

More Than a Team: Finding a Deeper Connection in Marriage

Stacey B. Thacker, LMFT

Research shows that 45-50% of first marriages end in divorce (<http://www.divorcestatistics.org/>), and most people will remarry even though the divorce rate increases in subsequent marriages. Obviously, people want to be married but they often lack the necessary skills to stay in an enriching relationship. Just as courage is not the absence of fear, *marital satisfaction is not the absence of conflict*. It is not the presence of conflict that blocks us from deeper connection with each other but the way we interact *within* the conflict that lessens our marital satisfaction.

What do couples fight about?

- Money
- Sex
- Household chores
- Kids
- Leisure time
- Roles

What's the real issue?

Unmet needs starting with **I just want to be heard!!!**

How do we block our own ability to hear our partner?

We do things we think will stop the fear of being hurt: we physically or emotionally “EXIT” the interaction.

Here are some of the more common ways we EXIT (these are not gender specific):

- Critical Christine- *Motto: It can't be my fault, so it must be yours.* “You don't care about me.” “You never keep your promises, I can't trust you.” “I see you didn't wash the car... again.” Heavy sigh.
- Hostile Harry- *Motto: If you are the bad one then I can be the good one.* Says things like “You are so stupid! Can't you do anything right!” (Rolls eyes) “You think you are so righteous! If people knew what I have to live with...”
- Defensive Deann- *Motto: I can't be to blame!* Says things like “I did not!” or makes excuses “Well, if you had just emptied the dishwasher I would have been able to pick up the kitchen!”
- Shame-filled Shane- *Motto: It's always my fault.* Says things like: “You are right. I am such a terrible person. I don't deserve you. If I was a better man, we would be okay.”

What can we do to deepen our marriage?

- Moralizing Mary- *Motto: Good things happen to good people. I am good, therefore, if we are having a problem it's because you are doing something bad.* Says things like: “You know what's wrong with you? You just don't have enough faith.” or “If you went to the temple every day, God would make this better for you.”
- Withdrawing Will- *Motto: I must avoid pain at all costs.* Says things like: “I'm out of here” or “Okay Dear whatever you say” and focuses on the TV, computer or video game as he emotionally shuts down.
- Martyr Molly- *Motto: If I just sacrifice myself enough, he will appreciate my goodness and meet my needs.* Says things like: “Well, I can do that for you after I finished my Sunday School lesson, attend the PTA meeting, bake a pie, finish the laundry and wash the car.” or to Self, “I will keep my mouth shut at all costs!”

Work on closing our own exits, not our spouses, and thus stay emotionally present in the relationship. Make it *your role* to convince your spouse you heard him/her.

Why it's important to keep working at it:

- Because we deserve it!
- So do our kids: “The higher the marital quality in the parent's marriage, the higher the marital quality in the adult children's marriages” (Glenn& Kramer, 1987).
- Most importantly, if what we are doing now isn't working, it's time to make the change.

References for further consideration:

Thacker 2009

Books:

Getting the Love You Want, Harville Hendrix, and marriage workshops.

The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work, John Gottman and Nan Silver.

The Five Love Languages, Gary Chapman.

Love Busters: Overcoming Habits That Destroy Romantic Love, Willard F. Harley, Jr.

7 Habits of Highly Effective Families, Stephen R. Covey.

Marriage Retreat Weekends:

www.roubicekandthacker.com “More Than A Team: Deepening the Marriage Relationship”
With Stacey B Thacker, LMFT and Michael C. Roubicek, LCSW (559) 323-8484.

Imago relationship workshops

<http://gettingtheloveyouwant.com/>