

Shrink Rap: Save your marriage: Part 6

Dr. John Gottman's research and subsequent book "The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work," instructs couples on how to reconnect with their partner and save their marriages. In the previous weeks I have covered the first five Principles: Enhance Your Love Maps, Nurturing Your Fondness and Admiration, Turning Toward, Let Your Partner Influence You, and Solve Your Solvable Problems. The last two Principles: #6 Overcoming Gridlock and #7 Create Shared Meaning, complete Dr. Gottmans' model.

What is "Gridlock?" It sounds like something from a sci-fi movie. Gridlock is when two people are polarized on an issue, they have had the same argument time and time again, and they allow the issue to create conflict and contention in their relationship. 'Gridlock' is what some couples deem 'irreconcilable differences.'

Dr. Gottman states: "the best approach to coping with gridlock is to avoid it in the first place." He goes on to say that the more adept you are at practicing the first five principles, the more you trust one another, disagreements are more easily handled, and you are meeting one another's needs more readily. Gridlock is not all bad. If you have gridlock, this just means you each have hopes and dreams in your life, they are individual to you, and not your partner. The saving grace in the marriage is when you can accept that fact, and not allow it to create a wedge between you.

When couples are able to sidestep gridlock, they *accept* that the issue won't go away, they *manage* to keep it from overwhelming their life together, and they *respect* their partner's dreams. Remember you do not have to win or lose; the goal is to be able to discuss the issue without hurting one another.

Principle #7: Create Shared Meaning. This principle is about creating an inner life together. One that has a culture rich in symbolism and spirituality; deep appreciation for roles; goals that lead you to understand who you are as family. Sometimes these things are so ingrained and a part of who we are as a couple that we take them for granted and do not notice them. It is a 'trust' a 'know' of the other person's reliability, faith, and loyalty.

As we approach Christmas, pay attention to the rituals, roles, and routines of your family. What are the assumptions about gift giving, extended family time, church life, and quiet time? What are the rituals of the ornaments on the tree and who puts up the lights, that one special ornament, or the topper on the tree? Do you value the excitement of children in the season?

Discover what is meaningful about your lives together. Develop a bond with your life partner. Trust, and be trusted. Be interdependent with each other with healthy give and take. It will save your marriage!

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