

Prioritizing Preferences

After my fiancée and I broke up, I was both devastated and relieved. I was devastated because here was a woman I had been friends with for eight years, and romantically involved with for over half of that. I was also relieved. In the last year we were together, though she and I shared an address, we did not live together; though we claimed to be lovers, we were barely friends.

There were many reasons we had grown apart. We were visited by the holy trinity of relationship conflict: family, sex, and money. We also couldn't agree on where to live, or how or who would do what to clean where we lived.

I am not concerned with divvying up blame, for there is more than enough to go around and I deserve a fair share of it. In particular, I realize that I treated my racquetball partner better than my romantic partner.

With my racquetball partner, I always assume the best, and am quick to acknowledge that I am fallible. Racquetball is a quick game. Very often shots are hit low against one of the walls, or one will rush to hit a ball before it bounces twice. It is not always easy to tell whether the ball just made it to the wall or bounced just before it; it is not easy to tell whether my partner just made it to the ball or just missed it.

Truth be told, she has called some shots that I think are just wrong; even more certainly, I have called shots that she would have had to bite her lip on. I never, however, have thought that my partner cheated.

With my romantic partner, I would too readily assume the worst. When she would call to say that she had to work late and couldn't meet me, I readily assumed that she was just blowing me off. When she didn't wash the dishes as she had promised, I automatically assumed that she just expected me to do everything around the apartment. When she fell asleep in another room, tired from studying, I would assume that she didn't want to sleep with me. I would too rarely give her the benefit of the doubt, and more readily just doubt her.

While I voluntarily offer to redo questionable plays in racquetball, I would suddenly feel as if I were perfect off the court. I would argue with my romantic partner without backing down, without thinking that I might have been wrong, without seeing situations from her point of view.

With my racquetball partner, I am willing to take instruction. I actively try to improve my racquetball skills. I read about the game, practice (although not as much as I should), and try to stay fit so that I can play well.

With my romantic partner, I assumed that being human made me knowledgeable about human relationships. I did not feel it necessary to read books on relationships, relegating all such books as "hokey."

I always show my racquetball partner courtesy; if I am going to be late, I call. My racquetball partner and I also have standing games. That is, I make time to play. I look forward to playing, and I don't cancel a game just because "I don't feel like playing." Of course, there is always something that I could do instead of playing racquetball. I have classes to prepare, articles to read, papers to grade.

Too often, my romantic partner and I would cancel dates, cancel dinners, and cancel time spent together simply because we were tired. We repeatedly postponed trips until a better time, because there was always something else we had to do. It was as if we kept

putting “us” off till we had nothing else we had to do. I realize now that there will always be something else to do: there will always be dinner to make, trash to take out, the broken cabinet to fix, articles to read, papers to grade. There will never come a time when I will not need to make choices among things that I wish to do or people that I want to spend time with. I will always need to put my priorities in order.

I now do not believe that a romantic relationship can survive, much less flourish, without a commitment to make it flourish. Next time, I will take the time and assume the best, and perhaps not end up in a few years hating a woman I once loved. I will treat my next romantic partner better than my racquetball partner.

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