Listening in With...

David Kessler

**Katy Koontz:** You say in your new book that most people know how to begin and end relationships, but they rarely learn how to complete them. What does it mean to complete a relationship as opposed to ending it?

**David Kessler:** We’re taught how to get out of a relationship or how to react to someone ending a relationship with us. But we’re not taught to look at the gifts or lessons (even when they’re painful lessons) and move forward. Completion is seeing the relationship for all that it was. If we just see it as a waste of time, we aren’t acknowledging the new awareness it gave us of who we are in relationship. Seeing a relationship in its entirety allows you to complete it with integrity and honor.

**KK:** So relationships are learning opportunities?

**DK:** Absolutely. Relationships are our greatest learning opportunities. Sometimes we think, *Wow, I thought I was doing so good spiritually and learning so much. So how can I be so unevolved?* It’s because the universe says, “Great! Now that you’re doing so well, let’s pick at some wounds from your childhood that need healing.” A relationship is the universe’s best tool for that healing.

**KK:** That sounds like a backhanded compliment!

**DK:** It is. And I’ll tell you, that is our challenge—to be in a disagreement with our loved one and instead of saying to them, “How dare you say that!” to think to ourselves, *Okay, I feel wounded. What’s this wound about? Why am I reacting so severely?*

**KK:** That’s hard to do in the heat of the moment.

**DK:** It’s unbelievably hard to do. That’s when we have to realize we’re humans on a spiritual path, and we have to have compassion and love for our humanness.

**KK:** So one of the keys to having successful relationships is having a successful relationship with yourself. Is that right?

**DK:** Yes, absolutely, and having that willingness for stuff to come up. Think of two people having an argument. Their wounds come up. They discuss it. They work it out. One person thinks, *Wow, we learned a lot in this argument. We’re learning our patterns. We’re learning how to communicate. It’s going to help us both in the future.* The other person walks away thinking, *These arguments are so damaging to our relationship.* So much of our success in relationships is how we hold what happens. People don’t realize that those fights as well as the pain and grief that follows a breakup or divorce are amazing windows into our patterns.

**KK:** In the book, you talk about the importance of staying present, and it sounds like a big part of that is being aware of when you’re in your past.

**DK:** Correct. That’s why we need friends who can help us put things in perspective. For instance, if we are fuming, *She’s late! I get so furious when she’s late!* We need a friend to say, “So she runs 15 minutes late—it’s just who she is. You have told me in so many other ways that she’s wonderful. Can’t you just adjust your expectations and your timing to know she runs a little late? Everyone’s got something. Big deal.” When you come back with, “But you don’t understand. That means she disrespects me,” you need a friend who can say, “That sounds like an old wound. Who disrespected you in your past to give you that reaction?”
**Katy Koontz:** That’s a good friend.

**David Kessler:** Absolutely. A good friend is someone who, when you go to them and just complain about your relationship, they say, “You know, we don’t have control over him or her. But let’s talk about you. Let’s see if we can help you here. Because I love you and I want you to be successful in your relationship.” Louise and I talk in the book about whose side of the tennis court you’re on. When we’re on the other side of the tennis court, wondering, *What do they think? What’s going on with them? Why did they do that?* we’re unhappy. In fact, if you are worrying about what someone else is thinking and perceiving, then who’s minding your life?

**KK:** Good point. I’ve come to understand that no matter what it is I think someone else thinks, even if I’m absolutely positive because of these 67 reasons, I’m probably wrong.

**DK:** Yes, and ultimately, what they think of you is really none of your business. It has nothing to do with you or your future. The reality is that no matter what someone else thinks, I still have control over who I am and who shows up in my relationships. So if someone is thinking positive thoughts about me, it won’t matter if I’m in a negative space. And if they’re thinking negative thoughts, and I’m on their side of the tennis court thinking, *Why are they thinking negative? What’s that about?* it leaves me empty. But what if I can think instead, *This is an inside job. I’m going to focus on me. And if I can get to a place of positivity or wholeness, it might even help heal their negative thoughts?* So no matter what they’re doing, the only way you can help the situation is to help yourself. Like the flight attendants say, put on your own oxygen mask first.

**KK:** That’s a whole different way of looking at the right person.

**DK:** Correct. The wrong person may be the right person for now. If I don’t have a lot of self-worth and someone comes along who treats me poorly, I can think, *The universe is wrong,* or instead I can think, *The universe has sent me someone who makes me react in a way that says, “You can’t treat me that way! I think I’m worth loving.”* And then I begin to find my wholeness. I realize I am worth loving, and I leave the abusive relationship. Then I can look back and think, *How wonderful that someone came who made me see that I’m worth more than that moment.*

**KK:** Although it may take a couple of bad relationships before you get to that point.

**DK:** That’s where our awareness comes in. Sometimes you have to ask yourself, *Have I danced this dance before? And once again, you can go back to a trusted friend, who may say, “You know, I’ve noticed that in your past three relationships, you keep choosing people who are always late. What’s up with that?”*

**KK:** The flip side of that is also true. If you have self-esteem issues and you get a partner who absolutely adores you, you may have a hard time taking that in.

**DK:** Correct, because you won’t feel worthy of it. Sometimes we need to see that we’re not there yet, but we’re working on it, and think, *I couldn’t sustain that relationship not because they mistreated me,*
We’re taught how to get out of a relationship or how to react to someone ending a relationship with us. But we’re not taught to look at the gifts or lessons (even when they’re painful lessons) and move forward.

KK: What was it like to work with Louise?

DK: Absolutely wonderful! No one pays attention to their thinking and their words like Louise does. I’d say to her on the phone, “I can’t wait to see you!” and she’d say, “Yes, you can. There’s a lot of enjoyment to be had until we see each other. And then we’ll have more enjoyment then.” When someone says, “This dessert is to die for!” Louise will respond, “No, but it’s a wonderful dessert to enjoy.” It’s just such a wake-up call to be in her presence. She’s also extremely grateful. She wakes up in the morning and thanks the pillows and the bed, and she even thanks the walls and the ceiling for keeping her safe. Sometimes, you think, Enough with the gratitude already. But then you look at how happy she is, and you think, I want that!

KK: How would you compare working with Louise to working with Elisabeth Kübler-Ross?

DK: They both have a level of honesty. Elisabeth was just more honest than the average person. When you were in her presence, her honesty at any given moment would either inspire you or really upset you. She was an amazing teacher. And neither Louise nor Elisabeth are victims—they are clearly creators of their own lives.

KK: Which is a big part of what your book is about.

DK: Yes. As painful as some of the things are that happen in our lives, there is still a future to be had. And we create that future.

That is our challenge—to be in a disagreement with our loved one and instead of saying to them, “How dare you say that!” to think to ourselves, Okay, I feel wounded. What’s this wound about?