

Relationship Rehab Show

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What is Your Relationship Legacy?

In my Masters Degree program, we each had to draw our family tree as far back as we had information. Then we named any dominant characteristics that we knew of for each person. It was interesting to see that farming and medical professions ran in my family tree. My generation's past were hard working folks that were responsible for feeding and caring for their own families as well as others. On the negative side, emotional distance, and in some cases, abuse blossomed into a preponderance of addictions. Other students saw domestic violence and even murders that were frequently sprinkled among the branches of their family trees.

Everyone receives a relationship legacy. For most it's a mixture of positive and negative qualities. Some have more negative than positive in their legacy. Others have more positive than negative. But like the DNA we inherit from our ancestors, we cannot escape being the recipient of a relationship legacy, as well.

From that legacy, you may be grateful, as I am for the positive qualities that were modeled for you. I find myself cleaning my yard tools before putting them away like my dad did. I also find I keep my home clean, tidy, and to the best of my ability, beautiful, the way my mom did.

About the more negative qualities handed down to you, you have two choices:

1. Blame your parents, your history, your ancestors and unconsciously duplicate their patterns in negative relationship habits of your own, thus handing down the negative relationship patterns to your children and grandchildren. Carl Jung says, (my paraphrase) "You either bring unconscious things up to the conscious level and work through them, or they remain unconsciously controlling your life and you blame fate."

Chapter 7 of [How to Stay Married & Love It!](#), addresses our tendency to follow the pattern we inherited even when we desperately want to do something better. Natalie Angier in a column for the *New York Times* titled,

Analysis: Parental Influence, wrote, “parents...impress their ways of doing things so firmly on their offspring that the behaviors...practically look inherited in their strength.” This includes not just behaviors, but whole belief systems, as well.

2. Or, you choose to become self-aware...noticing any tendency in yourself toward duplicating the negative patterns handed to you. You become conscious, and consciously make choices to change negative patterns into more positive ones for yourself and your family.

If you find yourself duplicating uncontrollable anger, then learn effective anger management skills. (I’ll be spending a whole episode on managing emotions in a few weeks.)

If avoiding conflict is your pattern, until the conflict builds up and explodes, then take a communication course such as the www.MillionaireMarriageClub.com to learn how conflict can be a doorway to greater intimacy. You’ll lose your fear of conflict and stop hiding!

If you find yourself out of balance...taking better care of others than you do of yourself...read [Pungent Boundaries](#) and/or [Your Inner Child: a Path to Healing and Freedom](#) to learn how to love yourself appropriately and set healthy boundaries to care for yourself. Did you know that whenever you set a genuinely healthy boundary for yourself it is automatically good for everyone else *whether they like it or not?!*

BLAME is a RELATIONSHIP CANCER!

Stop blaming your parents or your partner for the problems in your life. On some mysterious level that remains unseen until we choose to look, to a large degree, we create our own reality. What reality do you want to experience? Do you want to take the easy way out and find a different partner in order to get a better reality? In a small percentage of cases, that may be called for. (Untreated addiction, domestic violence, child abuse.) But in the greatest majority of cases, it’s a new *you* that is needed, not a new spouse.

An acquaintance of mine divorced his wife and married the woman with whom he was having an affair. Ten years later he confided to my sister that they are now fighting about the same issues that were the “problem” in his first marriage.

What legacy do you want to leave behind you? I remember visualizing myself standing in the middle of a river with the legacy of dysfunctional relationships flowing down to me. I fiercely determined that I would change the course of the river. I would not pass on the patterns of dysfunction that I had inherited. I have made many mistakes. There's no doubt about that! But I have also made many changes in myself and how I relate to others.

What legacy will you leave?

Let's change the world by changing our legacies!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Landrum".