

Rena Reiser

Relationships. Why don't we get the RESULTS we want?

Have you ever considered that you just might be a used car salesman? Used car salesmen are the stuff of legend. We all have an image in our mind of a guy who talks out of both sides of his mouth and would sell his grandma's wig just to close a deal.

What if I told you that we all have a used car salesmen within?

I am using this jarring imagery in order to introduce you to a concept known as a transactional relationship. It's the notion that my interaction with this person, this item, whatever it is, is in order to achieve a specific result. I provide x and receive y. A transaction. Like every time I go to the store. I pay money, I get milk. I am here to achieve my results.

I'd like to share a classic used car salesman story I just heard to exemplify this point.

I recently heard a story about someone's husband going to a used car lot to buy a family car. He felt sure that this would be a smooth process because 1) he knew what model he was looking for 2) he knew roughly what year it would be from 3) he had a set budget of what he was willing to pay 4) he was a little bit naive. Here is what actually occurred.

Man: I would like to buy a small car.

Salesman: I have a beautiful large sedan that just arrived. Are you interested?

Man: No. I want a small car. Do you have those?

Salesman: Small cars...small cars...I might be able to find you something. Do you have any idea what you are looking for?

Man: Yes. I would like any of these 3 models from at least 2012. The absolute most I am willing to spend is this.

Salesman: Yes. Perfect. I have just the car for you. It is not one of the three models you mentioned. But it is from 2017 and it is just amazing. Here are all the details of the car. For your money there is nothing that is better than this car. It's safe, reliable, and super fuel efficient and this one is in nearly perfect condition.

Man: It wasn't what I thought initially but it sounds amazing. How much is it?

Salesman: 50% higher than your budgeted price.

Man: But that's the most I am willing to pay! Why would you show me a car that costs 50% more than I had budgeted?

Salesman: Well, you're going to end up taking a payment plan anyways, so you pay for another 2 years. What's the big deal?

Man: (Head explodes)

We could title this interaction, “How not to have a conversation.” The Man came in with a clear set of goals. He was looking for a certain car and was only willing to spend a certain amount of money. The salesman also had a clear goal. Fill your quota and make a big commission. Get this man to spend as much money as you possibly can. Since the two goals are in conflict, one of these two men will have to compromise. Or both will, but one will end up compromising far more than the other. Or, neither of them willing to compromise, they can terminate the relationship.

Both of them are hoping to “get something” out of this interaction. Neither of them is particularly bent on making sure the other is being heard and getting their needs met.

Let’s shift this over to some interactions that hit a little bit closer to home. See if any of these uncomfortable interactions sound familiar to you.

Our children provide a steady stream of examples of transactional relationships.

After a long day of work you arrive home to find your children in the living room. The house is a mess, there’s a lot of hitting and screaming, and possibly some bartering for hostages. You begin to immediately bark orders. Your goal is straightforward. Get this house under control and these savages (aka your kids) following orders. This informs them of their stance - to resist being controlled. They continue to rampage, ignoring your pleas. You up the ante. You scream louder and this time you lace your vocal assault with threats. Early bedtime. No snacks. No freedom until each one goes under the chuppah.

Eventually one side snaps. Either you get backup, “Wait until I tell your father”, or the tribe surrenders, heads sunk low, kowtowed into obedience, looking like a pack of zombie janitors, sniffing as they reassemble the living room.

Next up is your spouse. Your soulmate. The person you married in order to reach your shleimus. And today he has continued on his recent campaign of disorder. He has once again “refused” to follow protocol and put his finished dishes in the sink. You take up your stance. He must repent his ways and fall in line with the clearly stated house policy.

You open with a patiently constructed opener - “How many times do I have to point it out to you? Dishes go in the sink when you are done eating. Is that too much to ask for? If you really cared about me I wouldn’t need to remind you”.

He takes his stance - to defend his ability to care for you and follow house policy. “That’s not fair. I usually remember. It’s just that today I happened to be in the middle of a call from work and I got distracted. On the one day that I happen to lose track, that’s the day you decide to do a house check up! If *you* loved *me*, you would notice how frequently I *do remember*.”

One side has to cave. Either you walk away, steam still billowing out of your ears, like a mini Vesuvias, or your husband takes special pains to remember to clean up after himself, each dish a fresh wound to his pride.

Last but not least, your relationship with yourself.

You are getting fed up with your body. It just doesn't look like those ladies you think it should look like. You get upset with it. You take your stance. It must obey your will and thin out.

You tell it - "Hey! Listen up. I have decided to only feed you raw foods for the next 3 months, and in return, you will grow stronger and healthier."

Your body takes its stance. "You do what you need to do. I'm going to endlessly beg you for cookies until you go crazy from it because you're starving me".

One of you will cave in. Either you will steadfastly devote yourself to your diet regardless of your body's pleas, or your body will harass you every day of your diet until you devour a box full of cookies out of desperation to silence it.

These are all transactional relationships. They are relationships we engage in in order to attain results. They are about us and our personal goals.

On the other hand, there is a different type of relationship one can try to engage in called "transformational relationships". The goal in a transformational relationship is to leave the interaction a better, more fulfilled person, whether or not I achieved my initial goals. A transformational relationship focuses on a powerful connection with the person you are interacting with. The goal is to understand and be understood.

Which isn't to say that you can't have expectations of the person you marry, or your children, or even a customer at work. You can be disappointed in their mistakes, encourage them to improve, and have dreams of a better future...you just can't be married to the results. In other words, when you get married, you are married to a person. Not a result.

For people focused on personal growth and development -- assuming you have a value of connection -- then a transactional relationship does not align with your value of connection. Because you value connection, you need to be aware that whatever work you're doing isn't focused on something transactional.

When we go back to our examples above, and replace transactional with transformational, the scenarios play out very differently.

After a long day of work you arrive home to find your children in the living room. The house is a mess, there's a lot of hitting and screaming, and possibly some bartering for hostages. You immediately take a deep breath and sum up the situation. "Proud warriors! The chieftess, your mother, has arrived. What do you need right now? How can I provide for you?"

They size you up, making sure you are a friend and not a foe. "Awwww, Mom! We're just playing!"

Obviously.

You reply, “How can I help? Do you need space to run and be wild? Are you hungry? Bored?”

Silence.

“Well, we are a little bored.”

Now you have what you need. “Can I take you all to the park?”

General agreement from the group. “Great. While I am putting away groceries, please take 10 minutes to organize this room.”

Neither side snaps and neither side gives in. Ultimately you want calm and order in the house, but the deeper goal is to understand your children -- not to control them. This is a relationship where both sides are willing to come halfway because they feel heard.

Next up is your spouse. Your soulmate. The person you married in order to reach your shleimus. And today he has continued on his recent campaign of disorder. He has once again “refused” to follow protocol and put his finished dishes in the sink. You take up your stance. Understand why this is a pattern he follows.

“Dear, I noticed you’ve been working on putting dishes in the sink after supper, but you frequently forget. Is there some way we could get it to be a more consistent habit?”

He looks at you like a small puppy, assuring himself that you have come from a place of love. “Oh goodness. I’m sorry dear. I keep forgetting. Whenever I have these calls after supper it just slips my mind.”

“So...how can we create a habit? Could you take your plate in hand right away, even if you have a phone call? Or, can you put an alert in your phone, reminding you?”

“Oh. I guess I could put an alert on my phone. That shouldn’t be so hard. Not for something important to you.”

“Thanks, dear. I appreciate that.”

No emasculating. Just a feeling of support in both directions. Because even though the goal is to feel like your husband cares about how hard you work in the house, your deeper goal is to be connected and growing together.

Last but not least, your relationship with yourself.

You are getting fed up with your body. It just doesn’t look like those ladies you think it should look like. You get upset with it. You take your stance. It is the body Hashem gave me and it is highly calibrated to keep me healthy and tranquil.

You tell it - "Hey! Listen up. I want to feed you more nourishing foods. I am curious to see if this will help you feel more strong and balanced. If, for whatever reason, I take it too extreme, we can always step back."

Our body takes its stance. "I appreciate that. You work for me and I'll work for you".

You may find that your new food plan won't cause you to lose weight, but it also won't have you bingeing. When you do not expect certain results, you can be open to whatever positive results you do achieve. And you get it all without the stress and torture of fighting with yourself and expecting things from your body it may not be capable of.

Even our used car salesman may have been surprised by what a transformational relationship could accomplish for him. As it is, the man in the story left and purchased a car elsewhere. Had he caved in to the transaction, he would have always felt bitter toward the salesman who pressured him into a decision he hadn't planned for. Had he listened to the man's actual guidelines and set him in the right direction, the man would most likely have been open to hear reasons why he may want to consider a more expensive purchase. And even if he was fixed on the more economic option, at least he sold him what the man wanted, and they both could have left feeling satisfied. And they built a real relationship on top of all that. The man will be more likely to encourage others to purchase cars with this salesman instead of grunting and eye-rolling when people ask him about his experience.

To put it succinctly, the best goal is to not have to have a goal no matter what. Rather, to look at life as an opportunity for connection and understanding. When we talk to our spouses, kids, coworkers, and even ourselves from a place of transformation, and not transaction, we will often surprise ourselves with the results.

When you are looking to put some plan into action involving your marriage, your children's chinuch, your job, your lifestyle, etc., make sure your goal is not to move mountains but to be ready *to be moved* in new and amazing ways.

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