

July 2007

Tina's Musings

-INCLUDING YOURSELF IN THE EQUATION-

"Remember to include yourself in the equation", I am often telling women who are very good at figuring out how to address the problems of others or to accommodate their needs to those of others – as though it has to be me or them – or, actually, just them because to include me would be selfish.

Carol came in yesterday without her husband though they were scheduled for couples' counseling. "He had gotten irritable," she said, "so I let him off the hook." I suggested that she might have said, "I know you are not really up for this; I really appreciate you doing it". That way she would acknowledge his discomfort but still go for what she felt was very important. She would keep herself in the equation yet still allow her husband to know what was important to her. When she got home, she did that and then re-scheduled for the two of them. She was thrilled – like she'd found a key to the universe.

Women often express that "their part in the equation" is the pleasure they get from doing for others. That certainly counts, but it need not be the only factor. Indeed, when it is the only factor, trouble ensues when "the other" is not as pleased as we'd envisioned.

-Dr. Tina's Aside-

I wrote the following story as an example of how you might put yourself out for your husband and he fails to appreciate it. As I went over it, it didn't seem to come out right. So I thought about it some more.....

The story: I remember the pleasure I used to anticipate that Bill would experience as I prepared what he came to call one of my "elaborate dinners". The evening would be romantic, lovely and exotic, I would imagine. Sadly, he did not find any of those attributes particularly appealing – at least not around food. He would prefer Bill Miller Bar-B-Que any day, without all the frou-frou. After all of my "slaving over a hot stove", he said he'd rather I'd have spent the time hanging out with him.

As I thought about it, I realized that I didn't really leave myself out of the equation so much as to fool myself into thinking I was doing this for him. Yes, it would have been nice had it worked as I envisioned – with me as the source of such pleasure. But mostly, it was my fantasy. If anything, I left him – the real him – out of the equation. And by focusing only on him, I failed to acknowledge to myself how much I enjoyed such preparations every once in a while – the aromas, the colors, the music I listen to, the switch from left- to right-brain activity. Once I recognized what I really loved about it, I could then do it as a gift to myself – and ask him to go along because I enjoyed it so much – and he would.

It turns out to be useful and interesting to know what's important about the situation for you. You get to know yourself better – and not just in terms of your relationship.

Including yourself in the equation also encourages you to come up with creative "in-betweeners" – ideas that incorporate the important parts of what each of you would like. To see if you can come up with an in-betweener, consider one of those situations where you rationalized your feelings away. "It means so much to her." "He totally hates that." "I don't really mind." Now try keeping yourself in the equation – being honest with yourself – at the same time that you still consider how the other feels about it. How else might you have played it?