

Your Personal Coach

By

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

My daughter, Kim, recently got engaged to a very nice guy she met through some mutual friends. She's very much in love with him, but her father is having a hard time accepting him because Kim is a professional with a graduate education and Adam is a carpenter. My husband likes Adam. Adam is hard-working, has a good heart, and treats Kim like a Princess. My husband hasn't said anything directly to Kim but he tells me that she "can do better" than marrying Adam – meaning that she should marry a doctor, lawyer, or executive. How can I guard against problems in the future, knowing how he feels? -- Eleanor

Dear Martha,

How can anyone do better than being deeply and happily in love? Your daughter sounds excited to be engaged to Adam. I'm assuming that she's an adult and able to make her own decisions – as she should. She's picked Adam, and her father will have to accept that.

Let me address your question from a broad, philosophical view and then from a more pragmatic one.

Unfortunately, your husband has embraced some prejudicial and hierarchical ideas about human beings. Admittedly, such views can be hard to avoid in a society like ours where – despite our proclamations about equality for all – a great deal of social stratification exists. I understand that all fathers (and mothers) want the best for their kids, but your husband is behaving like a (dare I say it?) snob.

Ours is a materialistic world, and regrettably, we often equate money with merit. When the almighty dollar is revered, there is a tendency to assume that the owner of an expensive car is somehow more important than someone driving an old clunker. Or that a great deal of formal education makes a person smarter – not just more educated -- than someone who has learned through experience. Or that someone who makes more money is somehow more entitled in life than someone with less financial security.

All of the great wisdom and spiritual traditions in the world are clear on this one point: We are all in this together, and we are at our best--we soar to the heights--when we love and respect one another regardless of position in life.

We shine when we can see our common humanity, rather than the trivial differences between us: how much money we earn, what we do for a living, the color of our skin, our religious faith, sexual orientation, gender, or ethnicity. All of these "isms" – classism, racism, ageism, sexism – separate us, instead of bringing us together.

The Hindu tradition has a beautiful and simple message about how we are all connected parts of the same Universe, all sparks from the same original fireball. When Hindus greet each other, they put their hands together as if in prayer and near the heart, bow their heads, and say "Namasté." The word is Sanskrit and it means, "The Great Perfection within me, recognizes the Great Perfection within you." In Mayan culture, people greet each other with this same deep reverence and say, "In La Kesh," which means, "I am another you."

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Now, practically, I can tell you without hesitation that there *will* be problems in your family's future if your husband can't come to terms with Adam as a human being and if he continues to see Adam as "less than" because he doesn't have a graduate degree or a white collar job.

Problems are indeed inevitable if your husband has already formed an opinion about Adam without trying to find out -- for his daughter's sake and his own -- what kind of person he really is. Is he honest? Is he caring? Does he love my daughter and treat her with respect and kindness? The answers to these questions will reveal more than any diploma.

Eleanor, no matter how well behaved your husband might be, or how hard he may try to keep his feelings to himself, his notion that Adam is not "good enough" will eventually be felt by all. And this will put your family in conflict.

Think about it. Can't you tell when someone has negative feelings about you, whether or not they voice them? Of course you can. You might start to notice small nuances of behavior – like a tone of voice or a certain look – or it might be just bad vibes. But you'll know.

Most conscious, breathing human beings can tell when someone doesn't like them, or is judging them. This would certainly make Adam feel uncomfortable around your husband. As Kim becomes clearer about those feelings, she is likely to feel that she has to choose between her father and her husband. Not a good situation for anyone.

Eleanor, you sound like a kind and concerned mother, but even so, you cannot take responsibility to make this all work out. Here's a good rule: don't ever take responsibility for what you can't control. Other people's feelings certainly fall into this category. As much as you may want to help, this is not your issue. This is an inner conflict that must be addressed by your husband, and it is his choice when and whether he will.

I suggest that you show this column to your husband, and open up a conversation about how you will all go forward from here. It would help for your hubby to spend some time with Adam. He can get to know Adam better, and learn to appreciate his upstanding character and his good heart, just as you have. I would suggest that your husband invite Adam to an outing of mutual interest, so they could spend some time together and get to know each other as people.

When people get to know each other one on one, a door opens to a different way of thinking. We have all experienced this. With mutual respect, there is a bright opportunity to get beyond stereotypes, to a broader sense of each other, and ourselves.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com, call 473-4004, or direct questions to the Outer Banks Sentinel, P.O. Box 546, Nags Head, NC 27949

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