

# SOURCE LINES

## Summertime and the Stars

Summertime is for vacations. Whether you spend time at a cottage with family and friends, enjoy working in your garden, swimming, or playing golf, having time to relax is important. One of my favourite summer pastimes, after an active summer day at the cottage, is to gaze at the stars in the night sky. By August, when the bugs are not as bad and the night sky is clear, I love to watch how the dusk turns to night. To



watch as the stars begin to appear - to find The Big Dipper and the Milky Way. I love to watch for falling stars. Inevitably the conversations with family and friends on a night of star gazing lead to reflection on the size of Earth in com-

parison to the Heavens and our relative significance in the Universe. Star gazing gives one perspective.

Summertime is a good time for personal reflection. There is usually enough time to ponder the big questions. What matters to me in life? Am I happy with how I spend my time? Am I content with the state of my relationships - work relationships, friendships, and family and couple relationships?

Part of having balance in one's life means having satisfying relationships. In the book **How Full is Your Bucket**, the authors Tom Rath and Donald

Clifton use the image of a bucket and a dipper to help you reflect on the nature of our relationships.

**"Everyone has an invisible bucket. We are at our best when our buckets are overflowing and at our worst when they are empty. Everyone has an invisible dipper. In each interaction we can use our dipper to fill or dip from each other's buckets. Whenever we chose to fill other's buckets we fill our own."**

These statements have a natural appeal. There is also some excellent research that supports the importance of "filling each other's buckets." By studying successful long lasting marriages and comparing them with those likely to divorce, John Gottman discovered that one could predict which couples would be together and which would not after ten years. 700 couples' were video-taped in conversation for 15 minutes. Their positive and negative interactions were measured and then the ratio of positive-to-negative interactions was calculated. The research was to test the prediction that successful marriages have 5:1 positive-to-negative interactions and couples likely to divorce have a ratio of 1:1. Ten years later the same 700 couples were contacted to follow up. The results were amazing. The predictions of which couples would divorce, based on the 15 minute observation, was 94% accurate.

These findings, that having far more positive than negative interactions increase relationship longevity and satisfaction, was also tested in the workplace. Workgroups with more positive than negative interactions were more productive. It was found that having a 3:1 positive-to-negative ratio seemed to be the ideal condition. Below this ratio productivity suffered. When the ratio climbed as high as 13:1 a "Pollyanna effect" of false optimism occurs which negatively impacts performance on a variety of measures.

**S**o how does this apply to you and me as we reflect on our lives and our relationships? Well, the authors suggest five strategies to increase positive emotions and positive relationships in your life.

**1. Stop Bucket Dipping (reduce negativity)**

Just as one needs to cap spending to stop debt and increase savings, relationships improve when we stop or reduce negative interactions. For example as parents we could stop nagging our children. Why not stop, it doesn't work anyway. At work we could stop gossiping. It never leads to anything useful or good. We all have some habits we could stop.

**2. Shine the Light on What is Right (focus on the your own or other's strengths)**

Giving people sincere complements is another way to fill someone's bucket and your own at the same time. Letting others know your own strengths means you will be called upon to do what you like and are good at.

**3. Make Good Friends (in all spheres family, friendships and with coworkers)**

It is important to make new friends and nurture the long-time friendships. What better time than now the summer to get together with family and friends.

**4. Give Unexpectedly (greater impact)**

Everyone loves a surprise. It seems an unexpected gift means more than other gifts. Gifts do not have to be big, expensive or even tangible. Doing something kind for someone else is a gift.

**5. Reverse the Golden Rule (individualize your giving)**

We have been taught to "do unto others as we would have them do unto us." Reversing the Golden Rule means giving what you know appeals to that specific individual. It tells them you know them, their interests, and their tastes.

**N**ow, if you happen to be out star gazing one summer night and see the Big Dipper, perhaps you will be reminded of your own invisible Bucket and Dipper and these ideas about how to increase the positive feelings in yourself and others and strengthen your relationships.

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