

**Stand Alone, Be Happy**  
**By Terry Ellis**  
**Contributing Editor**

Standing alone — together. Whether it's with our bosses, teachers and parents, or with our spouses, partners, friends and co-workers, this spirit to develop ourselves while respecting others is the key to happiness in relationships.

This was the Buddhist perspective on relationships presented during a recent conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. As it is in society, the question of how to create valuable relationships at home, at work and in the community is a hot topic among SGI-USA members — and one that drew a full capacity audience to the FNCC.

“The Buddha is the master of relationships,” Greg Martin, SGI-USA vice study department leader, pointed out during the opening lecture. In terms of Buddhist practice, he said, this means to first of all purify your own life. In other words, take control of the one person you can control — yourself.

“As long as we think [the key to the relationship] is the other person, our relationship with that person will, as Nichiren Daishonin writes in ‘On Attaining Buddhahood,’ be ‘an endless painful austerity,’” Mr. Martin said.

Sheila Edwards, SGI-USA vice general director, shared her experience of being a leader in the organization while married to a person who didn't practice Buddhism. It took her years to realize that the image of a Buddhist she was conveying to her family “was not a pretty picture.” Dinnertime often was interrupted by phone calls, and companionship with her husband took a backseat to organizational activities.

It was only when she began to change herself that her family began to appreciate her work for kosen-rufu.

Naomi Sasaki, SGI-USA vice women's division leader, shared another experience of overcoming difficulties early in her marriage. At one point, she even considered returning to Japan. She prayed to the Gohonzon, “Let me trust him, respect him, love him.” Later, when faced with children who wouldn't listen to what she said — and even fought against her — she again turned to the Gohonzon again for wisdom.

“I learned that I didn't have to change somebody else; I needed to elevate my own life condition,” said Mrs. Sasaki.

Any relationship also needs praise and appreciation, a point that the Daishonin astutely made when he said, “When praised one does not consider his own risk, and when criticized, he can recklessly cause his own ruin” (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 92).

“Even when we're motivated by love, we may focus on what's missing — not what there is to appreciate,” said Mr. Martin. “Our expectations become a burden. We already have something wonderful. If we nurture it and feed it, the relationship will blossom in its own fashion.”

At every FNCC conference, participants spend more time in small groups for dialogue and shared experiences than in lectures. At the conference on relationships, the power of this approach was apparent. People openly shared their heartaches and victories, and often discovered someone who already had walked the same path.

The experiences of those who attended could fill a book. Here are a few of those voices, selected because they arrived at the FNCC in pairs.

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