

Here's a thought for when you're feeling particularly challenged in your relationship.

Sometimes a Banana is Just a Banana
Written by Rita Maynard, PhD

One day in the kitchen my husband remarked, looking at the bruised bananas I just brought home, "Slim pickins', eh?" Right he was. There was a very sorry selection of bananas at the store and after scouring the shelves these were the best I could come up with. Then he said, "You know if I brought those bananas home you would have reacted differently." I gave this a bit of thought and, oh my, he was right.

In our relationship, I am the one who is more organized, disciplined, detailed and tidy. When he said "Slim pickins', eh?" it felt like a validation. He knows me and how hard I try to do a good job for our family.

However, if he brought home the same blackened produce, the message that would hang in the air was how incompetent a fruit picker he really was. Easily, I could jump to believing he just grabbed the first bananas he saw and rushed out of the store.

Then it would have been a short hop to have gone down the slippery slope of attacking all the other ways he does not pay attention to detail or attend to things I think are important. The counters are not cleaned well enough, the newspapers are left on the table. Then there are those unfinished projects around the house, etc...

If it was a *particularly* stressful day for me, my mind may have gone into some character assassination, thinking he was the kind of person who never picks up or always misses what is really important to me. A perfect storm of a stressful day and a recent cascade of feeling disappointed could lead me to experience my own vulnerability and fears about the relationship and regress to feeling I will never have the relationship I always wanted.

Yikes! I realized how quickly I can fuel a fire that was not even burning!

Now, I am a trained professional. I *know* how damaging both to me and the relationship this slippery slope can be. Once started, it reinforces a pattern of negative thinking in my brain and conjures up all that could be frightening and hurtful in my relationship. It leads me down the path of distancing myself from my partner as I would see him in this negative light.

Who knows? Maybe this type of thinking was adaptive at some point in our human history as a defense. But now, I wasn't even under attack and there was nothing constructive to this thought process, especially if I strive to be a good partner!

So, my goal for myself is to try to recognize this type of thinking at its inception and cut it off as soon as possible. I want to work on being more generous of spirit and to view my partner in the best light possible, putting a check on my quick process of negative attributions. I hope the next time I see bruised bananas in the kitchen I can think my husband did his best at the store, remembering all the ways he does things for us, smile lovingly and say "Slim pickins', eh?"