

Shrink Rap: Save your marriage: Part 5

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 Principle #1: Enhance Your Love Maps, Principle #2: Nurturing Your Fondness and Admiration, and Principle #3: Turning Toward. Practicing these three principles gives a solid foundation and open mind to the next principle: Let Your Partner Influence You.

I can hear you now with all of your defensiveness and rebuttal to allowing anyone else to influence you. After all, we teach our children to be strong-willed and independent, to not follow the crowd or to be easily influenced by others. How can we allow our partner to influence us?

Principle #4: Let Your Partner Influence You, is about empowerment, acceptance, and listening with an open mind. Not so much about being a follower or submissive. Allowing your partner to influence you is to engage in **partnership**. This means making decisions together, listening to one another's opinions and ideas, expressing respect and honor, disengaging any type of power struggle and sharing of power in the relationship, being equals in the marriage, and learning from your partner's experiences and values.

To allow your partner to influence you, there must be an ability to **learn to yield**. There are times in life that you must yield in order to win. A perfect example of yielding is to compromise; make concessions, and look for something you can agree on. Accept influence from your partner and work as a team.

Principle five seems very easy: Solve Your Solvable Problems. Easy to say, maybe more difficult to do. In this principle, Dr. Gottman gives the following steps: 1. Soften your start-up. This means to share responsibility, express feeling, be specific, state what you need. For example: "Perhaps I should have asked sooner, but we are having company tomorrow and I am feeling very overwhelmed trying to get ready all by myself. Could you please do the vacuuming?" 2. Learn to make and receive repair attempts. "You do a great job. Thank you for asking, I will be glad to help you." 3. Soothe yourself and each other. This could be done by finding humor and adding a little physical cue such as "OK, let's just shake it off and get it done" said with an accent while shaking like a wet dog. 4. Compromise. "I'll get the vacuuming. Can you get the dusting? Then we can work together on the bathrooms?" And, lastly, 5. Process any grievances so that they don't linger; this may mean apologizing for past hurts or abandonments, and moving forward with a new set of skills with the commitment to not offend again.

Next time, the final two principles – Overcoming Gridlock and Create Shared Meaning.

Be Happy!

Linda Yearout,

Licensed Clinical Marriage & Family Therapist, Hope's Place