

My Approach to Long Term Relationship Success

More often than I would care to count, couples come for therapy wondering how in the world their “significant other” has become an individual who now causes them so much pain. They find it difficult to understand how within the span of but a few brief months, the person who early on 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.

My observation is that there are two primary reasons for relationship failure. The first is that the individuals were not well suited for one another in the first place and thus are likely to experience chronic relationship conflict.

For example, I occasionally see couples in premarital therapy who come to realize that there are significant long term compatibility issues in their relationship. Although this realization is initially received with a great deal of pain, many such “mismatched” couples do eventually leave my office feeling relieved at having been able to avoid becoming yet another divorce statistic. On the other hand, it is also not unusual for couples to leave my office and decide to get married anyway, in spite of learning that their chances for a successful marriage are not particularly good.

The second reason for relationship failure can be traced back to the couple’s lack of knowledge about what relationships need in order to thrive. The overwhelming majority of individuals and couples I see in my practice, including those who are otherwise well suited for one another, simply have not learned or are not applying the “rules” necessary to ensure long term relationship success. In most cases these couples do not realize that such rules even exist.

Although this website cannot substitute for an actual “in person” session of relationship therapy, perhaps I can give you a glimpse into my thinking about relationships 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 Happy and Satisfying Relationship: Instead of trying to change your partner, change yourself.

Corollary to Rule Number One: Commit to being the kind of partner he or she is wanting you to be.

What this rule requires is that you stop complaining about all of the ways that your partner is disappointing to you and begin listening to and taking seriously all of your partner’s complaints about you. Living by rule number one requires that you begin treating your partner 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 your partner 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 in a relationship with a sociopath or with an extremely narcissistic person, 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 significant other, you will soon see the loving person you once knew begin to re-emerge. For example, send him or her one of those cute greeting cards you might have sent early in your relationship, the kind that captured perfectly everything about your partner that you found so endearing. Although your partner 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 relationship success is not a ploy to get your partner to change. Their new loving behavior is simply the natural byproduct of your own improved behavior. What ever “improvements” you see in your partner is the built-in way

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that human beings respond to being treated with kindness. I challenge you to treat your partner more lovingly than you had been. Treat your lover the way he or she wants to be treated and your partner will have no choice but 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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