


#7: Building and Maintaining Relationships in Stressful Times - What's a healthy relationship?

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Shauna Reitmeier: We talked about this three-legged stool and relationships really are foundational in two of those legs, that social piece, that connectedness, and then also around the emotional piece which is, how's that self-talk, how are we giving ourselves some self-compassion as well? Relationships feed both of those and relationships are really rooted in being healthy and making sure that we're going to walk through, how do you align your values around selecting the relationships that you have, and relationships are really rooted in strong communication, safety and aligned with those shared values.

Brenda Mack: I view building and maintaining relationships is that healthy relationships can be a protective factor. It can help you reduce your stress, it can increase your happiness levels, it can also be a risk factor in the sense that if you're in an unhealthy relationship that can impact stress, it can lead to depression. Just want you to consider as we're going through this, how is healthy relationships a protective factor for you and where is it potentially a risk factor for you?

Shauna Reitmeier: As we jump into this, when I think about relationships, it's really rooted in knowing what your values are. We know that, for some of us, we get overwhelmed or we talked a little bit about with our self-care when we overcommit to certain things. How do we make decisions based on our values? So I'm going to walk you through a process that you can use to start coming up with, what are your own personal core values? And you can use this core values exercise to evaluate existing relationships and can be used in helping determine where do you want to invest your time in new relationships.

It really starts with, take the experiences that you've had, walk through some of those times when you've had really positive experiences and what were they. Did you walk out of that experience with someone positive? Did you get energized? Did your cup get full? Were you able to have a really deep conversation where the person listened to you, you felt like you were engaged with that person? In those circumstances, your values were probably honored. In times where you walked out of that relationship and it was not enjoyable, you felt exhausted that, "Boy, we weren't connecting," the values that you have were probably

suppressed. You can use those past experiences to start putting words to what those are. So start thinking about, in those kinds of experiences, what is the most important to you beyond the basic living needs?

We all know we need shelter, we need food, we need sleep, and some of those values that are important to us. Think about what are those other things that are not basic to just survival that are important to you. Many times those values can be categorized into various themes like accountability, responsibility, timeliness, all kind of go together, connection, belonging, relationships. So go through your list, write them all down, check them off, and then you can start categorizing them. Once you've narrowed down those values and you have five to 10, look at, what are those values? Let's go back to the connection, belonging, and relationships, all right? You've got some themes, you're lining up this value and I'm going to decide that connection is really the one that stands out for me out of the three.

However, those other values like belonging and relationship really support connection. So I can come up with a sentence or a statement around, "For me, connection is to have meaningful relationships with people where I feel I belong." If that's happening, then I know I have connection. The next step is once you've identified that is test your value. Does it resonate with you? Is it consistent with the scenarios that you've been placed in with the decisions that you've made and how does it make you feel? But it's very normal in relationships that you have different values and it's a great exercise to walk through with your partner, with your spouse or whomever because this can be an area where you're really focusing on communication as well.

Brenda Mack: And I think finding that common ground-

Shauna Reitmeier: Yes.

Brenda Mack: ... that, where are your values with the person you're in a relationship, where are those aligned? Because I think it's always great to start where you have that in common and then build on that.

Shauna Reitmeier: As we dive into just relationships, there are the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. When we think about a healthy relationship, they have these characteristics of open communication. There is trust that's been established, you

have mutual respect with each other, you compromise, you come to the middle on issues or things that might come up and you have the ability to make decisions equally within your household, and there's boundaries, you know when it's okay to reach out and when it's not okay within that relationship. These characteristics are in all types of relationships and some of these types of relationships might cross, you might have a relationship that hits multiple types, you can have your family, your extended family, and you might have more intimate relationship with a family or a casual relationship.

Now, when I use the word intimacy, for some people, they think it's just a romantic or a sexual connotation to that when really it's about, how well are you connecting? Are you able to go, and I can use this analogy, can you go deep in a conversation with someone and have that trust and know that they're going to be there for you and listen to you? In other times you might not, you have friendships that might be casual, you might have a friendship where it's a much more intimate relationship, same with your spouse, you might be very intimate with your spouse on all levels of that continuum of intimacy, where you wouldn't with somebody else.

I can't forget about, we talk so much about self-care, the relationship that we have with ourself. So don't forget to communicate with yourself, to respect yourself in who you are because you need to be full, you need to have self-care because you're one part of a relationship as well. There's also unhealthy relationships and it's the same types of relationships that you have. But some things to be thinking about are the characteristics of what an unhealthy relationship is and that can be, there's criticism, there isn't communication, there's a loss of intimacy, that connection, that passive-aggressive behaviors that you're seeing, that trust has been broken in a relationship or they're hostile, and there's many more that we could be listing as you shared from a healthy perspective, there's others that would come up. Here's the thing, as relationships grow over time and have different scenarios or circumstances that happen is that there may be times when a relationship might experience some unhealthy characteristics and how the relationship addresses those will determine whether they stay unhealthy or whether they shift and now you become healthy. One of the things to think about though in your relationship is that, if you have a lot of these characteristics in your relationships or all of these are present in your relationship, then that's where you really want to start checking against your values. What is your value in your relationship and who you are and do these align? Now, we're not in any means advocating, a path of, do you stay in relationships or not, those are personal decisions that each one of you would be making. But what we're hoping is we're giving you some tools for you to evaluate that, to make whatever decisions that you need to make. Anything else, Brenda, that you want to add in this?

Brenda Mack: I don't, I don't think so.

Shauna Reitmeier: Think so right now? So then here's the piece to that, we would be, I think, a little remiss if we didn't bring up, is that, if a relationship is unhealthy and your relationship experiences any of these areas that are part of the power and control is being exerted over you, that you feel you don't have your own power and your own control in these areas, it may be a sign that you are in an abusive relationship.

Brenda Mack: We also like to share this, just so that you have some awareness, in case you know of somebody who, you have this sixth sense or intuition in your gut that they're not in a healthy relationship, just wanted to raise some awareness about patterns of abuse happen in cycles and there are times where you may feel like the abuse is over or things are smooth and without addressing these issues, it can go on and on potentially for your friend. Well, that's a heavy subject to talk about.

Shauna Reitmeier: It really is.

Brenda Mack: It's a heavy subject and yet again, I think we just would feel we'd be remiss if we didn't at least address a little bit on this call.

Megan Roberts: Thanks for joining us on this Cultivating Resiliency for Women in Agriculture Podcast series one. In this session, we learned about relationships from families, friends, casual relationships, to romantic relationships, to the relationship we have with ourselves. All these types of relationships can be positive and all these types of relationships can become negative. Do you have shared healthy values with the people you consider your closest relationship to? Do you have signs of unhealthy relationships? In the month since this webinar was recorded to now, our world has changed due to the pandemic. The ways many of us kept in contact with those outside our household are now strained as we have had to adapt to social distancing, but phone calls, emails, video chat, and more are all possibilities as our in-person face-to-face relationship tools are put on hold. We hope you find ways to keep connected. This project is a collaboration of American Agri-Women, District 11 Agri-Women University of Minnesota Extension, Women in Ag Network, and the Upper Midwest Agricultural Safety and Health Center (UMASH). You may find the recordings for an entire webinar series on the UMASH or American Agri-Women websites under cultivating

resiliency. Our next podcast is part two of our focus on relationships, where we talk about ways to improve relationships through active listening, conflict resolution and other strategies.