

The Importance of Being Relational

In the Lakota cultures, there is an expression, “All my Relations” which reflects the belief that we are all connected.

The South Africans have the philosophy of Ubuntu. In his 1999 book, *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu explains Ubuntu: “A person with Ubuntu...has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished.”

Science also shows that we are all connected.

“We are all connected; To each other, biologically. To the earth, chemically. To the rest of the universe atomically.”

- Neil deGrasse Tyson

Psychology tells us that developing healthy bonds with caretakers is necessary for healthy relationships. While the theory of attachment originated in the 19th Century, the reality goes back much further, having a caretaker is required for the actual survival of the child.

If an infant is not given proper love and attention, she may fail to thrive and even die. Elderly people who are not connected to others are more likely to be depressed and may have their own failure to thrive.

And, according to a [Harvard study](#):

Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives, the study revealed. Those ties protect people from life’s discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.

There has been much written about the distress in the legal profession – the high rates of suicide, addiction, and depression. Could the distress be connected to our approach to relationships? Psychologist and Law Professor Susan Swaim Daicoff addressed this in *Lawyer Know Thyself, A Psychological Analysis of Personality Strengths and Weakness* [p.143, her footnotes omitted].

“Empirical studies support the concept that law school fosters certain stressful conditions. First, there is the pressure or tendency in law school to keep interpersonal relationships on a professional and competitive basis, rather than a cooperative basis, which fosters a competitive environment. This competitive environment promotes isolation. Because social isolation or lack of social support is linked to lawyer distress, this environment likely contributes to emotional distress among law students.”

Perhaps, the key to distress in the legal profession, to healthier, happier lawyers and clients is to be more relational.