

RELATIONSHIPS, STUPID

***"To what is the Kingdom of God like?
He is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden,
and it grew into a tree, and the birds of the air nested in its
branches". (Luke 13:18-21)***

The seed, the sowing, the leafy tree, the nesting birds... these are **images** that bring to my mind and heart the duty of self-improvement, the task of creating a welcoming home, the responsibility of uniting the family, and the enjoyment of being with loved ones.

We could say, to borrow the expression, "**the economy, stupid**", popularized by Clinton's campaign manager in the 1992 election, that it is "**relationships, stupid**". None of what St. Luke's text evokes can be achieved without building **good relationships**. With oneself, with others and also with God the source of all good.

Good relationships are based on at least three **elements** according to the insights of Dr. Adizes:

The first is **mutual respect**. It consists of knowing how to listen in a spirit of understanding and learning. Mutual respect is the best formula to converge the criteria and mental rules with which we operate in the relationship. Mutual respect leads to better decisions by favoring the contrast of ideas in a constructive climate. A more complete vision of problems and opportunities and how to manage them emerges from a respectful conversation.

The second element is **mutual trust**, which is the oil that greases relationships so that there is no friction. Trust requires good mutual knowledge to understand and feel what is important to the other person. That mutual knowledge allows us to gauge the credibility, reliability, empathy and personal agenda with which we judge, and are judged, of the trust we deserve.

Trusting someone is taking a **risk** because the one who gives first may not be reciprocated. Trust diminishes that perception of risk and thus nurtures reciprocity. Reciprocity, moreover, helps align interests at least in the long run. This reduces dysfunctional conflicts arising from short-term clashes of interests.

The third element of a good relationship has to do with **mutual care**. With this element comes into play the heart and therefore the capacity to love. Mutual care is about **taking care** to make each other's lives more fulfilling. It is a way of expressing appreciation through acts of service done with the intention of doing good in facets ranging from the most material to the most spiritual.

Respect, trust and care are the triad of good, but they must be **mutual**. Relationships require the **cooperation** of the parties.



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Getting the other party to enter into the game of reciprocity sometimes requires a left hand. A relationship becomes **parasitic** or **extractive** when there is no balance between giving and receiving. A relationship becomes **sybiotic** when it is balanced and the exchange goes further.

The **symptoms** that a relationship is **not working** are at least five: **ignoring each other**, feeling **uncomfortable** with the other party, habitually **rejecting** what the other party proposes, feeling **resentment** towards the other side and, finally, acting **vindictively**. These five symptoms go from less bad to worse. The last two are toxic and should be avoided so that they do not generate a destructive spiral.

On the other hand, the **signs that a relationship works** are the **interest** in the things of the other party, the **openness** to what he/she can propose, the predisposition to **collaborate**, the sincere **friendship** and what we could call **fraternity**, which is the expression of an unconditional relationship.

Relationships are the factor that most influences personal **happiness**, as well as the success of a **family** and a business **project**. There is an art to making relationships work, not least because there is a structural **asymmetry**. In the professional sphere, maintaining a relationship requires a ratio of three successes for every failure. In the personal sphere, the ratio is five to one.

Relationships improve with at least five types of initiatives. The first is to spend **time** with the other party. A second is with the magic of relevant, constructive, sincere and honest **conversation**. At the right time and in the right place. It's making the other party feel that we care about them and that we understand them. It is the **"tell me more"** that we like to hear so much when we want to share concerns and illusions. A third approach is **details** because they express interest in the other party. A fourth initiative is **acts of service** where we ease the burdens of others in the spirit of helping. A final approach is through **expressions of affection** such as hugs, looks of affection, etc.

"Your network is your net worth" is an interesting play on words from the Anglo-Saxon world that suggests that the number of people who know and value you end up being your best (albeit intangible) assets.

Enjoy these Christmas days of good relationships that you have been weaving throughout your life. Let the **wisdom** of the Gospel enlighten your mind and heart to know how to respect, trust and care better for more people. Remember that this is the **triad** through which you can do the good to which we are called.

May that small mustard seed that was given to us at birth bear fruit and become a **leafy tree** that gives shade and shelter to many. I bid you farewell with my best wishes for the year 2025 to be full of great moments in the shade of that tree. Merry Christmas.

Luis Huete



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