

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- *Hidden Agenda: If I look at the faults of others I won't have to look at my own.* “You aren't going to wear that today are you? What's wrong with you, you are always sulking. Never mind, I will just do it myself, you never do it right anyway.”
- Hostile Harry- *Hidden Agenda: 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- *Hidden Agenda: 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- *Hidden Agenda: Whatever happened, I am to blame.* 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.”
- Moralizing Mary- *Hidden Agenda: 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- *Hidden Agenda. No one is going to control me.* Says things like: “Okay Dear, whatever you say” and focuses on the TV, computer or video game as he emotionally shuts down.
- Martyr Molly- *Hidden Agenda: 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.