

Dr. Chatelain's #1 Relationship Rule: "Porcupines Live Alone!"

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You can't go around "sticking" people and expect them to want to be around you. This seems so obvious, but over many years of working with couples, it is amazing to me how many people use criticism and punishment to try to influence other people, even the ones they "love".

Years ago, I was working with a young couple. The wife was especially critical of her husband, who seemed to always be "in trouble" and doing something wrong. As an intervention, I tried to limit her criticism to just three things at a time. If she added a new criticism, she had to drop one of the three. Limiting her criticism was very hard for her to do. She felt she had a right to criticize him whenever he needed it. On their anniversary, her husband planned a very nice, romantic evening together. At the end of the evening, when they were getting ready for bed, she yelled at him for leaving his clothes on the floor. He promptly put his clothes back on and left, never to return to the marriage or her continual criticism.

Criticism is probably the main tool of a "Porcupine" person. Some people feel it is their right to criticize, correct and instruct. When a person feels criticized, they typically respond with "fight" or "flight". It takes a highly skilled person to deliver criticism without creating defensiveness or withdrawal.

Perhaps the "Porcupine's" biggest interpersonal distortion is the belief that "fear is respect -- if you fear me and my ability to hurt you, then you will do as I say". Unfortunately, even if you get immediate compliance, eventually people just learn to withdraw and avoid you. Children grow up and move away, partners withdraw or get a divorce, and friends find better friends. Even employees will find a different job.

Bottom line, it's how people feel after they have interacted with you. Do you look for the good in others and validate them? In the end, love and kindness are the best ways to have people seek to be around you. So remember, "Porcupines Live Alone!"