A Gentle Approach

In difficult relationships, we are dealing with all kinds of things. We have intense emotions, confusion, and conflicting thoughts. We struggle with not being able to speak our truth, with not being heard, with fear, with anger, with hurt, and with frustration. We stuff and stuff until we blow. We worry and worry until we panic and then try to force change or fix what we are afraid of. We hold back and then react intensely. The result? We often push too hard to force solutions. If pushing hard isn’t working, try a gentle approach.

I struggle with this. When there is a problem in my marriage or with one of my children, I want it fixed—now. I can develop a ten-part plan in about 5 seconds. Sometimes I offer my plan right away and sometimes I wait. But when I bring it up I tend to push too hard. My family’s reactions have been something like this: “Mom, I can’t even process as fast as you talk,” “Oh no, not another plan,” “I can’t hear anymore—that’s enough,” and “I’m handling it.”

When you are pushing too hard, you will do things like this:

- Keep talking when others are done talking.
- Get upset when the person doesn’t agree to do what you are suggesting.
- Interrupt the other person when he/she starts talking and sharing opinions.
- Escalate the conversation by getting more intense and angrier.

Pushing too hard is understandable because there is a lot going on in difficult relationships, but it doesn’t work when the other person resists. A gentle approach might work better. When you are using a gentle approach, you will do things like this:

- Ask if it is a good time to talk.
- Ask if the person is interested in hearing your suggestions.
- Stop when the person says “enough.”
- Not get angry when your ideas aren’t accepted and agreed to.
- Listen to the other person.
❖ Purposely keep your emotions and intensity down.

❖ Keep it as short as possible. Don’t repeat your ideas.

A hard approach often increases resistance to your ideas and thoughts. A gentle approach makes the person more receptive which is ultimately what you want.

By Karla Downing

Relationship Prayer

God,  
Help me to use discernment to approach people with a gentle approach rather than a hard approach.

Relationship Challenge

❖ When do you use a hard approach?
❖ Purpose to use a gentle approach when needed.

Scripture Meditation

Proverbs 25:15  
“Through patience a ruler can be persuaded, and a gentle tongue can break a bone.”

Proverbs 15:1  
“A gentle answer turns away wrath.”

If you have any questions you would like to ask Karla, please feel free to email her at karla@changemyrelationship.com.

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