

HOW DO YOU REALLY LOVE SOMEONE?

THE FOUR CONDITIONS OF LOVE

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Faith, hope and love: the greatest is love. —Saint Paul



YOU have heard it before—to really love someone is to love unconditionally. I would like to challenge this often-quoted phrase—does true love come without any conditions?

I have two teenage daughters and when the inevitable day comes whereby one of them proclaims “He loves me”, do I let her go into her partner’s arms without any conditions, prerequisites and expectations?

Do I love my daughter enough to help her set certain conditions that will prove the genuineness of the potential suitor? In other words, wouldn’t it be my fatherly responsibility to lead my daughter to set a standard for discerning between real love and mere infatuation?

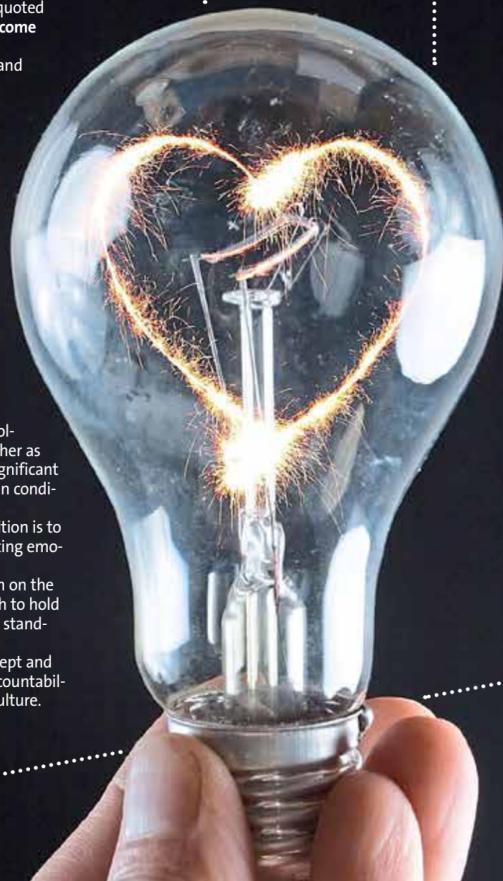
After all, without standards, one is unable to love and lead.

While it is true that we show tolerance and acceptance of each other as fellow human beings in life, no significant growth can take place until certain conditions are set in place.

To love someone *without* condition is to invite a love that is based on fleeting emotions with no anchoring depth.

To love someone *with* condition on the other hand, means to love enough to hold him or her accountable to certain standards of integrity.

While “love” is a common concept and term used in songs, the word “accountability” is hardly heard of in today’s culture.



Martin Luther King Jr, president of the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA), was arrested on Sept 3, 1958, outside the Montgomery courthouse for loitering after he was denied entrance and asked to leave a hearing for Ralph D. Abernathy, vice president of the association. This image symbolises the beginning of the civil rights struggle in Montgomery and across the nation, and King was at the forefront of that struggle. — AP Photo/Montgomery Advertiser, Charles Moore

1 THE CONDITION OF ACCOUNTABILITY

To love and lead is the courage to hold oneself and others accountable to what is right and true.

Accountability is about taking personal ownership to rise above one’s own circumstances and take charge to do what is right.

When I truly love someone, wouldn’t I desire for that person to be accountable? If I were to come to his or her rescue all the time and not allow for the lessons of personal responsibility to hit home, isn’t that unloving in the long run?

In fact, to love someone without holding them to the condition of accountability is to set them up to be a victim of circumstances in the future.

Here are five possible symptoms that may indicate that you are loving someone without the condition of accountability:

1. When things go wrong, this person naturally plays the blame game.
2. Their preferences become the centre of attention. They would often ask, “Why can’t people understand me?”
3. Nothing seems to please them. Every inconvenience is used as an excuse for not doing more.
4. The more you do for them, the higher

their sense of entitlement.

5. They lack initiative; they expect you to do everything (in the name of unconditional love).

According to the 2005 *State of the Industry Report* by Association for Talent Development (ATD), formerly American Society for Training and Development, 21% of companies outsourcing training are creating higher levels of ownership and joint accountability, to achieve better outcomes.

Most companies are not short of setting goals for employees. However, when results are short of expectation, accountability conversations are not forthcoming. Silent love is not love that leads to growth. To love is to love enough to confront.

I recalled a situation where a managing director of a factory had to confront a line manager for non-performance of which he is accountable for. Because of the attitude of truthful love, the conversation uncovered a mismatch of talent to the job tasks.

The line manager was then referred to take up another position in another company. Although he had to be managed out, the relationship and line of communication with the managing director remained strong. In fact, he was extremely thankful for the tough but honest conversation.

Are you leading from unconditional silence or from the condition of truth?

2 THE CONDITION OF ALERTNESS

To love and lead is to be aware of how one’s action impacts others.

Babies, although the cutest creatures ever, also come in a bundle of self-serving expectations.

We are reminded of this fact whenever a baby cries for attention and throws a tantrum because his or her needs are not served. The paradoxical observation is this: The more attention you pay to a child’s selfish wants, the less they will appreciate your loving actions.

All wise parents will affirm that loving a child entails putting in place loving boundaries and firm guidance rather than giving in to every whimsical demand of the child.

What a child interprets as unloving could actually be parental love expressed with conditions conducive for long-term growth. The alert parent is someone who loves the child with a firm mindset today for the sake of tomorrow.



Here are five possible symptoms that may indicate that you are loving someone without the condition of alertness:

1. Is there a sense of respect to others? Without the boundary of respect, love turns into a self-seeking activity.

2. Is there a sense of service? In other words, does this individual love enough to care?
3. Is there a sense of indifference? There is little awareness of what is taking place around them, demonstrating a lack of awareness.
4. Does this person simply react to the immediate circumstances or has he thoughtfully considered the right response?
5. Does this person take time to communicate with others? Or do they prefer to be alerted only to their own desires?

Whether it is at the workplace or at home, we live and love within a community. If love is not coupled with the condition of being alert to the needs of others, then this sense of loving is self-centred and self-serving.

To love and lead requires an external focus—being sensitive to the needs of others. If love is not practised with this conditional premise, then it becomes a self-seeking adventure.

3 THE CONDITION OF AVAILABILITY

To love and lead is to be willing to change one’s schedule and priorities to help others.

Someone once said that love is spelt as T-I-M-E. When I lead with love, it means that I have placed upon myself the condition of carving out time for those who are under my care.

How I spend my time is thus a reflection of who (or what) I really love. On a practical level, the details of your calendar are a reflection of what is truly important to you.

But then what about those who proclaim that quality time trumps quantity time? The proponents of this philosophy would claim that one only needs to focus on the depth of the effort rather than the breadth. Realistically speaking, is this really possible?

What if Usain Bolt stated that as far as his athletic training is concerned, he is only going to spend quality training time rather than the quantity of hours

invested in the building of his running career? Would he still be the fastest man in the world today?

I don’t think so. The fact of the matter is that time flows in the direction of what truly matters. For that reason, loving enough to lead means that one ought to be able to sacrifice their time to lead the ones they love.

Here are five possible symptoms that may indicate that you are leading without the condition of availability:

1. You get easily irritated when there are interruptions to your schedule, especially by family members or those close to you.
2. People seldom consult you or ask for advice because you probably won’t have the time for them anyway (at least that’s the impression).
3. You gain more satisfaction from work achievement than being available for relationships.
4. You do not have the patience to guide and mentor others.
5. You may claim to love your followers



but you are rarely available for casual conversations.

It is interesting that from Gallup’s study of employee engagement, it was observed that the rate of disengagement caused by an absent manager is significantly higher compared to that of a negative manager.

A leader who truly loves his or her fol-

lowers must be a leader who is present and be seen as one who identifies with the grass roots. There are many things that pull a leader in all different directions, but if they pull you away from being present with the team, then this is hardly loving at all.

Hence, here’s the simple human truth—to truly love someone (especially if you are a leader), you have to show up.

4 THE CONDITION OF ATTENTIVENESS

Do not follow one’s heart, it will bring one to places one’s mind may regret.

When faced with life’s decisions, many young people appear to subscribe to the maxim of “following your heart” in order to determine their next steps. This is not a loving thing to do.

The heart (the psychological version) functions primarily as a lagging indicator of our decision, not as a leading factor. The leading element in any good decision-making process is the adherence to universal principles that stand the test of time.

For example, if someone were to ask me, “Joseph, should I marry this girl?”, my reply ought not be “Follow your heart.”

What about the aspect of common values? Life’s purpose? Financial stability? Family goals? Career considerations?

In the parenting seminars that my wife and I regularly conduct, many family issues stem from a rocky and dysfunctional marriage that began as a wonderful wedding, full of all the right emotions, but lacking in the depth of loving commitment to stay the course despite the changing circumstances.

To truly love someone, pay attention to the principle first, and the passion will follow next.

Here are five possible symptoms that may indicate that you are leading without the condition of attentiveness:

1. You are often reactive to the emotions of others. Instead of remaining calm, you act to appease the situation.
2. The advice you give, though it may appear to be loving, lacks the depth of wisdom because you do not wish to offend the other person.
3. You do not have long-term stable goals because your feelings fluctuate.
4. Your followers do not view you as being objective because of your shifting standards.
5. You are often depressed because you look to your emotions as the only sole affirmation of your decisions.

To love is to first lead your own heart. The essence of self-leadership is the ability to stay the course, fight the right battles and to pay attention to what truly matters, despite how you may feel initially.

The law of life is such that when you begin to do what is right, then the right feelings will come about, as a result of your right decision and not the other way round.

So, you want to be a loving leader? Do not follow your heart—lead it.



TO LOVE IS TO “DIE”

The greatest act of love (and mothers would instinctively agree) is to give your life away, either to raising someone or working towards a cause that makes a difference in the lives of others.

Of course, taking the *Romeo and Juliet* path is not what I am referring to. Rather, it is the path of selfless men and women like Mother Teresa, Tunku Abdul Rahman and Martin Luther King Jr, who lived their lives with such loving passion that they no longer lived for themselves.

For all intents and purposes, they sacrificed so much of themselves because the cause they lived for had overtaken them. Their lives became a loving journey towards fulfilling the conditions of leadership—the condition of being accountable, alert, available and attentive.

Someone once said, “Because until you know what you are willing to die for, you have not yet begun to live.”

Now, I am not referring to physical death here. Rather, it is about the sort of loving commitment to a lifetime purpose that is actually worth living for.

Why not start living this life today?

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