

My Approach to Marital Therapy

Before we graduate from high school, many of us will have learned not only about the Civil War, or about how to calculate the area of a triangle, but also about how to balance a checkbook, how to use a computer, and even how to drive an automobile. Yet nowhere in the school curriculum will we find a course on how to select the right person to marry. Or perhaps more importantly, once we have found and have married our special person, there is no high school or college course to teach us how to keep that person and relationship special.

My hope is that this website will serve as such a “mini-course” for achieving marital success and that it will provide you with some resources to help you achieve the kind of marriage you’ve always desired.

More often than I would care to count, individuals come for therapy wondering how in the world the “soul mate” they married has turned into the person who now causes them so much pain. They find it difficult to understand how within the space of but a few brief years (sometimes only months) the person who early in their relationship they would have described as nothing less than perfect, now leaves them feeling empty and unfulfilled and for whom they feel little or no sexual desire.

The conclusion I have arrived at from working with so many demoralized couples is that there are two primary reasons for why marriages remain unfulfilling or end unhappily in divorce. The first is because most individuals have no idea about how to select an appropriate mate, and the second, and equally important reason, is because so few of us have learned, or know how to apply, the “rules for guaranteeing a successful and satisfying marriage.”

Although this website cannot substitute for an actual “in person” session of marital therapy, perhaps I can at least give you a glimpse into my thinking about marriage by sharing with you one of the “rules” that I believe can start making a difference in your life today.

Rule Number One for Re-Establishing a Successful and Satisfying Marriage: Instead of trying to change your spouse, change yourself.

Corollary to Rule Number One: Commit to being the kind of partner your husband or wife is wanting you to be.

What this rule requires is that you stop bemoaning all the ways that your husband or wife is disappointing to you and begin listening to and taking seriously all of your spouse’s complaints about you. Living by rule number one requires not that you twist yourself into a pretzel to become a “super husband” or “super wife,” but only that you begin treating your spouse as you did when you first met.

Do you remember how kind you were when you started courting your partner and how much you looked forward to his or her requests so that you might have an opportunity to prove your love? And do you remember how he or she invariably responded by “giving back more than they received?”

When you treated him or her lovingly, your partner treated you even more lovingly. Human nature is like that. We have no choice but to answer kindness with kindness and love with love. (I am assuming here that you are not married to a sociopath or to someone with a narcissistic personality disorder, in which case different rules apply.)

I believe that as soon as you start to apply rule number one (and its corollary) to your interactions with your spouse, you will quickly see the loving person you once knew begin to re-emerge. For example, consider sending him or her one of those cute greeting cards you might have sent early in your relationship, the type of card that captured perfectly everything about your partner that you initially found so endearing.

Apply rule number one today and although your spouse may not, at first, notice your changed behavior, he or she will gradually and inevitably begin treating you more lovingly.

It’s important that you understand that this approach to marital happiness is not a ploy to get your spouse to change. Their new loving behavior is simply the natural byproduct of your own

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improved behavior. What ever “improvements” you see in your partner is the built-in way that human beings respond to being treated with kindness. I challenge you to treat your husband or wife the way they would like to be treated and then notice how quickly he or she will begin to reciprocate.

I invite you to phone me at 410-377-4343 or email me at babass@towson.edu or visit my website to schedule an appointment to discuss your concerns.

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