



## **Stuck Trying to Resolve a Specific Conflict? Wanting to Break a Pattern of Behavior That's Not Working? Got a Tough Decision You Can't Figure Out How to Make?**

*There's help on the way...if you'll consider these critical issues*

**The business world got this one right—the definition of insanity really is doing the same thing over and over, but expecting new and different results!**

Yet to be human is to live in patterns. This is never truer than in relationships. Sometimes, our patterns work just fine. Other times, not so much. Some of our life patterns, we really learned as very young children. Mostly, we learned them in response to times when we didn't get what we wanted, or when we didn't exactly feel loved. Some of them work better for us than others. Counselors refer to the ones that don't work so well as *maladaptive behaviors* or *schema*. The moments of self-awareness where we know we need to try something new are when growth happens in marriages. Here's another saying: *If it gets you what you want, do more of it*. If it doesn't, then maybe it's time to re-negotiate and be more creative.

**Sometimes, to get to the solution you have to first negotiate the values that will become criteria**

If this doesn't sound like much fun, sorry. There are situations in life where racing toward a decision or a solution just won't get you where you need to be. Knowing when to call a sidebar and listen to each other about what is important may be the key to unlocking the potential solutions. Better to be clear what's important to each other before rushing toward an outcome. You'd rather have the right solution than the fast one most of the time. There's time later to arrive at the ONE you wanted, and you'll see it more clearly if you've invested the effort in some definitions.

**Conflict-Resolution assumes trust**

That is, BOTH parties trusting each other equally. Another assumption is that you as an individual are worthy of being trusted. (By the way, your ability to trust your partner will be affected by your own level of self-trust!) And while there are differences, you both value an outcome that is best for the big picture of your relationship. If that trust level isn't present, then there is some work to be done. Talk. Listen. Repair if need be. This is one of those aspects where the only healthy relational outcomes happen when there are two willing parties. One of you can't do this one alone.

**Will the same business skills that make you a champion in your career(s) see you successfully through married life?**

Some of what makes you formidable in the workplace, or skilled at your job, will serve you very well. Among many other realities, marriage is signing on to run a company called "us." There are business aspects where your specific savvy will be exactly what carries the day. But especially when dealing with your partner, some of your strengths can also quickly become weaknesses when overplayed. Used to excess, what works at work might not work at home! Your spouse isn't a board of directors to be manipulated, a jury to be convinced nor a poor vendor to be beaten down. Remember the saying—*if all you carry in your toolbox is a hammer, then every problem starts to look like a nail*. Don't play your spouse for a cheap "win." Don't manage your loved one in order to get your way. Your partner can learn to sense when they are being *handled* by you. Treat each other fairly and with integrity.

## **The only way out is the way through**

Conflict or tough decisions can test your commitment. In sloppy relationships, there is often one spouse who gets frustrated and pushes the nuclear button. “Well, then I ought to just leave you!” Or, “Fine, maybe we should just get a divorce!” When this is something you’ll even toss into the fray, then it’s an option. And, this is a dangerous game to play. Eventually one of you comes to see that outcome as a better potential solution than the hard work needed to pull things together. But, when two people are equally committed, there is a chance at the creativity and trust needed to dislodge tough impasses.

## **Brainstorming is to be understood—and then put to work in these marriage situations**

True brainstorming is a skill. If there is one skill that couples are often a little short on, it’s brainstorming. We’re all busy and time-pressured. Often, we just jump into a competition to get our particular idea heard. We want our partner to “listen” to us, which for most of us means seeing “it” our way. Brainstorming is a skill that when utilized by couples, facilitates open discussion, creative thought and active listening. Here’s the rule: when brainstorming— all ideas are good ideas! If a couple keeps that sacred between them, then brainstorming works. Take a blank sheet of paper and jot these brainstorms down; debriefing them or arguing over their validity is against the rule. You’ve got time later to move on and begin evaluating potential solutions. Still later, you can eliminate a few ideas (according to the criteria you share). Finally, you can choose the one or two solutions you’ll both commit to equally.

## **A win-lose scenario isn’t just life**

No, I mean that literally. In a marriage, it will be rare that when one of you loses you don’t both lose. There’s not much justice in watching your spouse lose. Sometimes, you might even both be better off losing in some ways than trying to live with an outcome where one clearly wins at the bitter expense of the other’s loss. Remember—business rules don’t always apply. Emotionally, when your spouse loses you’ve also lost.

## **Compromise? Sell-out**

The Washington, D.C., politicians got this one right. Politics is the art of compromise. Don’t think your home is political? Put this article down and walk away. Now. And, don’t come back until you say good-bye to the Easter Bunny, Santa and the Tooth Fairy in that little place you go. Here’s the problem: some of us has been encultured to think that compromise causes us to give up parts of who we are that we just can’t afford. Which brings me to the final thought...

## **... There is no ONE issue that is worth doing damage to your relationship over**

Remember this above all else. People lose sight of this principle too easily. In the heat of the moment, or in the drag of old business, perspective is easy to lose. Your fight over a seemingly large issue can’t be handled in sloppy or unfair ways that do damage to your relationship. That’s why having some boundaries in place is vital. Knowing the language of your conflict, as well as the pace of your resolution, are musts.

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