

Becoming Better Together

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Introduction

Becoming Better Together was authored by John Van Epp with contributions by Morgan Cutlip. Van Epp is a counselor who has trained many instructors in matters of relationships and how to build them. Morgan Cutlip is Van Epp's daughter who has also specialized in psychology and studies extensively about relationships. *Becoming Better Together* dives deep into the guiding principles of building healthy relationships. The book discusses the relationship attachment model (RAM) which incorporates key relationship principles like Know, trust, rely, commit and touch. The book also incorporates a hurdle guide that seeks to instruct a couple on what to expect about hurdles and how to navigate them. Throughout the book, the authors stress the fact that relationships do not operate on their own and that people need to actively engage in actions that improve their relationships. The book provides extensive knowledge on relationships and stresses the need to actively participate in progressively building them.

Summary

Becoming Better Together is a couple of links program based on real-life stories of couples who have endured various issues in marriage (Van Epp & Cutlip, 2019). The text has been beneficial for both community and Christian audiences. The book discusses the importance of balancing relationships. Relationships are in a constant state of balancing because they are not perfect. If you claim that your relationship is balanced and needs no further balancing then that's a sign of weakness in your relationship. It is wrong to look at relationships in a binary manner. For instance, right or wrong, balanced or unbalanced, healthy or unhealthy. Relationships are in a constant state of balancing and placing them in two categories fails to capture the essential steps

needed to constantly grow with your partner. Life is in a constant state of change. At some point interests change, needs may change, and life goals may change. These changes require the corresponding adjustments to balance them.

The book also stresses the need for sufficient input between both parties in marriages. The process of running relationships needs input from both parties. Relationships cannot run automatically because those involved need to chart important tenets of the process. For instance, there must be discussions of dreams that you could be having, ways to get closer, and skills you intend to improve among other areas of shared interests. Relationships grow with constant experience between involved parties. Every day one learns new skills, and identifies new areas of weakness and areas that need improvement. Improvements must be initiated and intentionally implemented since humans cannot change without personal initiative. The concept of personal responsibility is key in relationships. Even Christian principles reveal this concept in the scriptures. God has given humans free will to choose how to act. He has indicated to humans what is right and what is wrong. God has advised humans to choose the right path but has not forced them to do so. This implies that humans must decide to choose the right path without coercion. The same principle applies in relationships in that one must make the conscious decision to correct their life without idly hoping that it will automatically change. A relationship must be built on goals that one intends to achieve (Van Epp & Cutlip, 2019).

One Key point that the authors intended to communicate is the concept of the Relationship Attachment Model (RAM). The RAM model has sections including know, trust, rely, commit, and touch (Van Epp & Cutlip, 2019).

. These sections have specific importance in building healthy relationships. The book stresses the importance of knowing your partner, trusting them, committing to the relationship, and fostering relationships based on attachment and communication.

The book also outlines the importance of understanding and navigating through hurdles in relationships. There are hurdles in life that couples constantly face. Couples with hurdles are not necessarily intentionally responsible for those hurdles. Mostly they just stumble on them. One should not use hurdles as an opportunity to unload on their spouse. Hurdles should provide time for couples to come together and find out what their weaknesses might be and what they should do to make amends. Open communication is a central tenet of healthy relationships. Communication involves listening with a greater sense of value, viewing things beyond mere words, and striving to understand your spouse's feelings and experiences. Couples must strive to build a sexually fulfilling life because it is a central part of bonding and marital satisfaction. Everyone must strive to satisfy their spouse lest they get sexual frustrations that can severely damage the functionality of a marriage (Van Epp & Cutlip, 2019).

Critical Interaction with Author's Work

The book offers modalities of building relationships based on intentional activity among spouses. The authors articulate some mind-boggling ideas such as discouraging people from viewing relationships in a binary manner like healthy or unhealthy. The insistence by the authors that relationships should be viewed as growing organisms is not common. In most quarters, relationships are viewed in binary terms and are either working or not working (Pietromonaco & Collins, 2017). *Becoming Better Together* challenges this premise and encourages spouses to constantly work through their relationships and move them from one level to another consistently.

The relationship attachment module (RAM) is another unique contribution to relationships and counseling that the book introduces. The RAM module insists on spouses knowing each other mostly by ensuring quality time together and top-notch communication. The RAM module also insists on trust between partners. Trust incorporates the feeling of confidence and security in one's partner. Relying on your partner is depending on them to solve problems and meet daily needs. The RAM highlights the need to commit to your partner by having promises, priority, and presence. The RAM module also includes the need for touch which is heavily leaning toward sexual connection and attachment. The book uses the RAM module to uniquely describe the processes of not only rebuilding a dying relationship but also rejuvenating and growing relationships. The RAM module would be very effective in conducting couples counseling because it covers the vital areas of marriage. For instance, many marriages have stumbled on hurdles because of trust and sexual dissatisfaction. The RAM module squarely handles this problem by indicating how couples can maintain close sexual relations and ensure trust prevails (Van Epp & Cutlip, 2019).

Becoming Better Together broadens clinicians' perspectives when dealing with couples by providing alternative modes of handling couples' issues and providing real-life examples. The book contains numerous examples of couples who have undergone various hurdles in their lives and how they have used the concepts in the book to overcome them. For instance, while talking about the importance of communication in relationships, Van Epp cites a personal story concerning his wife while they were still dating. He explains how he had instructed his then-girlfriend to fly to Cleveland but she instead flew to Columbus. He explains the communication breakdown and potential blame game that arrives from such situations and offers a solution involving not engaging in past mistakes but attempting to forge a more understandable position

that will be acceptable to both parties. The use of practical examples enhances communications at levels that mere theory cannot achieve. The assurance that a concept has been tried and successfully functioned makes individuals more confident of the ability of similar concepts to help them in their circumstances (Capuzzi & Stauffer, 2021).

The book not only provides real-life examples of its applications but also cites scientific studies that have been done in the past on the RAM module. For instance, the book cites a study on one RAM facet which is trust. It highlights that a husband viewing pornography makes their wives skeptical hence reducing their trust in them. This increases the credibility of the book making it more applicable to clinical functions. However, the overreliance on Christian references to explain the message might be a stumbling block for those who are not Christians (Entwistle, 2021). This is not to reduce the importance of Christian references in counseling but to raise a potential weakness of the book in the larger global audience that might subscribe to the Christian faith.

The RAM module would serve me both as a Christian and as a clinician. The RAM module provides one of the most comprehensive descriptions of the requirements of human interactions and relationships. An explanation of the building blocks of the module can assist me in clinically diagnosing and counseling couples. As a Christian, the book reminds me of the basic requirements of building relationships according to the Christian program (Fraser et al., 2021). For instance, the reference of Matthew 22:34-40 provides a Christian background for fulfilling God's will as the main aim of humans. Those who strive to fulfill God's will are more likely to have healthy relationships with both man and God.

Conclusion

John Van Epp and Morgan Cutlip have provided couples with one of the most comprehensive guidelines for healthy relationships. The book provides three important lessons for couples. The relationship attachment model (RAM) incorporates key relationship principles like Know, trust, rely, commit and touch. The incorporation of a hurdle guide that seeks to instruct couples on what to expect about hurdles and how to navigate them is important in training on the undesirable side of relationships. Throughout the book, the authors stress the fact that relationships do not operate on their own and encourage couples to fully dive into their relationships. The authors achieve his goals by elaborating on these three main ideas in the book. The incorporation of real-life stories on relationship matters even makes the message more customized and presentable to the audience.

References

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