

## Stress Reduction for Marriage

In my last article I wrote about how happiness is an internal decision and an attitudinal choice. So that is the good news. The not so good news is your upsets, frustrations, and resentments are also a choice. Like happiness, anger is only from within. Commonly, it is our relationships that trigger us into an upset. Our spouses seem to have a magical way of knowing how to push our buttons. At first, it seems to be because we perceive our significant other is at fault for our upset. However, when examined with scrutiny, one finds that it is not usually the actions or words of the other person, but that we feel unheard and unacknowledged.

When you contemplate why you are upset, often you will feel resentment because one of these elements is missing in the communication. Your perceptions usually are based on not being either heard, understood or acknowledged. Obviously, the best way to deal with the situation is by listening, but how can you listen when you are triggered? One way I have discovered to deal with marital stress and improve communication is by a process called paired listening. Here is how to do it.

Sit down with your partner with a timing device. We use the clock on the stove which is right near our living room. Each partner is given five minutes to talk about their perceptions of the marital problem. When it is your turn to talk the rule is the other partner is not allowed to interrupt, but must listen for the full five minutes. When the time is up, the active listener then repeats his or her interpretation of what the partner had discussed, to make sure that what was said is what was heard. Then you switch roles for another five minutes. Each person needs to be heard without interruption, and to have their concerns acknowledged. When each partner is finished, that's it. The process is not to win an argument. The process is only to listen to the perceptions of the other partner. The idea is to hear, understand and acknowledge.

Many couples are surprised to find how effective this exercise is to clear the air on any issue. What is the upset? It is not being heard, understood or acknowledged. What is the solution? To sit for five minutes and hear, understand and acknowledge. For women, this provides the opportunity for his undivided attention. For men, you can love and respect your wife in only five minutes.

Another exercise to strengthen your relationship with your significant other is to practice being present without any verbal communication. This exercise is best done when there is no upset. The process is meant to acknowledge without words and is extremely powerful when applied. Here is how to do it. In separate chairs, face one another with your knees about six inches apart, but not touching. Set a timer for three minutes. Silently, be present with your partner, looking into their eyes. Just be with them in silence for three minutes. If you laugh, no problem, just resume being present. If you cry, no problem, just continue to be present. You will be amazed at what three minutes together in silence can do. In my experience, when I look into my wife's eyes I see myself. Other times I have sensed a connection beyond this world, as if we are soul mates.

I love my wife. We have been together now for sixteen years and we have a nice family including our miracle son who is six. Whenever we have a significant disagreement or strife, we have some communication tools that are useful and worth sharing with you in this article. Try them out for yourself and see if they reduce tension in your relationship. Remember most upset is resolved when we hear, understand and acknowledge one another. It will amaze you that anger can be resolved in five minutes or less. As I wrote last time, choose to be happy. I would add this time, choose to hear, understand and acknowledge your spouse. It only takes five minutes. I would conclude with one pearl of wisdom for all of the male readers of this article. Remember guys, "A happy wife, is a happy life."

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