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**Relational and Environmental Intelligence -  
“WHO I AM MAKES A DIFFERENCE!” - AND  
TEN THINGS TO DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS  
by Susie Itzstein**

Very warm greetings to everyone from Seattle where we arrived a few days ago. It's early morning and I'm still in my PJ's sitting on a big comfy couch with the sun streaming through the window behind me warming my back so luxuriously on this start to this beautiful new day. I'm someone who likes the warmth so I'm feeling very indulged and blessed to just take the time to enjoy being warmed by the sun....and how many more blessings there are all around me.....

My attention is caught by the novelty of a bunch of frisky squirrels frolicking playfully in the trees outside and how much fun they seem to be having,..... What a beautifully glorious time to return to the North West of America! Everywhere such an abundant beauty in the spring laden trees all around,.... and now thinking of the privilege for me to be able to write articles like this and thinking of all of you back in Australia who will be reading this.....

I'm taken back to thinking about how it was such a delight and blessing to meet so many of you at the recent **Living Now Expo in Melbourne** the beginning of May 2006. Connecting up with old friends and meeting so many new people.... We had so much fun and felt so nourished. How lucky we are to have such an arena to meet up. What an uplifting and inspiring experience to get to share the weekend with so many people who are on a journey to be living consciously and intentionally. That is such a huge gift for us to be grateful for. All of us – the practitioners as well as the clients - all of us who attended. I want to take this opportunity to shower abundant THANK YOUS on Elizabeth and Terry and all your wonderful Team at Living Now for your continuing Vision and dedicated hard work to create and pull off such an event.

There is so much we take for granted. We often don't realize how our actions and sometimes just our very presence is important to others, to the world. We don't often realize the IMPACT we have - of who we are and what we do. So many of you shared with me the valuable experience it was for you to read my articles and how just making one of the differences in your life I have written about has made a change in your relationships and your life. Wow!!.....

This brings me to a topic that I want to have a chat with you about now. It's on “WHO I AM MAKES A DIFFERENCE”. This has been such a continuing life “growth edge” for me and is to the forefront as I write today.

So what am I doing sitting in my PJ's on a couch in Seattle you may well be asking...? Well, my partner Shelton is American and he has a home in Seattle, and I am Australian and I have a home in Perth so we travel regularly between the 2 places and this is where we will be till the end of August. And apart from being warmed by the sun and feeling grateful for my blessings I've also been sitting here reflecting on a movie we saw last night. It has left me musing about some re-occurring questions for me: *how do we change people's*

*consciousness, how do we impact people's habits and familiar, comfortable, entrenched, automatic ways of doing things.....?*

The movie we saw was a new documentary film called "*An Inconvenient Truth*" (see [www.climatecrisis.org](http://www.climatecrisis.org)) which has Al Gore sharing his life-long passion and commitment to raising awareness about global warming. The movie presents research from top scientists around the world to raise public awareness of global warming and climate change with the continuing plea throughout the movie about the catastrophic threat this is to our planet and to us as a human race and for a call to action before it's too late if we are to save Planet Earth. His message is **we must** change our ways now or we'll kill our planet and ourselves.

Using lots of facts and figures and impressive graphs and striking before-and-after photographs which show examples of the impact around the world like the melting and disappearing of glaciers, the bleaching and collapse of coral reefs, warmer and shorter winters, hotter summers, more and prolonged droughts, increase in hurricanes and other natural disasters and the consequent change this makes to all plant and animal habitats and life. If the trend continues, he predicts, the ice shelves of Greenland and Antarctica will continue to melt away, raising sea levels around the world by more than a devastating 20 feet. It is shocking to realize following his figures that we only have about 50 years if we continue at the same consumer pace.

Al Gore is requesting that people pledge to go and see this film when it comes to a theatre near you. I want to pass that on and make that request of you as soon as it comes to Australia, as people's attendance is two-fold – it raises their awareness as well as making a statement that people care about this topic, and care about Planet Earth.

Al calls "*An Inconvenient Truth*" "*the ultimate action movie*" because it is designed to implore people to take action. Awareness is only the first step. To change we have to do actions or behaviours that are different and unfamiliar and will usually feel uncomfortable. Doing what we already do, and know how to do, will only get us more of what we already have.

Shelton passed the comment that it makes the work we do insignificant when you think we won't have a planet to live on if the things that the movie is presenting don't change. Well, I thought lots about this and here are my rambling thoughts. We work as relationship specialists and the work we do, which is also a lifetime passion and commitment for me, is raising awareness about people's "relational environment" and teaching them a new way to love, a new way of creating conscious partnerships both in their primary relationships and with all they come in contact with.

We teach people how to be in intentional and conscious relationships where both "you matter" and "I matter", where my reality and your reality can stand side by side and be validated, and where I am touched at a feeling level by your "world", by your reality whilst still holding my own. By validated I mean that you see, hear, feel and understand my world and how my way of being is true for me. It does not mean you have to agree with me. Everyone is different. You have an inner world that is different than mine and it and you are OK. There is a logic in everyone's mind.

The best example of this I always remember was shared in a seminar I went to many years ago on living a sustainable life. The young girl (she was only in her late teens!!) was committed to saving “old-growth” forests in the SW of Western Australia. She went to the people whose job it was to cut down the forests and told them I’m committed to stopping you cutting down these trees and at the same time I’m committed to you having a job.

How incredibly mature and relational and validating I thought. It wasn’t “*my way or the highway*” type of thinking – I’m right and you’re wrong – it was both of our realities, both of what we want makes sense, has validity.

I can hear you asking; well how do you get around it, or solve that these two people want opposing things to happen? How these two opposing camps are going to do that wouldn’t be clear and obvious at that point– but if we are committed to validating both realities then we are on the same team and together we will come up with a new way of thinking, a new way of doing whatever is before both of us.

Let’s go back to Al Gore and his relentless attempts to get the American politicians and public and the rest of the world to hear and understand what he has been saying and putting forth for many years. It hasn’t worked. The majority hasn’t heard him. He has come up against the world of consumerism and big dollars – the place most people argue from – their wallet. He quotes “*It’s difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.*”

Carbon dioxide is the principle greenhouse gas in global warming. Over 30% of human-induced carbon dioxide is from transportation alone. How do you get someone who doesn’t believe in and isn’t committed to matters such as conscious consumerism or conscious use of energy in one’s home or car, or supporting renewable energy to do it? How do you get people to become responsible for their own carbon dioxide emissions who don’t think what they do matters – either individually or at the level of corporations, cultures or countries? Do you just take up the “I’m right” and “you’re wrong” thinking/position? It doesn’t work as Gore has discovered.

Go into any newsagency or supermarket and have a look at the covers of all the women’s popular magazines – what are they featuring? Is it about the urgency of the state the planet is in? NO! It’s about who’s going out with who, about who’s getting married to who, who’s breaking up, who’s divorcing..... Check them out – the far majority are about the break-downs and the break-ups – there are very few “happy ever-afters”. What a skewed sort of modeling or picture this gives our young people to aspire to. Relationships are not working! We as a Western culture don’t know how to do them well. We are not relationally intelligent at the primary personal level and thus either at the larger interpersonal level. What’s more we don’t even know this about ourselves, or if we do, we don’t own up about it and seek help to change it.

Al gives two examples that I want to share that help me to illustrate my point. One is the familiar one of the frog jumping in the pot of hot water compared to one sitting in a pot of water that is being brought slowly to the boil. The first frog will jump straight out while the second one will stay in there till it’s cooked -I’m not sure who did this experiment but most of us have heard it somewhere or other.

The other is Al's personal poignant story of being a young boy growing up on the family farm enjoying cutting the tobacco that was one of the crops they grew. For him there was no distinction between work and play he enjoyed it so much. He goes on to share about how his sister who smoked from an early age and did so throughout her life died of lung cancer. He shares after that how their family stopped growing tobacco and how they hadn't joined the dots in growing tobacco and dieing from lung cancer. His words were something like... "you wouldn't want to die that way".

It's like we don't join the dots, we don't get it till it's too late. We don't know that we aren't relationally and environmentally "intelligent" and skilled..... We stay sitting in the pot of water till we .....

Here then is some information about relationships:

**STATISTIC:** Couples usually don't get help for their problems in their relationships until 6 years after that problem arises – which is often 6 years too late – in my opinion it's always too late (even if the couples stay together) for the family to have to experience the pain and hurt of years of conflict, disconnection, unhappiness and often hopelessness. As well keep in mind, half of all marriages that end do so in the first seven years.

**THE MYTH:** We should know how to do relationships and if we just work harder it will change. The problem is we have to work smarter, not harder and we need to **learn how to** behave in different ways. Doing what we already know how to do will only get us more of what we have already got.

**STATISTIC:** the earlier in their relationship that a couple goes to counseling or relationship education the more likely will their relationship be effective as well as any counseling that they may do at any time. Yet going to couples therapy/education still carries a stigma.

**THE MYTH and STIGMA** - that there must be something wrong with the relationship if they need to see a counselor and especially before they are married. Says 30-year old newly wed. *"I think if my fiancée approached me about doing pre-marital therapy, I would think maybe marriage isn't the right path for us and would probably rethink whether she was the right one for me to spend the rest of my life with."*

**STATISTICS:** in Australia we have a divorce rate where less than 1 in 2 marriages succeed - in Australia every 10 minutes there is a divorce and more than half of those divorces involve children still living at home - over 1.3 million kids live away from their father! The death rate among divorced men is much higher than for other men. Alcohol-related diseases and suicide account for many of the deaths. Separated men die through suicide 10 times more than road accidents and 7 lives are lost each day to suicides and 5 of them are male. The cost both financially and emotionally of all this is huge. Try finding out what getting a divorce lawyer costs for starters!!

**THE MYTH:** relationship education is too expensive.

**STATISTIC and MYTH:** Generally men think they have to be dying or that there has to be major crisis for them to seek assistance. You think you should fix your own problems and that it isn't OK, and generally that it is a sign of weakness to ask for

help. Generally 60 - 70% of men are "dragged along" to our workshops under threat of divorce/separation.

**FACT:** The repeated comment we hear from the men at the end of the workshop is how sad they are to realize how much damage and pain could have been avoided if they had the knowledge and skills years earlier. We repeatedly hear comments like: ***"It is quite amazing how simple things are when we have the right tools."***

By the way, the other fact it is important for men to know is that 2/3rds of divorces are filed by women most of whom still love their partners!!

## **SO HERE'S TEN THINGS TO DO TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS** (We must put them into practice☺)

### **1) Seek help early.**

Learn the skills needed to be in relationship. Get a "marital road map". Learn the skills of communication so that both "You matter" and "I matter".

**EVERYONE** no matter how old or how long they have been in relationship will benefit from relationship education and needs to learn about what is **really** going on in relationships and what your marriage/relationship is trying to teach you and the skills/tools necessary to make love last. The divorce figures above mean that everyone will have experienced the grief of failed relationships either personally or through someone they know.

### **2) In all relationships we must honour the "otherness" or reality/perspective of the other and assume we are two separate people.**

Our challenge is to validate the reality of the other whilst still holding onto our own. To create a "we-ness". Our job is to commit to doing what the young girl above did in saving the trees and the jobs of the loggers at the same time.

Take the opportunity of a minimum of once per week in the next few weeks to really understand the other's point of view when you disagree with them – try it with your partner, or it might be your child screaming for something you don't want them to have, or your teenager, or someone at work doing something opposite to the way you think it should be done, or it might be a politician. Really enter their world and validate their way and let yourself be influenced by their reality. Practice "walking a mile in their moccasins" not forgetting that you have to take yours off to put theirs on! Honour their "otherness" and observe what comes up for you and learn from it. We teach "radical otherness" as a spiritual path.

### **3) You can be "right" or you can be in relationship.**

People get so polarized in their thinking. I'm right – you're wrong! This is the way, the truth! I love Rumi's quote: *"Beyond 'right-thinking' and 'wrong-thinking' there is a field. I'll meet you there."*

If one of you loses in any relationship then you both lose. This goes against our mainstream competitive consciousness that is especially propagated in sport, business and politics that there is only winning and coming first. Notice how you take "coming second".

### **4) Ask what is good for the relationship, not just what is good for me.**

Become committed to clearing up what gets in the way of you being close and connected to your partner or the other. In other words uncover what is the unconscious agenda/"baggage" you bring to all your adult relationships? Ask yourself

what is it like living with me, being in relationship with me? If you are courageous ask others around you the same question – especially when you are at your worst! Remember relationships have an unconscious purpose. We all have needs that didn't get met in childhood and in adulthood (even though we deny it) we need our partners and significant other relationships to meet these needs and give us what we never got. Unfortunately we are attracted to, and tend to partner with people who are most inadequately able to meet our needs!! We are unconsciously drawn to those who have some of the best and worst characteristics of the people who raised us. We all carry around inside us an image/collage (this is what we call the **Imago** which is Latin for image) of the way people who love us will treat us and the way we will respond to and treat them. This is the **unconscious agenda** we bring to our relationships that needs changing. This is going on with all those who irritate and bug us out there in the world.

**5) Love (as well as respect) is a DECISION.**

It is **not just** a feeling. It is a **decision we make** and we make it every day, every minute, in the way that **we behave** with one another. “Love is a verb”, a doing word. **It is something that you do.** What do you do daily to bring more love and respect into your relationships?

**6) Become a love-finder instead of a fault-finder.**

One of my teachers, Hedy Schleifer, made a joke recently and said: Do you know that almost everyone in our culture has D.D.D.? What's that?... you ask.....It's Delight Deficit Disorder! Don't you think that's a great concept?.....I am going to invite you to look at yourself and life in a completely new way today. My invitation is for you to let yourself be touched more deeply than ever before.....let yourself experience delight.....just as an experiment, just for today.....(or everyday, is even better). Look at your partner or the other with curiosity and new eyes, listen with new ears, as if you've never seen or heard them before.

Find something in them that delights you, something that you adore about them..... Go ahead,.....if that feels too hard to do, just imagine it, and it's International “Take-a-Big-Risk-Day”! If finding delight feels too much of a stretch then look for what you can appreciate/acknowledge/value/are grateful for about the other. Do this daily. Keep focused on what you find right about them rather than what's wrong. For any relationships to succeed there must be a **rich climate of positivity** – in fact we teach there needs to be a **commitment to zero negativity!**

**7) Conflict is inevitable and normal and is supposed to happen** in relationships and in fact is a good thing!!

Conflict is not the enemy – within all conflict is the opportunity for growth and healing. To quote Harville Hendrix, “**Conflict is growth trying to happen**”. We just need to learn the code to unravel the growth. We have a 90-10 formula in conflict: 10% is about the present; 90% is about the past.

8) We teach that every time the other is behaving in a “crazy way” that seems bewildering to you (or as well when **you** behave in a way that you can't understand how or why you could possibly have done that!) there is a **child trying to tell a story** and our job is to make it SAFE enough for that story to be told.

**Safety means eliminating criticism, judgment, sarcasm, defensiveness, withdrawing, shame, blame and contempt of the other and of ourselves.** As well

all conflict is held in place by unmet needs of that child trying to tell the story. When the story gets told and is held in a validated and empathic way the needs get met and the issues dissolve.

**9) In every frustration there is a double gift for the relationship.**

Under all frustrations there is a need that is unmet in the present as well as it was likely not met in the past. For the person with the frustration transforming your frustration and complaint into your need and getting your need met is a gift for you as well as for the relationship.

For the one that triggered the frustration your greatest growth and life changes will come from stretching into doing the very things that will make your partner feel loved and cared for.

I've written about this before yet it is so important I am going to repeat it in this list. What does your partner or the other ask you to do that is important to them that you don't do very well? It might be listening, or talking, or spending time doing things together, or feeling, or touching, or laughing and having fun, or coming home early from work, or speaking gently, or dancing, or valuing the way they do things, or going on holidays, or being on time, or making love, .....or a million and one things. **What does your partner or the other ask you to do that you continually reject?** This, believe it or not is your greatest growth edge and opportunity for you to grow into being more of who you truly are. Doing what is hardest for you to give or be is stretching into a part of you that you had to cut off to be accepted in the environment that was surrounding you as you were growing up.

**10) Have high standards and learn to repair the argument** by continuously transforming your frustration into needs and getting those needs met.

In the most successful relationships they refuse to accept hurtful behaviour from one another and they know how and have the tools to repair the situation before an argument gets completely out of control and have a range of successful repair strategies. **Aiming for a state of zero negativity** creates safety for both people and all those around you.

Says Al, *"Global warming is the greatest threat to humankind in history, and it is happening now. We have the tools, the technology, and the means to create a cleaner, safer and brighter energy future."*

So for me, as well as reducing my carbon dioxide emissions and becoming "carbon neutral", I'm committing to contributing to saving the planet by continuing and further expanding my teaching people to become relationally mature and intelligent. Imagine where we might be environmentally if Al Gore and the American people and government had the relational skills and followed the 10 points above.

Also please go to [www.climatecrisis.net/pdf/10things.pdf](http://www.climatecrisis.net/pdf/10things.pdf) and check out what you are doing to contribute to the climate change and the 10 simple things you can do to make a big difference – especially if a significant amount of us do them.

As far as relationship education goes we also have the tools, the strategies/processes and the coaching for you to create exceptional relationships. In all your relationships I invite you to check out what behaviours you can and will change today to make a difference.

I earnestly call and challenge you to take action both environmentally and relationally. Remember we are all connected and all that we do does make a difference and has a consequence and an impact. Our world and our future depends on you and your relationships.

In **every** relationship **You do** make a difference.

