



# BEING RELATIONAL

**The Seven Ways  
to Quality Interaction  
& Lasting Change**

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## Chapter 2

# Being Relational— The Seven Ways

**S**o what does it mean to be relational? It can be reduced to seven ways of being:

Being Engaged  
Being Centered  
Being Grounded  
Being Clear  
Being Generous  
Being Humble  
Being Kind

Now you might look at this list and think, “Well, I might as well put this book down now because I already know all about these things.” But we invite you to keep going. Why? Because each of

these anchoring concepts, each of these seven ways of being, has a *much more than meets the eye* quality. Each can be understood on a glib, surface level (*Hey, I'm not stupid; I know what it means to be kind!*), but much is revealed when these concepts are cracked open and unpacked. Each has implications going well beyond familiar cliché platitudes like “Go with the flow” and “It is what it is.” Each has importance in every significant relationship in your life. Each greatly affects how much you suffer and experience internal turmoil and how you affect the suffering and internal turmoil of others. Each represents a crossroad on your path to either a desperate reality or a reality of well-being for yourself and others.

## Being Conscious and Deliberate in Your Choices

As you make choices about what you do or don't do, what you say or don't say, what you support or oppose, in each instance you may or may not *be relational*. By fully exploring these seven ways, you will become more conscious and deliberate in the choices

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that you make. For many people, the processes of interaction are automatic, based on habits governing reactions (or lack thereof) to various situations, and

based on learned behavior influenced by any number of sources including family, society, media, attachment, nurturing, trauma, love, approval, rejection, insecurity, and many more. Our goal is to help you become more intentional in the choices you make. Being relational *can* become a way of being for you, but it will never be an automatic habit. It will always require an exercise of

your free will. You may decide that one or more of the *seven ways of being* explored in this book are “just not me” or “just don’t fit with my experience” or “just seem too (insert adjective here) for me,” but, having taken a 360 degree look at them, after reading this book you will be able to say that your choices are *intentional* and *deliberate*—**your** choices, based on your more fully informed decisions about what you believe is right and best in how you act in relation to others. And, as you continue to make these choices daily, you may discover a new way of being, not only a new set of behaviors and attitudes that you can put on like a new set of clothes, but a new *you*—a you that is naturally and authentically relational, a you that is healthier and more content, a you that empowers and brings joy to yourself and others. So . . . keep going. Winners have stamina.

Influenced by any number of sources including family, society, media, attachment, nurturing, trauma, love, approval, rejection, insecurity, and many more. Our goal is to help you become more intentional in the choices you make.

## Ways That Are Universally Applicable

Another question you might be asking is “Why these seven?” When we say *relational* many things may come to your mind; many words may be associated with your concept of relating to another person in a healthy way—words like *cooperative*, *collaborative*, *open*, and *trusting*. Aren’t these part of being relational? Why aren’t they part of the seven ways? The answer is that, yes, they are part of being relational and, no, they are not left out. For example, being relational involves a combination of attitudes and

behaviors that often will be cooperative, *but not always*. There are times when cooperation is completely inappropriate in being relational toward another, such as when they threaten harm or use power to exploit and oppress. And the same can be said with being collaborative, open, and trusting.

These explain *positive* ways that you are in relation to another, but do not universally apply to the way you relate, especially in conflict. These concepts imply a level of alignment with another or at least a neutral posture toward the other. That may be the case in the vast majority of your interactions, but clearly not always. These positive ways are aspirational—ways that you may hope to be in positive relationship with another. In contrast, it is always relational to be engaged, centered, grounded, and clear—ways of

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being that prevent conflict from escalating and promote quality interaction. *In addition, it is always relational to be generous, humble, and kind—ways of being that create positive outcomes*

*which reverberate, are paid forward, and foster reconciliation, peace, well-being, and lasting and positive change. But these ways do not imply any alignment with another.* These seven ways are universally applicable, within your control, and involve choices always available to you in how you relate to friends or enemies, to those you know well and to those who are strangers and everyone in between, including all of the anonymous others with whom you interact. Yes, you can be relational even when you have no **relationship**. Yes, you can be relational even when facing violence and dealing with those who are in no way being relational toward you—even terrorists.

## Roles Affecting Your Ways of Being Relational

And, just as there are many orientations that others have in their dealings with you—supporting you, alongside you, coming at you, pursuing you, moving away from you, indifferent or neutral to you—so too, do you find yourself in many different roles when you interact with others. First, obviously, you act on your own behalf. But often, you act on behalf of another person—such as when you are an employee or agent for another person or organization. Sometimes you are in the middle of someone else’s conflict. We have a great deal of experience with that, serving formally as mediators engaged to intervene and work with others in conflict. But, even if you are not a professional mediator, you often act informally in what we call a “little m” mediator role—at home, in the workplace, and in your community. Sometimes you are alongside others in a group, as a teammate, or member of a family, clan, or tribe. Sometimes you are in a position of authority over others as a boss, manager, committee chair, or elected position holder; sometimes others are in a position of authority over you. In all of these roles you can be relational, but how you are relational will look different depending on your role. For each of the seven ways of being relational, we will explore how your role in a particular situation affects your choices in how you relate and how you influence the way others relate to you.

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Lastly, in looking at the seven ways, it is also important to note that, while each attitude and set of behaviors is distinct, the lines between them are quite blurry. They mix into each other and blend like the colors in a spectrum of light, a rainbow. But despite the blurry lines, together these ways constitute the full spectrum of what it means to be relational. So we will look at each individually, but we will keep in mind that all of these ways of being are involved in every interaction—or not—depending on the choices you make in the moment. So let's take a closer look at those choices.