

The Platinum Rule of Love

By Geri Carter, M.A., LMHC

We are familiar with the short story *The Gift of The Magi* by O. Henry where the poor, newly married couple, Jim and Della, contemplates the perfect gift for each other. To quickly recap, they each find they don't have enough money to buy the other their heart's desire. Therefore, Jim decides to sell his only valuable possession, his gold watch, to buy a pair of tortoise shell combs for his wife's lovely long brown hair. Della, knowing how much Jim loves his gold watch, decides to cut and sell her hair to buy a chain for his watch.

This touching and sacrificial story reminds me of an underused technique to use with couples. It is called the platinum rule- a slight variation of the well-known golden rule. The Platinum rule states "Do unto others as they would like to have done to them". To truly strengthen relationships, this rule is worth exploring and using.

We sometimes are duped into thinking that the golden rule, "Do unto others as we would have done to us", is the way we should go about loving relationships, but it backfires due to individual differences. For instance, if a woman purchases a gift for the man in her life using the golden rule, she might very likely buy him a tennis bracelet! A man, if using the golden rule, might very well buy the woman in his life a tool belt!

The Platinum rule can be further demonstrated by what Gottman¹ calls the "Love Map" of the other person. It is being intimately familiar with each other's world (likes, dislikes, dreams, goals) by having a richly detailed "love map" of the other person embedded in the part of the brain where you keep relevant information about your

¹ From the book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriages Work*

partner's life. If a couple is in trouble, it is very likely that the platinum rule doesn't exist in the relationship and a love map is sitting on a dusty shelf. The challenge, when things are going poorly, is to get one person (or better, both!) to start giving sacrificially without trying to control the other- that is giving to the other for the sake of the relationship. What better time to try the platinum rule than now?

Gerri Carter is a Mental Health Counselor in private practice at Carter and Evans, 2111 W. Swann Ave. Tampa, Fl 33606, 813-258-1272