
LESSON ONE

Simplicity Works



If you pick up a pebble in your shoe and do not remove it right away, the pain will gradually build until it is unbearable. Over time, if you ignore it, a little pebble will even cause blisters and scabs. That little pebble will cause so much pain that eventually you will walk with a limp. However, once you remove the pebble, you feel immediate relief. Soon you can forget all about the pebble as your gait becomes normal and walking is a pleasure again. You also become a lot more careful about where to step, consciously avoiding pebbles. Marriage is like that. The pebbles are mistaken and unintended misbehavior that causes tremendous pain and ongoing suffering. Once you identify these destabilizing behaviors, you will have the power to avoid them.

When my wife and I were married, we had no idea the solutions for our unhappy marriage could be simple and quick. We struggled. As we individually reached the point of frustration, we turned to those we thought were the marriage experts. We went to more psychologists and family counselors than I can remember. Even though we began with faith-based renewed hope at every first visit, the happy relationship we sought never came. Even after extended periods of counseling (spanning at least ten years), any peace we reached was tense. We kept running up against the same walls, although with different wallpaper. Any calm we achieved in our relationship was short lived and fragile. Our lives were getting progressively more miserable. We openly discussed and agreed that we were staying together only for our children, but it was getting harder by the day. Finally, after twenty years, our family of five went the same way as well over 50 percent of all families in our country—it shredded in a devastating divorce.

For me the pain of our divorce kept growing through many stages and phases. Although I am usually very good at figuring out what is going on, there was something too elusive for me to grasp and reconcile; it was killing me. I was confused and disoriented and I started to question if it was just me or the divorce court system (which quickly dominated our lives blocking out everything else). My first thought was that the court system was to blame for all my sorrow. After all, the divorce complex is

Our children's needs are worthy of our greatest efforts

insanely dysfunctional. It causes immediate and obvious complications that requires every ounce of attention. The horror stories I had heard about the system actually did not even come close to my own experience of the degrading and polarizing effects it had on us. I was unprepared for what we encountered. Initially I did not even notice how beaten up our kids were getting, the same ones we hung in there for! I was in complete survival mode and so was my ex.

Like most Americans, I accepted divorce as unattractive but normal. I expected a smooth transition with the help of counselors and family law experts. However, the system I discovered was completely non-user-friendly and does nothing to help parents or kids. In fact, it polarized us, the parents, completely with its crazy reward system. It added to our wounds of mistrust. Both of us had to take completely defensive postures. I was so frustrated from, and at the same time focused on, all the junk of the divorce proceedings that I did not recognize the primary cause of my suffering, which I now realize came from giving up on our marriage. At the time, I saw divorce as the only viable solution, and I assumed it would eventually all work out fine. It never did.

Divorce means inexcusable failure. I have always been successful. I take on challenges with relish. In the early seventies I began a nationally recognized food co-op. Later I started a very successful Grocery store. I have also done hands-on social work, taught, and eventually founded the largest fresh herb company in the country. With over \$25 million in sales and hundreds of employees I achieved great personal success and public recognition. I founded and funded numerous humane projects of all sorts. I have always tried to help others. One of my core beliefs is "life is chiefly service." I am not a person who accepts failure, yet here it was in the one area that means the most to me: family. I had to understand what happened and do something about it.

Therefore, with a right attitude of concern but an inaccurate perspective of what divorce really signified, I became a business and family mediator.

My desire was to help others avoid the pain of the divorce system by helping divorcing couples work out separation, property, and child-raising issues without additional conflict. Good mediators can help those going through a divorce reach resolution through open discussions. I wanted to help people get out of the polarized positions they found themselves in so they could transition peacefully; at least that was my idea. The way courts value material issues such as houses and conveniences over joint parental responsibility and involvement hurts too many kids. I believed I could help people with far less wear and tears. Additionally, my long-range vision was to gain credibility as a mediator so I could do my part to help fix the system. I wanted to make it more humane; but I had not really seen the big picture yet. I was just at the tip of the real problem. I had not yet seen that divorce is completely preventable!

Every problem can be solved once the problem is truly understood

Fortunately though, it was not long before I noticed something very obvious. Folks who came for mediation did not really want to end their marriage at all, even when they thought they did. These good people just could not take the pressure of a dysfunctional marriage anymore and believed divorce was the only way out; just as I did. In fact, many licensed marriage counselors, including clinical psychologists who specialize in family counseling, routinely recommend divorce, incorrectly thinking it will end the pain (my ex and I also ran into one of them). It does make sense to the psychological community in a backward sort of way. How can they help people reconstruct marriage when they don't know what marriage is supposed to look like in the first place? Divorce, when recommended as a final solution in the context of helplessness, is not a bad thought. However, I was beginning to see there was a better way. God could not have made this marriage thing so difficult; we had to be the ones screwing it up.

I took a closer look at the whole marriage picture. I wanted to understand the core reasons people wanted out (and in) and see if I could help them stay together. Being a successful businessman, I knew from personal experience that **every problem can be solved once the problem is truly understood**. It became abundantly clear to me that folks who were trying to help married couples simply did not understand marriage or want to admit it (the divorce statistics among marriage professionals is about the same as for the general population) so I chose to ignore faulty Western psychological theory and began a fresh search for the keys to a successful marriage. I had to reinvent the wheel without input from a system that is a proven failure.

My quest started by looking as dispassionately and objectively as I could at my own failed marriage. I had to come up with the whys. Why didn't I have a happy marriage? What did I/we do wrong? I am not stupid. My desire for happiness is as strong as could be. Neither my ex wife nor I are evil or masochistic. So what happened? It cannot be that tricky!

I explored relevant principles harvested from numerous sources regarding friendship and loyalty in order to gain a broader perspective. I concluded that **active friendship is a cornerstone of sound marital relationships**. I wanted to understand friendship because marriage is the greatest friendship opportunity most of us will ever have.

Next, I created a "happy marriage" template, a schematic design of positive interactions, as well as the corresponding potential pitfalls and subsequent temptations. This was the easy part. Visualizing harmonious living is not that difficult for any of us. I just had to figure out why living it was so tough. I drew a "picture" of a happy marriage and placed it next to my past marriage so I could clearly compare the differences. It was brutal but necessary. I wanted peace; we had tension and arguments. I wanted trust, caring, support, intimacy, and love. Instead, every petty

Once a malfunctioning “part” is replaced it can cause no more damage; big or little

Complete success is the only reasonable goal

problem eclipsed what I wanted. I asked myself the pertinent questions and a conceptual understanding started to take shape in my mind. I jotted down some assumptions and equations of cause and effect, which I randomly tested informally with various individuals, including my then current clients. I also experimented during my own interactions; studying people’s reactions to my words and behaviors. I had to be sure I didn’t become another irrelevant theorist. I wanted my conceptual understanding to become realistic and practical, so I tested everything from every angle I could imagine. Over time, my view of marriage began to take definite shape and make a lot of sense. It was, ultimately, simple; and because it was coming up simple, I knew I was on the right track.

I had to test my newfound knowledge on real-life desperate marriage cases, the more hopeless the better for these purposes. If my cures worked on the hopeless, they would work on everyone. Helping couples who only needed a little encouragement would do nothing to prove any process. My thinking is if it is broken big or broken little the fix should be the same and work either way. I did not want to leave room in my mind for rationalizations and excuses that could undermine my goal of true understanding and reliable results.

I had no qualms about experimenting with real people. I had heard a story on PBS about marriage counseling that reported the success rate for Western psychologists was below 6 percent; I was shocked (none of the counselors we saw ever admitted failure—it was always vaguely our fault). Can you imagine any repairperson (we expected our therapists to help us *repair* our marriage) with that kind of failure rate calling themselves an expert? I knew I wouldn’t do that poorly.

I did not work with people who thought I was something I am not. Everyone knew going in that my efforts were experimental and nonintrusive, not therapeutic or diagnostic. I was very clear that I was a mediator and not a student of Western psychology or a professional anything other than a mediator. I would explain marriage and help them compare; they would fix.

I created an outline for a tutorial and shifted my mediation focus to help folks get back together instead of divorce. My goal of complete success included designing a transparent process that suggested a few simple commonsense steps that individuals would need to take toward their own success, and how to take those steps quickly. My clients were given realistic timelines for that success (the whole process got down to three two-hour weekly sessions, on the outside). I made an outline on my whiteboard to address the main points. People knew the path to take and the milestones they could expect along the way. To avoid the common and deflating expectation of long, drawn-out and painful processes, I made it clear I would give all their money back if we were unsuccessful. My motivation was to prove my goal was realistic based on real-life success. I also burned the bridge behind me; I refused to help any more folks get a divorce.

**Forget the past
and focus on
what you can do
to improve your
relationship right
now**

In less than two years I unearthed almost every nuance of all the important lessons they had to learn. As I encountered the same questions from my clients I was able to adjust the emphasis to tougher-to-learn points. My tutorial became consistent and the positive outcomes predictable. I even came to the point where I could usually tell if a couple needed to hear the whole “shebang” in great technical detail or just needed a little nudge and reminder. In a few cases I could show a person the way on the phone in our preliminary discussion. If a pebble is plucked early, it is not as damaging.

These lessons contain all you will need. While writing this, I often passed on the near-completed manuscript to new acquaintances who needed useful guidance with their marriage to test the effectiveness of the lessons in written form. Here is an example of typical feedback:

Hi Paul,

I want to thank you for sending me your book. I am about half way through and it has immediately impacted my life. I explained to my wife, Lori, our meeting and the book and she has just about completed it. . . .

I am not a very religious person but I do believe in divine intervention.

I am beginning to believe our chance meeting just wasn't that, chance. . . .

I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate what you had shared with me/us. Our marriage is now on the right track of recovery. When I met you on Friday, I literally thought my marriage was done. Now it is not even a thought in my mind.

Again, thank you and if I run into you at Starbucks I owe you a coffee . . . it's the least I can do.

Brad

This e-mail was not edited in any way, shape, or form. They are normal—like you. These people went from despair and inevitable divorce to understanding as quickly as it took to read the lessons; in hours.

If you are in a troubled marriage use this knowledge to quickly end the suffering. You will learn how to move beyond the hurt. You will learn to behave in a way that creates joy and security. Those of you in new marriages will see that marriage is wonderful when you understand it. Everything in these lessons will teach you what you need to know. You can succeed when it all makes sense. There is no hocus pocus or new age pontifications that will give you temporary good feelings. This works

**Your success will
come very fast
Don't take too
long to accept it**

**Don't your kids
deserve all the
effort you can
make?**

because it is clear from beginning to end. This is a reliable manual. It works, when applied, immediately—now. It is not complicated either. Your marriage is quickly fixable!

Marriages that end in divorce are rarely lost because of insurmountable issues such as complete mental instability, which leads to physical danger and/or other radical problems. Commonly perceived *big* issues like infidelity, mistrust, loss of respect, financial problems, and emotional suffering are actually symptoms of one or more of the three killers thrust upon people who have no idea what they are doing to themselves and each other. The so-called big issues are forgivable and forgettable when understood in proper context. Couples learn why and how to move on.

Obviously there are relationships in which, sadly, one or both partners fall so far that they are abusive by any standard. Threatening conditions cannot be taken lightly. Each of us must take personal responsibility for our children's safety and our own. I did not work with couples who lived with physical violence or drug (including alcohol) abuse. Neither did I work with couples where one partner did not want to participate, or where there was a serious psychological disorder. These lessons definitely work for those who want to stay married but need the "manual". They also work for others who have "gone crazy" because of the pressures caused by mutual misbehaviors, You will know if you try.

I hope current trendy rationalizations that try to convince you your kids will do fine when their home is broken do not fool you. Kids do not do fine at all. They adapt, but so what? My father and many like him adapted to concentration camps. That is not doing fine. It is noble to be willing to hang in there for the kids, but I do not advocate a life of suffering. I advocate marriage filled with joy. When you make your marriage into something truly wonderful, everyone wins. Isn't it how it is supposed to be, where everyone wins? I know many of you good people are hanging in there for the sake of your children. I praise you! Now is the time to get the joy back into your marriage so your kids will not be the only reason to be married. Your children will benefit when you are happily married. What a difference! Please do not entertain the notion that your best hope is a marriage that you can 'live with.' You will have a marriage you will not want to live without.

I met with some people who believed they already lost a marriage they did not want to lose. Some already moved out and/or had begun the legal process of divorce; I was their last shot, like the cancer clinics in Mexico. Do not give up! Ninety-nine percent of the time both partners make the effort after a bit, but mutual agreement is not a prerequisite for happiness. You can lead the way. Yes, you will have to make changes but only changes that make sense to you. After twenty minutes of their first session, it was obvious to couples that these lessons work. The proof is in the pudding, and you will see. Once you understand the underlying principles, correct behavior is obvious, which it should be. I never listen

**Marriage is meant
to be joyous—
never a struggle**

to people's issues and "whodunwhats." There is no need for therapy or dispute resolution. When you bring your car to the shop after running around with a flat front tire, it doesn't help the mechanic change the tire if you go on and on about how the car pulls, loses traction, how you skid, or all the other likely results of driving a car with a flat. Changing the tire is all it takes. There is nothing mystical or magical. The lessons work because it explains and illustrates the mechanical principles of a happy marriage relationship. All advice is solution-oriented. The expected result is a happy marriage.

It was not the good fortune of my family to have this knowledge when we were married, or we would still be married. On the other hand, I never would have produced these lessons without the painful prod of my own losses. God bless your family!

One more thing: Learn these lessons as conceptually as you can. Don't get hung up on every word or detail. There are different ways of hearing things. This book contains more information than any particular couple received in a session. My goal is to get you going in the right direction as efficiently as possible. You will not hear it all even if you read it all; neither will you need to. You will hear what you are ready to hear, and it will be enough.

Additionally, everything is presented in a very definite order, so don't skip around until you have finished the book once. There is a compounding of knowledge that comes from reading the lessons in the order I wrote them. Definitely, do not read the last chapter, on intimacy, until you have assimilated the foundational principles built one upon the other in the previous chapters. Now smile; you are embarking on a new and wonderful beginning.

**For most, these lessons work fast and easily
For some, it requires more effort to change bad habits.
Go for it! You can do it!**

Lesson Exercise

Make a list of your spouse's good qualities.

Now pretend you are their lawyer. It is up to you to convince a jury that your spouse is a good person. Elaborate on each quality to save your spouse from a crime they did not commit. It is all up to you. You are the only one who will speak up for your spouse. You must do a great job. Go beyond your own ability. Be incredible.

Now understand that this is how you are supposed to feel and think and speak about your spouse all the time.

Whenever negative thoughts about your spouse rise in your mind recall your pitch to the jury and re-pitch yourself.

Simplicity works. If something sounds complicated you have possibly misread it. A perfect marriage is the only reasonable goal for anyone.

LESSON TWO

The Three Marriage Killers



The first thing you will want to do is stop hurting each other.
... agreed?

When you learned to drive a car, which is actually more complicated than creating a successful marriage, the first thing you learn are the don'ts. Don't drive on the wrong side of the road, don't drink and drive, don't accelerate in unsafe conditions, and don't get mad at other drivers; just mind your own driving business. Some cautions are blatantly obvious while others are only obvious after a brief explanation. Some complex don'ts, however, need to be explained in more detail, or just accepted; like not hitting the brakes during a skid even though it is a normal and instinctive reaction.

The don'ts in marriage warn about the "killers." Paying attention to the don'ts will work. Once revealed, you can remember them when you see them popping in and stop dangerous thoughts and deeds. The problem is you have not known what the don'ts are (they really should teach this stuff in school). The don'ts you do will often overwhelm all the good you have already done. They eclipse your loving and positive behavior (which might now seem almost absent to your spouse after the buildup of pain). Marriage has no tally sheet where you get to balance your good and bad. There is no scorecard. The bad blocks views of the good no matter how vast the good is, just as your hand can completely block the entire sun from your view. Even though both of you are really good people with your good traits far outweighing your bad habits, it is hard to feel it because of the eclipse effect; like when a tiny part on your car goes out and the whole car shakes like a jalopy. This is a good thing. Because just as fixing one small part will have you driving a great car again, or moving your hand away from your eyes will open you to the world, so removing the little bad habits that are undermining your marital happiness will allow the innate joy of marriage to fill your lives again.

The three "killers" become like roots that produce various evil vines and destructive fruits. In order to kill all the fruit and vines, one must attack only the roots. By putting most of your attention on the first killer

(which is the biggest and most fundamental to your problems) you will surely succeed. The rest will fall into place. God did not invent marriage to make you suffer. You are entitled to the results that automatically come from well-defined and purposeful actions of beneficially oriented behavior. So take control and start cultivating the relationship you have always wanted.

The Three Killers (Pebbles) of Marriage

1. Overfamiliarity

2. Poor Communication

3. “Business Arrangement” Mentality

(Rare, but most lethal)

LESSON THREE

Overfamiliarity



Always remember; it is your promised obligation to cherish your spouse.

Start behaving respectfully again

Overfamiliarity means you are taking each other for granted; you have become, in a word, disrespectful if not downright mean. Overfamiliarity will destroy every relationship all by itself; it is *deadly*! Being disrespectful to your spouse is like smiling at them while you slap them silly. Marrying your spouse sent a message of acceptance (the smile). Disrespectfulness is the slap. It is not the deadliest killer, since it is the killer most easily fixed, but it is by far the biggest killer because it is at the bottom of *every* hurting marriage. Don't be overfamiliar. If you learn how and why the terrible habit of disrespectfulness is able to take root in the first place, you can nip it in the bud whenever it tries to sneak in.

Behaving *respectfully* and lovingly toward your spouse is the first rule to follow for ending all the pain. When you first met, you treated each other with kind and cautious respect, which is always normal when meeting someone new. Then when you saw the potential for marriage, you both began to ratchet up your attractiveness by making progressively greater effort to show each other your best side; this was good! You were patient, kind, and attentive. You were sweet, funny, considerate, noble, and appreciative (right?). You were oh-so-polite, always smiling, always complimenting each other, and you laughed at each other's jokes even when they were not that funny. You dressed to impress, washed behind your ears, and bent over backward to do special little things for each other; you bought flowers, made cookies, maybe called each other all the time. You treated your "squeeze" correctly! You may laugh when you recall doing some of the things you did to ensure that you were the kind of person who would impress your crush. They were not crazy things; you wanted your crush to appreciate you and love you enough to choose you as the "one."

You were trying to win each other's love and respect.

Perfect!

Start doing so again.

You define who you are by how you behave. Blaming your behavior on how someone treats you really defines your own weaknesses, not the other person's violations.

Trying to impress your pre-spouse was not phony! It was practical. You exposed the real you instead of the unattractive habits you thought might be a turn-off. What is wrong with that! **Your habits are not you.**

It is smart to be considerate and create new habits that make you happy. You behave well towards any person who is important to you. You are at your best anytime acceptance is important to you. Your spouse's acceptance of your flaws was and is not a grace you should think of as a "given." You are not automatically entitled to acceptance even though you need to give unconditional acceptance yourself. Do you recall when your pre-spouse was in a bad mood or had a bad day and you did all you could to ease their suffering? That is correct behavior! You did not expect them to "come around" or "snap out of it." You were authentically concerned only for them rather than how they might be bumming you out. You probably didn't even think of them as bumming you out because you put them ahead of yourself. Expecting unconditional acceptance is selfish, whereas giving it is correct.

After some time you became over-familiar with your spouse and stopped behaving at basic levels of consideration. It became all about you. Can you recall the last time you thought about what would really make your spouse happy? You take your spouse for granted, and resentment has become the normal response to his or her needs. Perhaps you see your spouse's needs as an imposition on you. Most people do wish to serve their spouses, but I have never met anyone who wanted to be abused. Many women occasionally enjoy the fantasy of being a courtesan, but no woman wants to be treated like a whore. Most men take pride in doing "honey-dos" for their wives, but none wish to be the house slave. Instead of treating each other like royalty forever, as you promised, you fell into habits of behavior you would never dare use on anyone else. What happened to the flowers? What happened to the smiles and sexy looks? What happened to compliments, sweet phone messages, careful grooming, supportive chats, little gifts, funny stories, gentle smooches, loving looks, special dinners, unasked for shoulder rubs? They have gone out the window. You replaced good and appropriate behavior with sarcastic comments, critical thoughts, commands, insults, complaints, nagging, and unfair expectations. I mean, c'mon! When you enter someone's space with rudeness, anger, criticism, expectations, and other destructiveness, you are offensive; you are being overly familiar. Do you really expect your spouse to cherish you when you are mean in return? Even a sweet dog will eventually bite you if you mistreat it every day. Do you think you now know each other well enough to treat each other without consideration? Do you believe you have reached a point when it becomes okay to be a jerk? Is that what friendship is supposed to evolve into? No way! You have traded the bliss that comes from consistent loving behavior for the perverse right to speak your mind and act out your most lowbrow behaviors.

Treat your spouse as if they are the most important person you have ever met; they are

Go back to your sweet behavior even if your spouse does not. It is your job to try to win your spouse's affection and appreciation—regardless of how you are treated.

I have heard so many variations of “it's different when you're married.” Yes, it is *supposed* to be different; different better! **The more you know your friend and lover, the more you are supposed to use your intimate knowledge to be nicer in ways that no one else in the world can match because no one knows the little secrets about your spouse like you.** Instead you unthinkingly behave in a way that says, because you are married you may abuse each other as if that is what you and your spouse signed up for.

You did not did not sign up for abuse!

Your spouse did not sign up for abuse!

Isn't this so unbelievably simple? Do not follow the ways of the world. It does not work. Stop being mean. Replace the over-familiar behavior with great behavior and make extra good behavior a habit. Don't you want to be treated the way you were treated when you were courting? Would you consider marrying the person who treats you the way you are currently treated? Well, neither would your spouse.

You are supposed to take advantage of the security of the marriage contract by opening your heart and expressing love without inhibition. Express loyalty and appreciation like you ought to. (Don't care or worry if your spouse does not get this. Just do what *you* are supposed to do.)

Predicate your behavior on what you know to be right rather than how others, your spouse included, behave. You are ultimately responsible for only your own behavior. This point is critical to the success of your marriage. If you wait for your spouse to measure up before you take the next step, you will fail. Behaving well toward a person who does not treat you as you desire is a sign of maturity. No time limits and no conditions should interfere with your efforts to behave well. You are hurting each other and have become so used to it that you do not see how mean and ugly you have become. You do not hear yourself when you speak to your spouse. Your meanness in whatever form it comes was extremely painful in the beginning before you became numb. Perhaps it is still painful, but you hardly notice it through the anger and hurt.

Life is not like a TV sitcom where it is funny or entertaining to be vicious or sarcastic. It is not comical to judge or ridicule another's weakness or unfortunate predicament and goof on them. Nor is it your right to notice your spouse's flaws or behavioral faux pas. It is time to stop this atrocious behavior right now! I have heard so many exceptions. They are not valid. There is never a justifiable reason to be mean or inconsiderate; excuses are a form of lying.

You have no right, no matter what the circumstances, to criticize your partner. Not only is criticism simply an expression of your own

Never allow a negative thought, word or deed to be entertained about your spouse.

Be their greatest fan club at all times; that is love as a verb.

shortcomings but it never, never, never achieves your desired result, immediate or long term.

If you see your spouse doing something wrong, which is anything you don't happen to like, just stop your own mind from judging and think about changing your own behavior, or dwell upon one of the many positive traits your spouse has. Take note of your own behavior without comparing it to your spouse. Marriage is not a contest. It is a codependent independent team. If your spouse has difficulty living up to standards you have set for him or her, the real problem is that you are being judgmental. Do you see what I mean? Support your spouse at every turn.

Start being kind now. Stop being critical now. Stop saying things that are offensive and disrespectful. *Say things that are complimentary and gracious.* Gracious means something your spouse will like hearing. If you stop being mean and start being kind, everything will immediately improve. You have the power!

Only one couple I worked with told me they treated each other well. They were just numb. After some challenging discussions, they began to see how much they abused each other in subtle ways. Subtle attacks and hurts cause not so subtle pain and resentment. Because this couple remained *polite*, they thought they were nice.

"Insincerity is like a beautiful dead lady." Being polite just to be polite is only slightly better than remaining quiet. However, it is better to start with politeness than to wait until you *feel* like being polite. You must refocus on your love and build it again in your heart and actions. Tend to this precious plant without applying "lovicides" of inconsiderate behavior. Make your mind return to the thoughts that will benefit your relationship by making your spouse feel loved and appreciated.

Not long ago I went for coffee with a couple of my friends (women), one married and the other divorced. Grace asked Lilly about her marriage, and Lilly started to tell us the good . . . and the bad. I told Lilly that she was breaking a cardinal rule. One must never say anything that can be even remotely construed as negative about their spouse. (Are you guilty of this, too?)

Lilly said she was just being truthful, and I complimented her for her intention. I reminded her that her intention to be loyal must supersede all other intentions. I suggested if her husband heard what she said he would probably be hurt, and she agreed. I also let her know that **giving hurtful facts about someone is not being truthful** because the mind of the listener will always fixate on the negative and have an unbalanced and thus untruthful understanding of the person whose character is being discussed. Think how challenging it is to remain positive about a friend you hear gossip about even though most of your previous experience with that person is positive. When we listen

Assume the virtue of being the world's greatest spouse until you are

You did not get married to work on each other's flaws

to someone going on about someone's flaws, we are all ears. Some say it is human nature, but in reality it is a learned response, a destructive habit that needs to change.

Both listening to gossip and speaking gossip are horrible and we all know it. Can you see how gossiping about your own spouse because you are mad over some trifle of the moment is traitorous? Is this cool? It is so accepted as normal these days! Other people I have met with said they only put down their spouse to a close confidant; they said they needed to speak to someone or they might explode. Explode then! Why would you give ammunition to someone about your own spouse, your best friend, your soul mate, your precious love? It is all too common to take for granted the person we are closest to (the definition of irony!). We actually feel privileged to be the one who can inform others of otherwise hidden flaws. That's not nice! But it is easy to change this habit to the opposite habit of praising your spouse. Change now! Be utterly respectful of your spouse at all times, whether or not you are in each other's presence.

The current thinking is you ought to have compassionate understanding about the flaws of others. We rationalize away flaws by not judging them and talk about them as neutral observers. We use imagined or real excuses to explain away evil. I am not asking you to do that because it diminishes your natural repulsion toward evil behavior. Evil should be exposed so that it can be eradicated. You need to catch your evil, not others'. Let your spouse and others work on their own flaws. Unfortunately the mind prefers to notice the flaws of others, especially your spouse's, because it feels comforted to see the cause of its suffering as something outside of your own thinking and behavior so your mind won't feel pressure to change its comfortable bad habits (which requires some courage and effort to change).

Remember that other people's evil is their problem and nothing you say or do can get them to change. Any effort you make toward changing them is effort not made toward changing your own evil habits, which compounds your error. In addition, pointing out your loved one's flaws is the opposite of loving behavior. You must see your spouse as the most beautiful or handsome person you have ever seen. Don't go along with the Hollywood version of beauty. Go along with your heart's version.

1. Can you control or change your spouse's mind (or behavior)?

Answer: NO way

2. Can your spouse control or change your mind (or behavior)?

Answer: NOPE

3. Do you try to control and change your spouse?

Answer: Of course you do!

Your spouse is just fine as they are (no one is perfect)

Don't try to change them or even convince them of something...just listen and learn

Yes, you do! You can protest if you want, but nearly everyone tries to control his or her spouse. **Trying to control your spouse in small or big ways is both offensive and useless.**

Everyone who is uninformed tries to get his or her spouse to change. Trying to change your spouse is a losing proposition for both of you. This is the part about braking when your car is in a skid; you will crash if you try, even though it seems to be the right thing to do. Try to change your spouse and you will crash. The mind comes up with many rationalizations and exceptions, so we must stick to our commitment to mind our own business, to change only ourselves. It is an absolute!

The mere subconscious desire to blame and change outer circumstances (i.e., our spouse's behavior or thinking) leads to nothing but frustration for everyone. Life is much sweeter when we refuse to try to change each other even when asked. When we learn to appreciate instead of criticize each other and change flaws we see in ourselves, we become much more fun. Avoid giving advice even when begged. There are much better ways to be helpful.

Face it; it is easier to notice flaws in others. **All logic dictates the futility of trying to change another person. We will not allow another person to change us, yet we actually think they will be grateful for our advice.** Our habits push us into this ridiculous behavior. It is so common; this flawed behavior is not seen as flawed behavior in our society, so we bang our heads against the same wall repeatedly and then wonder what is wrong with the other person. Why don't they change? We see it everywhere. Everyone is always criticizing everyone else, blaming everyone or anything else when something is not how he or she wants it to be. It is an epidemic in this world—an epidemic of a disease called over-familiarity. Though we hate it when someone blames us, even when we accidentally did something wrong, we think nothing of blaming someone else for whatever unfortunate event might befall us. It's crazy!

We usually blame the person we are supposed to love with all our hearts. Moreover, it is always for the most petty and unanticipated things. Do you see the irony? **The one person we vow to love, cherish, respect, and hold dear is the one who gets our unrestricted crap. It is insane!**

Overfamiliarity needs to be replaced with unconditional respect. Honor your spouse. Your happy marriage will bounce back faster than you can imagine. Your marriage relationship is organic, and it will heal very quickly when you stop the bad behavior—when you remove the pebbles.

Apologize to your spouse even if he or she cannot hear you. Ask for forgiveness. Promise you will try never to be mean again. Don't allow your mind to think your spouse does it so you can do it too. Finding excuses is the greatest pitfall to success. It can be insidious. Most people

see this flawed behavior in their spouse without realizing judgemental thoughts must never be entertained in their own mind.

You should not allow critical thoughts to sprout into disrespectful behavior. Kick those thoughts out! Control your words and behavior. Control the mind. It is *your* mind, and you can control it. When you first met, you were respectful because you feared rejection. That's a fine reason! Whatever you need to motivate your good behavior is fine. That particular fear can be healthy. Of course it's better to behave well because you wish to please your spouse, but I'll take the fear motivator over mean treatment any time.

Try hard to stop yourself from thinking or saying things like, "I knew you would do that," or "you never listen to me," or "I saw that coming." Allow only kind and beneficial thoughts about your spouse to be expressed in your behavior and words. Assuming the positive instead of the negative is very important.

When was the last time you dwelled on good thoughts about your spouse? Think of some right now. Really! Right now.

When was the last time you couldn't stop thinking about how good a person your spouse is or how much you love him/her? Do it now!

Make it a habit to be your spouse's most ardent supporter. That is what loyalty means.

If you do your part, you will have a great marriage; even if your spouse does not do his or her part, such is the power of right behavior.

Have you, perhaps, lost your objectivity? Obviously. When you were courting each other, you saw only the good qualities and barely noticed the little flaws. Now is the time to stop the evil thoughts about your spouse that ruin your day. Replace them with sweet thoughts. You can relive those dreamy courting days by controlling your mind and behavior.

Some people actually believe, "if only I had a better partner everything would be fine." While they are married they look around for the so-called perfect partner by looking at the surface of others—looks, easy demeanors, and other image traits—then become more negative toward their spouse. They do not realize that in the beginning people show only the good just as they did.

The surface does not tell the whole story. When you switch partners, you only switch mirrors and your same bad traits will show up again until you get rid of them. I tell you this so that you will stop comparing your spouse with others and you get started making the *tiny* effort of controlling your own behavior instead; I say *tiny* in comparison with the guaranteed gargantuan suffering that comes from ignoring this reality.

When you recognize how much poison you have been spewing into your relationship and stop, you will have won half the battle. **Evil**

**Marrying the
"wrong" person
is extremely rare.
Focus only on the
good traits of your
spouse.**

You didn't mean to become mean.

thoughts, feelings, and speech are erosive toxins eating away your relationship as surely as acid eats away the most durable steel. Another self-interested way to look at this is to recognize your thoughts as your closest environment; even closer than the nose on your face. You live in the “mental” environment you create. When your thoughts and feelings are miserable, you live in a self-created miserable environment. When you make sure your thoughts and feelings are positive and uplifting, or compassionate and charitable, you live in a healthy mental environment. It's completely up to you. As this concept sinks in, **your relationship already improves, because the relationship will heal when it is not subjected to those things that are destroying it—the pebbles of inadvertent misbehavior.**

You didn't mean to become mean. Of course, the options are yours. You don't have to follow this practical advice; it is *your* call. You can imagine that someone else created your suffering if you want to. You have free will and will do whatever you want, but has it *ever* worked when you tried to change your spouse? If they chose to go along with your demands when you were insistent, did it really help for long, or did you just keep noticing new flaws to make yourself miserable?

You can control a great deal in your life and learn about whom you really are by learning to control your own mind. If you make the effort to control what you are able to control—your mind—you will be happy. Stop banging your head against the wall. Stop trying to control or change your spouse.

- Stop expecting.
- Stop manipulating.
- Stop asking for this or that.

Summary

The greatest expression of overfamiliarity is to get into someone else's space with judgment and criticism. Instead, always compliment your spouse. Always compliment your spouse. No matter what your mind is thinking, all you have to do is shift your thinking and deliver a sweet compliment. You won't lose a thing, but you will gain much. Always compliment your spouse.

Quiz

Fill in the blanks.

1. I will never _____ my spouse again.
2. I will always look for opportunities to _____ my spouse.

Answers: 1. criticize; 2. compliment

**List the ways you
have become
over-familiar**

The recurring associated theme is to look at your own stuff, which is all you need to be concerned with in order to find happiness and meaning in your life. Graciously allow other people the space to grow and develop when and if they choose.

Highly evolved people don't try to force growth or change on others (except their kids) because it doesn't work. They work only on themselves and never consider another person's flaws; they realize that only their own flaws bring pain. At the same time they diplomatically and lovingly support the positive efforts of those who wish to change.

Great prophets of every religion demonstrate unconditional love and commitment to our salvation. They never attempt to beat us into right behavior. They inspire us by their own right behavior—it's a free-will game. We have no right to try to change another person; especially not our spouse!

Men and women often express overfamiliarity differently. The following is not an attempt to cover all expressions of overfamiliarity, just a way to get you to recognize some of your own undesirable expressions. See if some of these behaviors are part of your own repertoire. Consider if they are respectful and loving or if they should be removed.

Men

- Belching or worse (you know what I mean) in front of your wife
- Leaving the toilet seat up
- Discourteous speech such as swearing
- Expressing anger verbally or otherwise
- Expressing impatience
- Looking at other women
- Flirting and/or responding to flirtatiousness
- Expecting sex as if from a prostitute
- Not defending your wife from attacks
- Not understanding her point of view
- Having mean or degrading thoughts about your wife
- Trying to control the finances
- Trying to control your wife's behavior
- Making fun of your wife, even "jokingly"
- Criticizing your wife
- Assuming you know what she is thinking

There are many more ways, but I hope I have made my point and you can think of ways in which you have stopped treating your wife with the same level of respect you want for yourself. On the other hand, if you

are a wife, you will be reading this and thinking, “Uh huh, that’s what he does!” If you are having thoughts about his flaws, you are, unfortunately, doing more than acknowledging a situation; you are being critical and thus expressing a form of disrespect. Do not take flawed behavior from your spouse as a personal attack. In most cases, the insults are not intentionally aimed at you. If you assume they are intentional or loaded, you will make yourself a victim. Being a victim is a personal choice.

Women

- Having unkind thoughts about your husband
- Talking unfavorably about your husband to your friends (so commonly accepted, and so horrible)
- Not considering family budgets
- Dumping emotionally on your husband
- Unkind speech such as nagging
- Ordering him instead of asking
- Letting your body go (This is a sensitive topic. It has to do with caring about pleasing him. The idea of “if he doesn’t like me the way I am . . .” is not the point. Nor are we looking for 100 percent compliance in any of these examples. This is a reminder that your intentions have shifted from a desire to please to destructive apathy or resentment.)
- Criticizing your husband openly and in private
- Reading your husband’s mind
- Finishing his thoughts and sentences
- Not demonstrating love and loyalty through intimacy (well covered in the last lesson)
- Manipulatively withholding affection
- Blaming your husband for misunderstandings
- Taking sides with children or others publicly
- Interrupting his train of thought with your own ideas
- Unilaterally changing the subject

There are many ways you currently express disrespectfulness that sprouts from overfamiliarity. I hope you will see that over-familiar behavior is not conducive to a harmonious and loving relationship. If you and your husband treated one another in an unloving manner when you were courting, there is not a chance you would have chosen to marry each other, The same point can be made to men. If you are thinking, “Yes, she does all that and more,” then you are being critical. You need to think something along the lines of, “My lovely wife may have a few

**Entertaining
unkind thoughts
about your spouse
undermines your
marriage**

flaws, but I refuse to notice them; they are so small compared to all the wonderful traits I see. I love her so much.”

The main point is *both* individuals have stopped treating each other with the love and respect expressed during courting. You are cheating yourselves out of what you rightfully expected from marriage. I will address this in more detail a bit later, but the main point is neither of you are happy with how you are treated and one or both of you may be blaming the other for “starting it.” Therefore, I ask you now at this very moment to make a conscious effort to recognize only your own misbehavior and take responsibility for being kind, regardless of how you are being treated.

Yes, that is correct: **No matter how you are being treated, I am asking you to be kind, courteous, and well behaved.** Stop lowering yourself by imagining you would behave better if your spouse did. You behave the way you choose when you control your mind. Just do it because it makes sense. Everyone will like you better; but that doesn’t matter! **Be kind because you know it’s the right thing to do.**

It’s not what is wrong with your spouse that is the problem with your marriage. Your spouse is merely the catalyst for revealing your own flaws. Your behavior is a reflection of how you wish to live. Treat your spouse better than *anyone else* in the world no matter how your spouse treats you, even if it appears unfair at the moment.

How you behave is what you are. One of my favorite stories emphasizes this point. This story is true, as far as I know.

Though suffering in a concentration camp, an inmate was saying a prayer of thanksgiving. His friend, overhearing this well-known prayer, was startled by his friend’s prayers of sincere and humble gratitude and asked, “How can you be grateful? Have you lost your mind? You have lost everything else! You are skin and bones, your family is dead, all is gone and you are dying! What can you possibly be thankful for?”

His friend softly answered, “I am grateful that God didn’t make me like those who put us in here.”

The wise man in this story was not allowing his outer circumstances to control his self-view or his behavior. His noble attitude removed him from the victim designation despite every outward circumstance, so he was not compelled to retaliate. In his mind, he was a free man who felt joy because he did not let anyone or anything interfere with his lofty attitude. He reframed his perspective of the situation to demonstrate his inner peace rather than his outer temporary agonies. What he did you can do also! It’s not as hard as it seems; it is a matter of training the mind to respond in ways that give you joy instead of sorrow. It’s all up to you. Ultimately, you are a victim only if you choose to be one by seeing yourself compromised.

Do what you should do, not what you want to do

You do not need to be perfect to be happily married.

Don't waste your effort on changing your spouse; change how you perceive your spouse. That doesn't mean you should become a fatalist. I am not asking you to be a doormat either. On the contrary, when you control your mind, you are the master of your destiny. Circumstances will change with the right effort, but the effort put into changing yourself is the most useful effort of all. The effort you make will guarantee you will be a happier person no matter what the situation. It is the effort itself that pays off. You do not need to be perfect to be happily married. Just remember never to criticize and always praise.

Remember, you chose your spouse to be your lover, best friend, co-parent, business partner, and more. You chose this person for the rest of your life. You weren't crazy or ill-informed. You just didn't know how to behave in a relationship and now you are learning these things; everything will work out.

Years ago, the Thames River in England was pronounced dead. It was so polluted that there were no more fish in it. The government passed strong laws and made cleaning the river a national cause. Everybody got on board because the pollution impacted their lives in ugly ways. Within a short time, to the amazement of all the skeptics the river came back and is now clean and sweet. No one had to sanitize the waters or re-filter it. They just stopped polluting. Stop polluting your marriage, and soon you will be drinking the nectar of a loving marriage with your soul mate.

Lesson Exercise

Ask yourself what your most destructive trait is; write it down on a piece of paper you can carry with you. Every time you catch your mind going there and don't act on it give yourself a point. When you don't catch it and you act out, take a point away.

The two best ways to eliminate bad habits are by using sheer will power to deny the unwanted habit (I refuse to be angry) and by replacing the bad habit with the opposite good habit (I am feeling angry so I will be sympathetic). Strong habits take stronger resolve. Pernicious habits can be overcome. Never give up!

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We hope you got help from the sample

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