

## Lessons for a Lifetime



For many of us, the most important areas of our lives are our careers and our relationships. The enormous amount of time and money we dedicate to higher education and degrees are part of our cultural “norm”. On the other hand, most of us have not invested money or dedicated time to learning how to keep our relationships growing and thriving. We tend to assume “all is well” in a relationship as long as there are no conflicts. We are more prone to believe and act, especially after getting married, as though the marriage will take care of itself.



Couples often “coast” without realizing that the law of gravity will eventually prevail. Anything “coasting” will eventually either come to a halt or start to go downhill... even a marriage. When this special committed partnership devotes more time to “running the household” and not enough to time to each other, the growing apart begins.



Have you noticed that much of what we learn and the skills we develop for career success are not as valuable in our relationships? Intimate relationships thrive on play, openness and discovery; with our partners we need to be understanding, cooperative, emotionally open, vulnerable and willing to reveal our true selves. In our business and career lives these abilities may be inappropriate; we need to stay focused, analyze, interpret, solve problems and “get the job done.”



Since we devote so much time to education for our career, it may be time to also consider “going to school” for your relationship. Many of the skills we need to derive the most pleasure from an intimate relationship are learnable. We can be powerful at shaping the outcomes of our interactions with those we



love and care about. Our choices of words, attitudes and behaviors can contribute mightily to the quality and level of satisfaction of our intimate relationship. There are skills available for couples to effectively negotiate for a behavior change!

*Typical Lesson from A Couples Education Class:*

### Do You Know Your Relationship Stress Style?

When a relationship is going through a stressful time, people tend to have the same physical and emotional response they would if they were in real danger. Do any of these four basic stress styles apply to you and your partner?

- 1) The Placater**—You fear losing the relationship, so when you are angry, instead of voicing it directly, you put up with a little more and a little more (i.e. apologizing when it’s not your fault, making nice even though you are upset on the inside).
- 2) The Blamer**—You lash out with criticism, fault finding comments by only focusing on the negatives of your partner and telling them what is wrong with them.
- 3) The Super-Reasonable** —You hide behind logic, statistics, and facts, sending the message that you won’t reveal your

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own feelings (too vulnerable) and you are not all that interested in your partner's feelings.

**4) The Distracter**—You disappear (mentally, emotionally) when the problem rears its ugly head. You distance yourself as much as you can from problems by using humor, changing the subject, or postponing talking about what needs to be discussed.

Whatever our default style of communicating under stress, we can learn to use its strengths - and the strengths of the other styles- to create more effective interactions in all our important relationships. We don't have to choose between ending a relationship or settling for less than what we need... there are ways to effectively create change!

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