

Commitment, anyone...? Why we're all running scared

By Olga Sheean

When was the last time you heard someone say, “Gosh, I can’t *wait* to commit to this!”? Okay, so maybe they wouldn’t say “gosh”, but commitment is certainly not getting the rave reviews that it deserves. In the wake of failed marriages, broken hearts, bitter law suits and child-custody battles, the concept of commitment has become largely synonymous with a loss of personal autonomy, rights and freedom. With more negative connotations than positive, it is often associated with compromise, surrender and even entrapment. It’s enough to make *anyone* drag their feet.

When Carl married Maria, back in ’85, he promised to love, honour, cherish and everything else he could think of to demonstrate his commitment to her. He lived for her smile, her approval and her reliance on him. Three years later, Maria began a love affair with alcohol ...and Carl began to lose his grip. He tried everything he could to get Maria to take charge of her life and to find some meaning beyond the bottle of whiskey she knocked back every day. But Maria wasn’t interested; she’d always had a man to take care of her and she had no sense of purpose for herself. Within a year, Carl was exhausted and heading for bankruptcy, and Maria was heading for cirrhosis.

Commitment to another person never works—as Carl finally discovered after many painful years of putting Maria first. When you commit to another person or even to a relationship, your autonomy and sense of identity can be quickly subsumed by compromises, blurred boundaries and a disconnection from the heart. This kind of commitment is more a surrendering of self, which usually results in heartache, emotional or financial depletion, or some other dynamic that detracts from, rather than enhancing, your personal fulfilment.

True, healthy commitment is all about committing to yourself—to being the best that you can be, to doing whatever enhances your personal evolution, and to making conscious choices in terms of what’s best for you as an individual. This kind of commitment can be

an exciting, dynamic process, taking you deeper into love, self-expression and empowerment, precisely because it is based on your right to freely choose in every moment.

Maria's lack of direction was the perfect counterpart to Carl's need to be needed (which conveniently took the focus off him). It created a cycle of disempowerment, with neither one having control over the other's decisions or values and neither one committing to their own fulfilment. If, like Carl, you try to rescue your partner or encourage them to be more committed to themselves, you often end up inadvertently supporting their self-destructive choices. Supporting any unhealthy dynamic keeps you stuck in dysfunction and prevents you from fully committing to yourself—and to having what you really want.

Commitment only ever truly works when it is to you. You are the only person over whom you have control and whose values and choices you can freely determine and live by. Committing to your self-discovery, your empowerment, your values, and to following your heart creates emotional strength and self-sufficiency, which makes you compelling and attractive to others. Committing to someone else, in the hope of earning their love, on the other hand, makes you needy and dependent, which ultimately pushes others away.

Time for your commitment comeback?

It can be helpful to define commitment so you understand what it's really about. If it has negative associations for you, you may never have explored its most rewarding application—that of fully committing to yourself in your own life. Literal definitions of commitment include “*the act of binding yourself intellectually or emotionally to a course of action or a person*”, which certainly sounds a bit daunting. Even its secondary meaning—that of “*consigning a person to confinement (as in a prison or mental hospital)*”—is often the dynamic that plays itself out in relationships.

Healthy commitment to self requires a different definition altogether, coupled with a radical shift in perspective. As children, we often fail to receive some of the essential qualities—such as acceptance, trust, honesty, support, commitment and encouragement—that we need in order to feel good about ourselves, to be whole and to develop strong

self-worth. These 'missing pieces' constitute our negative subconscious programming, which is the most powerful driving force in our lives. It shapes us in very significant ways and causes us to come to very specific subconscious conclusions about how worthy or lovable we are.

When commitment to self is missing from our early programming, we never learn to put ourselves first in healthy ways, or to dedicate ourselves to being the best that we can be. Instead, we come to believe that we cannot have what we want, that we do not deserve to have the best, that others' needs come before ours, and even that it is selfish to put ourselves first.

As a result of these negative subconscious beliefs, we powerfully attract partners and dynamics that cater to them and reinforce their validity. Like Carl, we end up with partners whose needs seem more important than ours or partners who are not committed to their own personal growth and never take responsibility for their emotions, behaviour or issues. We attract partners who are either emotionally or geographically unavailable (which amounts to the same thing), and who therefore cannot fully commit to love. And so we fail to get the very quality that we are looking for in a partner because we have failed to engender this quality within and for ourselves. Only when we begin to embody and demonstrate healthy commitment in our lives do we begin to attract partners who are similarly committed to themselves and to their personal growth.

Seeing the bigger picture

Because committing to ourselves represents a conscious decision to be all that we can be, a lack of commitment can become a way of avoiding going deeper within ourselves and, consequently, going deeper with a partner. As a result, we fail to experience the intimacy or fullness of life that we desire. Most of us are programmed to object to our own greatness and to be overly modest and self-deprecating. We will argue that we are not wonderful, talented, creative or powerful enough to make our lives work beautifully. But it is only the internal conflict between our negative subconscious programming and the good intentions generated by our conscious mind that creates this resistance to our being

fully ourselves. Relationships are designed to take us deeper into self-awareness, self-acceptance and self-love. For as long as we fail to commit to this process, we remain on hold, inaccessible not only to prospective partners but also to ourselves.

The commitment payoff

When you are committed to yourself and to what's best for you, you become magnetic, attracting the people, opportunities and resources that enhance your personal fulfilment and evolution. You also inspire others to be similarly committed and to start taking responsibility for their own lives. The biggest factor in building this kind of healthy personal commitment is consciously choosing what you want in every moment, in the context of what's healthy and right for you and your growth. If you can do that, in the face of possible resistance or rejection, you will increasingly attract the qualities that have, up to now, been missing in your relationships and your life.

What would you prefer to have: a partner who stays with you because they're 'committed' to being your partner, or a partner who stays with you because they're actively, freely, daily choosing to be with you? Would you really want your partner to stay with you out of some sense of obligation, if they did not want to be there? And if your partner is not committed to their own personal growth and to being the best that they can be, then what are they committed to? Whatever the case, your partner will be a glaring indicator of what's missing in you.

So don't be fooled by the commitment smokescreen; if commitment is missing in your relationships, remember that it is your failure to commit to yourself that is perpetuating this dynamic in your life and causing you to attract partners who reflect this issue back to you. You can buy into the collective disenchantment around the pitfalls of commitment or you can see how committing to anyone other than you sets you up for disappointment, dysfunction and disempowerment. Think of it as '3D commitment'—the kind that's guaranteed to bring you what you *don't* want. The healthy variety—commitment to yourself, your growth, your values and your dreams—is the only kind worth living and loving for.

Olga Sheean is a relationship/personal empowerment coach and author of Fit for Love—find your self and your perfect mate, available in hard copy and as an e-book, from her website, www.olgasheean.com, amazon.com and selected bookstores. Her unique self-mastery course, DiscoverYou, is also available for purchase via her website.

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Committing to you

Whether commitment seems to be an issue for your partner or whether you realize that it's also an issue for you, the solution is to practise committing to yourself in as many healthy, practical ways as possible.

To facilitate this process, ask yourself the following questions:

- In what ways do I avoid doing what's best for my personal fulfilment and evolution?
- How might I be holding myself back in terms of my growth?
- When do I allow others' needs to get in the way of my best interests?
- In what ways do I avoid exploring more of myself and my greater potential—emotionally, physically, creatively and spiritually?

The answers to these questions will help you to determine the practical things you can start to do and say that will foster a deeper commitment to self. By doing that, you will automatically start to attract partners and dynamics that will support and reflect your commitment to you.

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