 p.m., be there at 5 till. If you say you'll pick up milk at the store on the way home, do it.

6. Make your life an open book. Display, without vindictiveness, the things you used to hide - the cell phone bill, the address book, the credit card statements, the contents of your travel suitcase, who's on the other end of the phoneline, and what's in the cup you're drinking out of.

You can grasp the picture better if you consider the unfortunate analogy of a dog who's been beaten. If you adopt such a dog, you'll find every time you approach them, they will cower or run away. You will have to approach slowly, with your hands exposed, palms up, so that slowly the dog will learn that you don't harbor weapons, and don't use your hands to hit. This requires discipline on your part, and consideration for the other, but is part of restitution. In other words, you make it very clear, overly-clear, that you don't intend to do what you did again.

In sum, if someone has granted you forgiveness for something you've said or done, and you want to continue the relationship, you will have to rebuild the trust. Damaged relationships can be repaired with forgiveness, time, changed behavior (and words are a behavior), and restored trust.

Susan Dunn, MA, Emotional Intelligence Coach, <http://www.susandunn.cc> . Offering coaching, internet courses and ebooks around emotional intelligence for your personal and professional development. I

train and certify EQ coaches. Mailto:sdunn@susandunn.cc for information on this fast, affordable, comprehensive, no-residency program. For FREE EQ ezine, email w/ "ezine" for subject line.

## **Forgive For Less Marital Anger**

**By Dr Tony Fiore**

Stacy's partner of twelve years does not come home one evening and she knew he was with a former lover. He begged for another chance with Stacy, but her pride and anger held her back. Stacy said she would feel like a fool if she forgave him, even though she still loved him. Stacy didn't end the relationship, but reminds him daily of what he did to her.

Should Stacy forgive her otherwise good husband for what he did? Of course, only Stacy can make this decision.

Fact is, most marriages cannot survive knowledge of an affair, but some do and can even grow stronger in the long run.

Stacy and others who struggle with forgiveness for all kinds of marital offenses (not only affairs) can be helped in their decision by considering the following misconceptions about forgiveness:

**MISCONCEPTION #1** Forgiving means that you forget about the offense. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even though you forgive, you may never forget (and probably shouldn't) what happened to you.

However, you can tell that you have truly forgiven an offense when you can remember it without experiencing the emotional pain connected with it.

**MISCONCEPTION #2** Forgiving means that you are saying what they did was okay. Quite the opposite. We can still forgive, but see what happened to us as unjust, unfair, or unacceptable.

There are many things that our partners can do to us that we don't deserve or that violate the contract, covenant, or agreement you have with each other.

Yet, we can forgive by realizing that perhaps they were misguided, or flawed and thus worthy of another chance.

**MISCONCEPTION #3** In order to forgive, you need to tell your partner that you forgive them.

Actually, it often backfires if you go up to someone and say "I forgive you," especially if they see themselves as a victim instead of seeing themselves as someone who warrants forgiveness.

Fact is, forgiveness occurs in your heart— not in the telling someone that you forgive them.

There are exceptions to this, however, and circumstances under which you might want to discuss your

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forgiveness of them—but only if you think that it will not cause further harm.

For instance, Ruth's husband asked for her forgiveness following a gambling spree which put the family in financial peril. After one year of rehabilitation and a "clean" record, Ruth told him that she now forgave him.

**MISCONCEPTION #4** If you forgive, it means you will trust them again immediately.

Forgiveness and trust are two separate issues. Even after forgiveness, it may take a long time to re-build trust.

To instantly trust your partner again after being violated is not a sign of good mental health or strong self-esteem.

Doing this may also send a message to your partner that they may continue to violate your trust with little fear of actually having to suffer the consequences. Marital trust must be re-earned after an offense, based on good behavior— not just smooth words or empty promises.

**MISCONCEPTION #5** After forgiving, you will automatically feel positive feelings again for your partner.

The opposite of anger is not love. Absence of angry feelings doesn't necessarily create warm, positive feelings— sometimes it simply creates neutral ones.

In many cases, of course, it is impossible to ever rekindle the love feelings— even after forgiveness. This is common with ex-partners who learn to let go of the anger connected with the divorce issues, but never love each other again.

**MISCONCEPTION #6** Forgiveness occurs all at once.

Not necessarily. Maybe you can start by forgiving maybe 10%—just open the door—and then see how your partner behaves.

After a period of time, you might open the door a little wider and let go of a little more anger until you are truly able to forgive 100%

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workplace, and professionals. He can be reached at 714-771-0378.



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