



Solution Oriented

Creative Coaching©

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ENHANCING YOUR RELATIONSHIP Part deux

David Schnarch identifies several activities that happen when a person differentiates:



- **Maintaining a clear sense of who you are within the relationship.** Your partner was probably originally attracted to you because of the strength of your unique qualities. Both of you knew what you valued and believed in. Over time, because we accommodate ourselves to both our own and our partner's more immature qualities and unresolved issues, we lose our sense of uniqueness. We compromise ourselves with the goal of smoothing out conflicts and fail to realize that we are losing our sense of self in the process. We may find that we have lost those qualities that were once so attractive to our partner. Differentiation involves looking within, gaining a firm definition of who we are, and celebrating our uniqueness.
- **Maintaining a sense of perspective.** We need to accept the fact that we all have anxieties and other shortcomings. This is part of the human condition. The mature person, however, understands that these frailties need not determine our behavior. Our limits should neither incapacitate nor drive us. When we honestly accept this fact both in ourselves and in our partners, we can take a more balanced approach in dealing with each other's limitations. The peaks and valleys of crises can be smoothed out. The blaming can come to an end, replaced by acceptance and love for the other person.

- **Committing to a willingness to engage in self-confrontation.** Looking within is difficult, but it is a necessary step both in our own life development and in helping our relationships to grow to new levels. Self-confrontation means coming to terms with our own fears, anxieties, and insecurities, a process that may be aided by professional psychotherapy. It may mean accepting the criticisms of our partners as valuable feedback about where our insecurities lie. Self-examination can focus on understanding how and why we undermine our own effectiveness, take a selfish approach at times (or, alternatively, give to others and never to ourselves), and work against our own best interests. We need to understand why we avoid ourselves, and then we need to make an honest commitment to enter into a path of honesty and integrity.
- **Acknowledging our projections and distortions of reality that protect us from ourselves.** We need to understand why we blame others, especially our emotionally committed partners, rather than acknowledging our own participation in interpersonal conflicts. This involves admitting when we are wrong. We should not expect that our partners will do likewise. Taking an honest approach toward our own lives is a tough, but rewarding, journey into personal integrity. When we embark on the trip, our partners, who are no longer feeling blamed and know that the old emotional standoffs have been eliminated, will often decide to begin their own excursions into self-growth.
- **Learning to tolerate the pain involved in self-exploration.** Dealing with emotional pain is a talent, which can be learned. In childhood many of us learned unhealthy ways of handling discomfort, often because we lacked supportive role modeling from our parents or other adults that would have taught us how to deal with pain in a healthier way. We may have learned to blame our parents when we faced life's difficulties, and then we carry this blaming behavior into our committed relationships in adulthood. Avoiding pain is the reason many adults indulge in substance abuse or other addictive behaviors such as gambling, inordinate spending, or watching too much television. The healthier option is to make the adult commitment to explore the pain and its sources – and to find ways to make self-growth a friend rather than something to avoid. When we learn to cope with our own pain, we no longer need to manipulate our partners into making us feel better. And when this happens, the magic can re-enter our relationships.



