

Week 31: Turning Pro at the Art of Loving

When Quinn was seven, he decided to turn pro at apologizing.

We'd sent him to his room after some egregious act toward somebody in the house, and he emerged fifteen minutes later with an apology note, scribbled with a black Sharpie marker and first-grade jaggedness. Several days later, we went through the same scenario. But not quite. This time, when he came out of his room, he was carrying an apology note written in multi-colored crayon. The letters were less jagged, written with more care. The next time it happened, he used glitter glue and waited for it to dry. He tried to write it in cursive he'd never been taught, and the words were tender and sincere.

The note was hard to read, but love always translates, doesn't it?

I've been a couples therapist for over a decade. Sitting in the therapy room, with two people who have two sets of histories, wounds, and resentments can feel complicated and confusing. I have a big bag of therapeutic interventions, and some days, I almost empty it out. But as I held my son's sparkling work of love and remorse, it occurred to me: maybe love is not as complicated as I'm trying to make it. Maybe it's about turning pro at one thing, and dedicating our life to it. Maybe I just need to remember the old Navy engineering adage, KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid.

Maybe we all just need to KISS.

How many relationship blogs can you read before they all start to bleed into one, and isn't the one thing they bleed into always a jumbled mess of contradicting advice? How much unhelpful relationship-enhancing click-bait can you be tricked into before you start to get jaded about every article that shows up in your news feed?

Maybe, rather than making relationship drama more complex, we need to simplify our relationships dramatically. Maybe, instead of searching for the answers in words on a website, we could find our solution in the words being whispered in our hearts. And maybe the solution would be this simple:

Decide the one thing you want to turn pro at in your relationships.

And then get better at it every day.

By making it your art.

Several weeks after Quinn decided to turn pro at apologizing, he and I had conflict about something I can't remember anymore. In the grand scheme of things, it was not very grand. I had walked out of the living room and was already focused on washing some dishes, when I heard the rustle of paper on the kitchen counter behind me. I turned around to find one of my son's "I'm Sorry" pieces of art sitting

on the counter. This time, on the front of the card, was a carefully drawn picture of a father and a son.

They were holding hands.

At the age of seven, words often failed Quinn, and even when he could find the right words, he often couldn't *write* them. But a picture speaks a thousand words. And a picture of a father and son, hand-in-hand, spoke a thousand words about his desire for forgiveness and reconciliation and connection and belonging. Quinn had taken the art of apology to the next level.

He had turned pro.

And, slowly, it changed *me*. Now, when my son does something bone-headed because he's anxious or sad or wounded, I don't see the kid who is lashing out. Instead, I see, in my mind's eye, the image of a kid on his bedroom floor, toiling over his apology. That is who he is at his center—that is his truest, worthiest self—and he's decided to make a habit of revealing it.

What if we all made a habit of the good thing at the center of us? What if we all found the artist inside of us, and decided to draw one good and beautiful thing upon the canvas of our lives? Stephen Pressfield writes, "The different between an amateur and a professional is in their habits. An amateur has amateur habits. A professional has professional habits."²

What if we all decided to turn pro at one thing in our relationships?

Professionals don't master a huge range of skills. There are very few multi-sport professional athletes. The most outstanding professionals focus very narrowly on their very specific craft. A professional knows we can't be all things to all people. We can only wield the skills we have the best we can. We can only be who we truly are to the people who will *value* who we truly are.

Turning pro at your relationships might just be that simple, too.

² Pressfield, Steven. *Turning Pro: Tap Your Inner Power and Create Your Life's Work*. New York, NY: Black Irish Entertainment, 2012.