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Healing Relationships is an Inside Job: When the Connection Between You and Another Person is Strained or Broken

Arlene Harder
Personhood Press (June 2011)
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This book is for those who have tried to convince themselves that their relationship with their spouse, child, or other significant person would be better if only that person would change. And that they must help show that person how to change…even though it isn't working.

According to Arlene Harder, a marriage and family therapist, an effective way to heal a strained relationship is by discovering what needs to shift within oneself to create a positive environment in which to develop better relations. "A healthy relationship cannot be imposed from without, but can only come from within," she states in Healing Relationships is an Inside Job.

Harder writes from both her professional experience with clients and her personal experience with her son. She addresses, for example, a parent's expectations for a child's development: When a child turns out to be a different person than a parent expects, the parent often tries to change the child. Not only is this approach ineffective, she argues, but it can lead to estrangement and heartbreak.

The book's first eight chapters offer principals designed to teach readers how to build a healthy relationship out of one that is damaged. Each chapter provides an experiential exercise, which gives readers an opportunity to turn the written word into a course of action. In the third chapter, "Exploring How You Became Who You Are Today," family rituals, rules, and myths are discussed; it also notes influences that shape personalities. The healing exercise in this chapter is titled "Why Do You Think You Are Who You Are?"

Other chapters deal with managing emotions, setting goals for relationships, letting go of regrets and learning to forgive, strengthening one's true self, and preventing one's ego from destroying love.

Harder posits that a strong relationship consists of both people experiencing a feeling of respect, a sense of closeness, and the freedom to be themselves. Additionally, with a romantic partner, most people also want sexual intimacy.

Healing Relationships is an Inside Job is a considerate book, relevant for everyone in challenging relationships. While inclusion of case histories might have better emphasized each lesson, the book is helpful, easy-to-read, and likely to spark further contemplation.

PENNY HASTINGS (April 18, 2011)

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