

## Newsletter Article 3

### **Solving Problems or Slaying Partners**

While we are in the midst of "The War On Terrorism," I want to talk about another battlefield - marriage and the home. We all know that misunderstandings, deceit, and conflict occur between husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters. When couples and families come in for counseling, they often say that we just don't communicate any more, or that I'm not sure I can live with this person any more because of the hurt that has been caused.

When people say they these things it can mean a variety of things: they don't speak to each other at all or very seldom; they don't believe the other person hears and understands them; they feel that nothing can ever get solved, so why bother; or, they can't talk without a fight and someone losing in the process; or, that the other's behavior is so bad I don't think I can keep going. The debris of this battlefield is deep wounds, hurt feelings, long standing resentments, loneliness, and feeling unimportant or devalued.

Here are some helpful suggestions that might be worth trying before calling it quits:

1. Solve the problem; don't slay the person. This means define and resolve the problem, not destroy the partner's character. If a couple cannot talk long enough without hurting each other, it might work for each to write out what the problem is from their viewpoint and suggest a means to solve it. If partners are looking for solutions more than winning a point, both end up as winners.
2. Don't overload the present problem with past resentments. This is difficult to do, but it can be done. Often, a present problem is a repeat of past problems that were never resolved. As often happens, couples start dumping the whole can of garbage and the emotional battleground is littered with wounded feelings. If the present problem can be defined and resolved in a productive manner, it can go a long way to resolving past problems and hurts.
3. Agree to have each other's interests at heart. Marriage is more than trying to get my needs met. It is not only asking how I can help you, but what is the best for our marriage or committed relationship? Taking time to respect each other's point of view will allow both individuals to come up with a solution where both feel the gain and help the other at the same time, and make the marriage bond stronger.
4. Decide to talk to each other as you want others to model your behavior - especially your children. Ask yourself if you want your child to say I learned how to talk this way because it was how mom and dad showed me.
5. Learn to ask your mate "What is the most important thing you want me hear from what you are saying?" Most mates want to know they are safe, respected, valued, and important. Some know how to communicate this more than others. Some spouses are so afraid to let their mate know what they fear and need that it often comes out in the form of nagging, complaining, criticizing, and avoidance which just reinforces the underlying vulnerable feeling. Remember,

the purpose of marriage is to build each other up, not tear each other down. Avoid the below the belt shots.

6. Clarify what you need from the other person. Most partners want to be a part of the solution, not part of the problem. For instance, you may want to have your partner just listen and not try to solve anything, so let him or her know that. If you are seeking an opinion, let them know you want their thoughts, but you still need to make your own decision. You may want some help with the house or kids, so ask for what you want and how they can best do it. Most partners are willing to help each other if that help is valued, doesn't come with criticism, and acknowledged with appreciation.

7. Treat your partner with the same care you want to be treated. If you are sarcastic, cutting, bullying, lecturing, controlling, selfish, avoiding, or some other negative behavior, ask yourself if you want to be on the receiving end of your own style.

Marriage can easily leave a lot of casualties on its battleground because it is filled with so many unexpected landmines of unexpected problems, unfulfilled dreams and unclear expectations. It seems natural to take our mates for granted and let out our worst side on the one with whom we are to feel the most safe, just as we might do with our parents when we were children.