



Love is a Verb

Donna Daisy, Ph.D. explains why loving is a choice each of us makes every day.

“The deep sense of connection, worth and belonging that love provides is as close to heaven as we mortals experience on earth.”

~ Joan Borysenko, Ph.D.

Three years ago, finding myself in the role of full time caregiver definitely tested the true meaning of the phrase, “I love you” that I’d said so glibly to my husband throughout our many years of marriage. When Charles first became ill, I wasn’t prepared to abandon life as I’d known it. On the contrary, I tried to maintain many of the activities I had enjoyed, as well as work part time. I was standing with one foot in a boat and the other on the land, with no strong commitment to either. It didn’t take long before I became resentful and stressed to the max.

One day, when I said, “I love you,” the words sounded hollow even to me. I was saying, “I love you” to a man who needed a considerable amount of assistance, while at

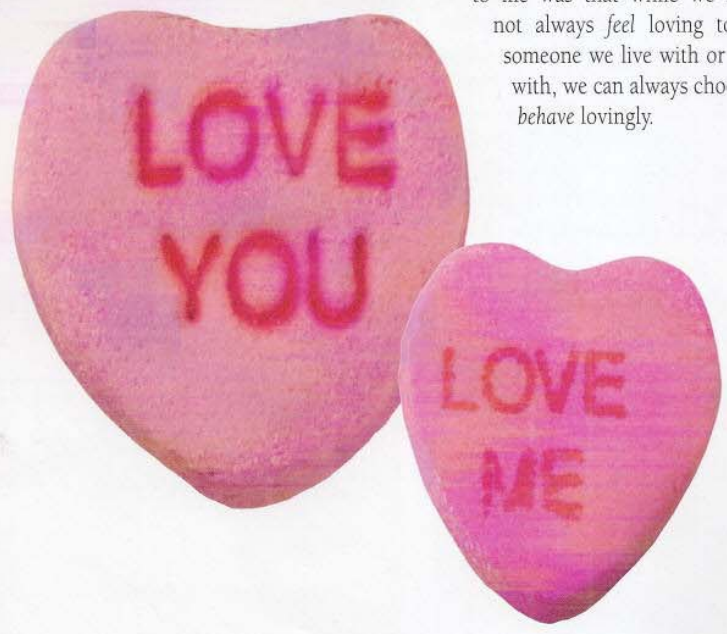
the same time feeling angry and crabby, wanting to get back to whatever project I was working on at the time. I spent most of that day disgruntled and not particularly happy about anything in my life. I was disappointed in my self-serving attitude, while at the same time begrudging the time requirements of my new role. I felt I had no control over my life.

Often when experiencing a “dark night of the soul” such as this, I turn to my books. On this occasion, I was drawn to James C. Hunter’s, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the*

True Essence of Leadership. As surprising as it may seem in a book about organizational leadership, one chapter was about love, which Hunter defines as a verb — a love of behavior and choice, not the sentimental feeling that usually comes to mind when we think of the word.

CHOOSING LOVE

As I read the chapter, I realized that just saying, “I love you” or feeling those warm, fuzzy moments isn’t really what love is all about. It’s about our actions, even when we’re upset or stressed. The concept that really spoke to me was that while we might not always *feel* loving toward someone we live with or work with, we can always choose to *behave* lovingly.





Loving behavior starts with a commitment to empathy, kindness, patience, respect, honesty and forgiveness. But demonstrating that commitment can be easily jeopardized by the way we communicate. Unfortunately, I've found that when I get angered or frustrated by the words and/or actions of someone I care about, the communication skills I've spent a lifetime trying to develop can go right out the window. Old patterns of behavior don't necessarily change overnight, but we can work toward gradually strengthening communications and

behaviors that lead to more peaceful and loving relationships.

While we all enjoy the warm fuzzy feelings we experience when we think about love, in the end, it's our actions and communication with people that put the meat on the bones of the words, "I love you."

Donna Daisy, Ph.D., has spent 25 years as a therapist, life coach, and author. More recently, she has pursued research into the topic of aging consciously. Donna lives in Naples with her husband.

PUT LOVE IN ACTION

- Stay focused on what you're trying to achieve when you communicate. Is your goal to convey peace or aggression?
 - Be a good listener. Listening carefully to what the other person is trying to communicate can speak volumes about how much you care.
 - Practice the art of "no blame" truth. Comment on the person's behavior and how it makes you feel ("When you're late for dinner, I feel discounted and frustrated.") rather than attack their character ("You're late again. How can you be so thoughtless?") Sarcasm and anger bring others down to the same level.
 - Asking for what you want rather than expecting someone to read your mind goes a long way toward keeping the peace.
 - Sprinkle the tone of your communication with kindness. People enjoy knowing that they're respected whether at home or at work.
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