

February 1, 2008

Recently a woman in one of my groups was crying about her great yearning to speak to her deceased mother who had died at a relatively early age. "Our conversation wasn't over. I had so much more to say to her, and so much more I wanted to hear." Tragically, her mother had died suddenly of a brain aneurysm. There was no time for goodbye, no time for a thank you, no time to ask for last minute advice.

I have heard this lament many times over the course of my career. Sometimes even when the loved one has a protracted illness, we sometimes fool ourselves into believing that there will be enough time "tomorrow" to say the things we need to say. Unfortunately, too often that "tomorrow" never arrives, and we are left with a heavy load of guilt and regret.

It is painfully ironic to consider how much we humans talk, and to realize how little we often say. When tomorrows are taken from us, this realization hits home with great ferocity.

Ira Byock, MD, a seminal figure in the hospice movement, authored several years ago an important book titled [The Four Things that Matter Most: A Book about Living](#). In the book Byock shares his experiences with teaching his patients about the power of saying the following four statements. **Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you.** Although he talks about these statements in the context of terminal illness, the application to current relationships is clear. These statements are foundation of any close relationship. All human relationships include brokenness. The key is to create an ongoing repair mechanism that heals the brokenness. These four simple statements do just that.

Thus, when the woman in the group finished speaking about her regrets about things not said, I asked her and the group: "who in your life right now needs to hear from you, and why are you waiting to hold that conversation?" Indeed, why are we waiting?