

## The Challenge

I understand what I share may not relate to all women and men. Most likely this concept of The Challenge relates most closely to men and women who have been hurt in previous relationships. With this experience(s) they are very vulnerable and likely extremely vigilant to any possible transgression. Given their past they may subconsciously want some degree of proof that the person with whom they are taking a chance can pass some tests. What follows relates to this likelihood.

### **What challenge does a woman pose to a man in a relationship?**

A challenge in this context is what a man needs to discover and satisfy within his female partner in order to have a vibrant relationship. In an intimate conversation with five women, they shared the challenges that they created for their relationships.

1. The expectation for the man to anticipate her needs, which because of the nature of the challenge, are ever shifting. This shifting begins as soon as the man seeks to satisfy the expectation. He must learn how to keep pace with the shifting in order to satisfy them. When he is in top form he is aware that success does not last much longer than after the moment when she rewards him with a romance. He must understand that at the very moment of satisfying her romantically, is the moment when the adventure in anticipating her needs begins anew. He must learn not to anticipate too strongly the satisfaction in meeting a woman's needs, rather he must find some degree of satisfaction in being aware of the woman's creation of the next adventure.

2. The need for the man to make mistakes that the woman judges and then allows the man to seek forgiveness. This is followed by the woman then meting out varying degrees of expected compensation that the man must meet in order to regain her good graces. The real mistake that the man makes is in his effort to step around the set-up for failure that gives the woman the feeling that he is not all-powerful. He must be capable of living within this fabricated vulnerability without resentment. The man does this by appreciating just how vulnerable a woman is in a relationship with a man. To live in vulnerability with her demonstrates to the woman the he is safe to live with.

3. He must be there for the woman in a manly way when danger presents itself. He must be capable physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually, but only as much as she decides was necessary strictly from her hindsight of the event. As in 2. above he must be able to apologize for over-stepping into the situation as the woman alters through hindsight her evaluation of his intervention. In this way he provides her with the opportunity to reassert her sense of self-worth, integrity, and capability.

4. At times he must demonstrate his emotional need for her. To do this he may be required to convincingly fabricate moments of weakness. In these moments she can hold him in a nurturing way. She then extends herself physically to him so that he can be embraced and strengthened in his masculinity. For her the embrace also provides him a safe haven in her willingness to share her feminine strength. This experience empowers her and makes this relationship very meaningful to her.

5. The man must come to grasp that what a woman may say may not be what she means. For instance the following is instructive. The time is autumn. They are going for a walk through a local park to view the change of colors. It is a bit nippy and so the man suggests that she bring a warm jacket. She relates that it is a sunny day without any wind and so she feels that a light sweater is sufficient. During the walk the weather begins to change with an afternoon breeze

strengthening and clouds begin to block out the sun. After a while she relates that she is cold. The man is frustrated because they are having such a good time walking through the woods and she had disregarded his suggestion to bring a warm jacket. He tells her so and she responds with a terse comment about how patronizing he is. Her reaction is hurtful and he feels put off by it and drops her hand and starts to walk by himself. What happened here? The man was trying to be protective by suggesting that she take along a warm jacket. She rejected his suggestion and then spoke harshly to him when he reminded her of this.

What the man failed to perceive was this. Her decision to not take along a jacket was with the hope that in-deed it would get cold and she was hoping that he would put his arm around her to keep her warm. He failed to interpret the situation correctly, not that any young man ever could. However, a mature man would by his experience have acted in a protective manner by providing that warmth to her, which would allow her to snuggle close to him while they continued their walk. He might have then chosen to take his jacket off and place it around her shoulders to further provide her with a demonstration of his ability to care for her. This reveals that the woman's challenge is for the man to learn how to interpret her words as a code; as words to her are just the clothing for intent. This also may explain his father's struggle with his mother as the man's father evidently failed to understand this and never then could have communicated the insight to his son.

### **What challenges does a woman believe a man poses to her in a relationship?**

The women in the group asked me to share with them, as a man, what the challenges men pose to women. I responded with the suggestion that first they come up with what they believed the challenges to be and then I would share my input. They were OK with this and the following is what they suggested:

1. The willingness to learn how to support his decisions, to find his thoughts meaningful, and especially to appreciate his attitudes and values.
2. The willingness to learn how to satisfy him sexually and to find him manly.
3. The willingness to encourage him to find time apart from the relationship so that he can have man-time.

In listening to the challenges that they shared they seemed to be very straightforward and practical. The challenges seemed to be more what they felt a woman had to do to satisfy him, to please him. I thanked them and then shared what I could about the challenges set by men.

### **What challenge does a man pose to a woman in a relationship?**

Where the woman may have some awareness, or at times a great deal of awareness as to the intrigue that she builds into her relationship in the form of the challenge, we men most likely will be unaware that we even have the power to create a challenge. We seem to operate unconsciously. We believe that we are doing our best to support and to encourage the relationship, while simultaneously subconsciously we will be placing obstacles in front of the woman that severely limits her ability to meet this challenge. For a woman to meet his challenges, she would have to be able to cope with the intense vulnerability that his challenges demand.

The following are some of the most critical elements of the challenge that we men pose to a woman, which she must dance with in order to keep the relationship meaningful to us:

1. To be willing to trust him.
2. To be willing to respect him.

3. To be willing to appreciate him for his ability to have an oversight of the pathways of life.
4. To be willing to allow him to find satisfaction in being a protector and provider.
5. To be willing to allow him to find satisfaction in his commitment to the family.
6. To be willing to appreciate him for his manly qualities
7. To be willing to accept him unconditionally, which implies that his mistakes will not be held against him, rather to be viewed as stepping-stones to greater awareness and maturity.
8. To be willing to appreciate his relationship with a higher being, and appreciate him for his ability to share that experience with his family.
9. Of utmost importance is for her to acknowledge they she needs him to fulfill her vision of life.

**The following is one example of the challenge and the obstacles that he can create:**

Should the man find a woman needing and trusting him he will be enthralled by the experience and as a result of her apparently meeting his challenge he will feel nurtured, confident, and come closer and closer to realizing his full potential. This seems desirable in a relationship, except where the man's increased adequacy subtly generates in the woman a sense of inadequacy and dependency. This heightened feeling of vulnerability will excite the levels of her challenge and she will start to create the dynamics for him to begin to fail her through which she can then judge and criticize him. This will allow her to feel more equal in their relationship. The subtlety of this creates confusion in our perception of the relationship. This outcome will shift our perspective of acceptance and result in an emotional reaction leading to our feeling that the woman as no longer trusting and with that development she fails to meet the challenge that he isn't even aware of creating.

To the man it will feel like just when he were getting himself together and performing incredibly well, she steps in and undermines him. Likely we men will feel betrayed and hurt. This feeling will cascade into anger and resentment, which will lead us to becoming critical and judgmental. We will be totally unaware that we really have done anything to prevent the woman from meeting the challenge and incorrectly conclude that this has all been a mistake now seeing her as having insufficient care for him and the relationship. This usually results in a reduction in self-esteem and as a result he will feel driven to assert in manly ways, perhaps by entering into a casual intimate relationship with another woman, and/or the need to spend more time with his male friends. It can also result in what is called passive-aggressive behavior, where we men declare our willingness to cooperate, yet somehow we are not there when the actual work needs to be done, or if it is done, it is done incompletely. There are times also when our anger may result in passive behavior in which we never seem to be able to make a decision, or risk an answer to a challenging situation. We may also accomplish this by spending extended hours at work, or in some other activity, which takes us away from relating with her. As a result of this collapse in the relationship, through the obstacles placed by us, the woman may feel guilty that she has driven a man to extremes and she will seek to make the situation better and thus maintain her hope that the relationship in time, can work out. In reality, the feelings of vulnerability that is the source of the male's challenge may never be fully resolved, however that inability to resolve the feeling is exactly at the core and power of the man's challenge.

**An example of a challenge that both a man and a woman can create by placing obstacles in the face of the relationship would be as follows:**

Either a man or woman can fashion themselves to be harsh, judgmental, self-centered, intellectually intimidating, undependable, wild and adventuresome, sexually unfaithful, quick to be jealous and to anger, yet to be incredibly passionate. In addition to these qualities both can also get violent at times. While this may seem repugnant to many people, the intense and unstable passion of the individuals can none-the-less attract a certain kind of partner who would view these behaviors as exciting, dangerous and satisfy the need for intensity. For the woman, she may be driven to engage with this type of man in order to “tame” him and thereby prove her warriorship; her feminine strength and ultimately her superiority. For the man, he may be attracted to such a woman to prove his manhood by asserting his ability to take risks and to face danger. This relationship may be quickly over or may go on for a long term, yet for the man and the woman it has all the ingredients of maximizing both the male and the female challenge to the limits. The extremes are engaged and for them intensity is the central nature of this type of relationship. They control the dynamics by being willing to extend the envelop of their extreme behavior. Should the behavior become overwhelming for one of them that person may seek to disengage. However it usually takes just a phone call with an apology for the partner to be willing to re-engage. In this way the male dominant partner prevents the “taming” from ever being fully accomplished and the female dominant partner prevents the man from fully rising to the occasion, and so the challenge can continue.

**In Summary**

For the woman, she seemingly allows the male only a momentary if not transitory sense of satisfaction so that the challenge never ends, which for him without a conscious sense of the function of the female challenge, would entrap him in an ever deepening sense of confusion, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy. The key to the success in this relationship would be for the man to allow the woman to teach him the true nature of the challenge and for the woman to be willing to do it. In this way he would be encouraged to make a conscious choice whether or not to enter the relationship with the challenge as its foundation. This would allow him to engage the challenge with awareness and this would foster within him a sense of excitement and delight, and a willingness to manifest a certain degree of vulnerability.

For the man, he must be allowed by the woman to teach her how to take care of herself sufficiently so that her anxiety and fear of vulnerability does not destroy the challenge. He, of course, must be willing to do this in such a way as not to intimidate her. With these skills in place and with a sense of appreciation for him, she will be then able to engage in the challenge with awareness and with a deep enough sense of self-worth and survival skills such that the obstacles placed within the challenges are exciting and deeply meaningful. Thus the challenge could be engaged with no end which satisfies the woman, yet would provide enough plateaus of satisfaction, which is essential to the man’s emotional welfare. With this balance in place, the challenge can be a most exciting and deeply meaningful experience, which can enhance the intimacy and passion within the man/woman relationship.

However when this consciousness is in place, meeting their mutual challenges in an enduring way may cause the relationship to eventually fade as the challenge appears to be one of the central elements of the male/female relationship. It seems that the relationship can be enhanced when the challenge is not easily reached, but eventually, even for these types of relationships the individual must be allowed to reach it sometimes. Whether the person is

allowed to maintain that state for a short or long time would be dependent upon the individual's make-up and the skill of the partner in allowing the experience to occur. Without control over these dynamics by both the man and the woman the relationship will be out of balance, creating tension and dysfunction, which could deteriorate into a loss of purpose and direction and likely separation. It is a dance, where each partner has a contribution that must be balanced to maintain the proper degree of intensity and excitement. Keeping in mind that a certain degree of vulnerability allows the relationship to be vibrant and dynamic, where the relationship is enhanced with the resultant passion, mystery, and satisfaction.

### **Some further insights to The Challenge**

It seems to me that the challenges women create for the men are couched within mystery and elusiveness. The essential nature of the feminine challenge is dynamic if not ephemeral. Her challenge to him is in undefined expectations that changed when approached. For the women, the male's challenge to the woman appear to be fairly concrete and static.

For the man, even if he could define the woman's challenge, by the time he learned how to approach it, the nature of the challenge would alter. He would need to learn vast subtlety and infinite patience, to provide almost simultaneous strength and vulnerability, to have knowledge and yet a tinge of ignorance and the resultant humility, to be both man and boy, mature and playful; each strength balanced by a vulnerability of weakness so as to not overwhelm the woman with self doubt as to her ability to assert and to take care of her own needs. The man must enjoy her challenge and to view it as entertaining and essential. At no time even if he could should he exhibit overt mastery of the challenge, for success in the challenge must appear to be temporary. Any consistent success at anticipating the needs would be tantamount to defeat, for she would know that he no longer was enthralled within the mystery and her state of passion, intensity and excitement in keeping him guessing would be negated, thus rendering the relationship unsatisfying if not threatening.

The women admitted that should a man be poor, weak and unreliable, he would still be highly desirable if he understood and knew how to engage within the woman's challenge. Should he be wealthy, powerful, sharing, kind, thoughtful, supportive, and loving and not know how to engage within the woman's challenge, he would not be attractive for long. Thus it seems that the core of a meaningful relationship for women is the challenge, and all else is ultimately secondary.

For the woman, it seems to her that all she has to do to meet his challenge is to choose to support his ideas, his plans, to please him sexually, to not place undue expectations on him financially, etc. Yet one can hope that the dynamics can develop into a good place for both partners. Yet, there are times when development cannot proceed because of a deep, almost unfathomable dynamic, which attaches the person to the position of never allowing the other person to meet the challenge. In order to explore this phenomenon, one must make a leap of consciousness to the point of seeing the value of a person never allowing their partner the success of meeting the challenge.

A woman, by manifesting ever shifting expectations may well continue to frustrate the male even at the risk of losing the relationship. For this woman her life has been deeply influenced by a past abusive relationship that has been reinforced culturally with men being perceived as basically untrustworthy. For this woman she must constantly feel in control of any relationship with a man, if not also with women and her children. The mystique of the ever shifting expectations and the frustration of the man is the mechanism through which she can feel

safe. Should she ever let the male meet the challenge for more than a moment, such an event would sky rocket her feelings of vulnerability to the point where she would blow out the relationship in fear.

The positive element for the man is that he must grow spiritually in order to successfully be in this level of relationship with a woman who has been so hurt in the past that she requires this buffer of safety. His challenge then becomes to view this relationship as the opportunity to expand his ability to be loving and unconditional. The success he then feels is in his ability to grow in this way. At some point of course, he dreams of the day when the relationship shifts to the point of balance where he will be allowed to fulfill her expectations in a meaningful way, and to feel accepted and trusted for who he is, and to be encouraged to become more capable in every way.

In my view their feeling of vulnerability is the underlying cause for the challenge for both women and men. I would like to share again that the challenges might be more subconscious than overtly intended. The women I spent time with shared that they probably learned it from their mothers in the way they interacted with their fathers. Of course it's difficult to say exactly from where these challenges originated.

I thank my friends for helping me to be more aware and hopefully more sensitive to what appears to be an innate aspect of a male interacting within the feminine realm. I would say that the sense of the male challenges likely emanate from the male psyche, perhaps even from a historical genetic source, which is role modeled by their fathers and somehow reinforced by their mothers. In either case it seems to me that women and men are unaware of this interplay, but it would be better if they were.