

The MIND Reader

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Six Marital Maxims You May Not Have Heard

By: Dr. Sheri Fluellen

Every relationship in our lives can be challenging. If they don't challenge you on some level, at some point, you probably don't really have a relationship. You have an acquaintance. I am talking about real relationships; relationships that are defined by patterns of vulnerability, humility, sacrifice, and brutal honesty.

One of the most challenging relationships we can ever have is with our spouse. We have verbalized a commitment to this imperfect person, that we will be partners, that we will love no matter what, and we won't run away.

To help you stay true to your marriage vows and to have the best marriage possible, there are a few ground rules which may not have been disclosed to you on your wedding day. I am now here to enlighten you. If you can follow these simple (yet extremely difficult) rules, then you are much more likely to have a successful marriage.

1. Make sure that at least 51% of your decisions have the best interests of your spouse in mind ahead of your own interests. Marriage is about being selfless and working for the needs of the other. If you married because you thought it was a great way to get all your needs met, you took a wrong turn.
2. DO NOT spend a lot of time with the opposite sex or with people you could reasonably be attracted to. Time and time again, affairs happen (sometimes rather unexpectedly) because (in part) one partner was spending a lot of time with someone else, getting to know them. It may seem innocent and the reason may be well intentioned. But even in a work context, this is a breeding ground for disaster. Guard your time and attention so that you do not give it too much in a direction that is not your spouse and start to find yourself drawn in and physically or emotionally attached to another.
3. DO NOT spend any time watching porn or engaging in anything that is headed in that direction. I hear antidotal stories from people that porn isn't a big deal in one's marriage. However relationship research espouses an entirely different stance. It is destructive to the delicate emotional bond that should be present in marriage. It destroys our sensitivity to our spouse and (referring back to my first point), it is wholly selfish and excludes your spouse from taking a role in your marriage that is a critical role to stay intramarital (i.e. sexual fulfillment and excitement). (Continued on page 2)

THIS ISSUE

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Mind Spa is excited to announce the addition of three exceptional counselors to our team of Providers. **Candise Leininger, Robin Gorsuch, and Alyssa de la Torre** will begin seeing clients in June. All three therapists have a wide range of interests and specialties. For more information, visit our website and read their bios!

In reflecting on the topic of intimacy, love and relationships, I am recalling a presentation on marriage that my husband and I gave at a MOPS (Mothers of Preschoolers) group a few weeks back. During our presentation, we talked about how we (as counselors) are often seeing couples that are in distress for one reason or another. In a sense, we get to see “behind the scenes” into marriages in a way most people don’t. This has led us to have a greater understanding of a few key concepts that were maybe “theory” up to that point. One of these concepts is called “bidding for connection.”

Dr. John Gottman, who has conducted forty years of research on couples in the areas of marital stability and divorce prediction, writes about the concept of “bidding for connection” in his book “Relationship Cure.” In this book he writes that we are “bidding for connection” with those around us on a daily basis. Bidding for connection is not limited to a marital or dating relationship. We bid for connection with anyone we are in relationship with, be it our kids, co-workers, friends, and so on. What these “bids” look like can be extremely obvious. Do you find me attractive? Can I have a hug? Can we go on a date? Do you like me? Do you want to get coffee? Am I a good friend? These are all examples of obvious bids for connection. However, often our bids are a little bit more subtle. We might snuggle up next to our partner and hope that he or she puts his or her arm around us. We might comment on not feeling so “good” in our jeans hoping for a rebuttal. We might hint around wanting to spend time with someone without a direct request being made.

Regardless of how we do it, we seek connection in our life, and hope that we are met with mutual desire for connection. When our bids for connections are met, meaning when our partner (or friend, co-worker, etc.) turns “towards us,” we feel encouraged to be vulnerable again in the future. (Continued on page 4)

Six Marital Maxims You May Not Have Heard (Continued)

4. It is not THAT you fight that is the problem, it is how you navigate and resolve the fight that matters. Dr. Gottman’s research (1) shows that when a couple makes attempts to connect with their spouse in little ways during arguments, that is predictive of staying married.
5. Be intentional about keeping your marriage priority and carving out time to be together without distractions. In the age of busy lives and the use of technology to keep us all more “connected” through the busyness, there still is NO substitute for real facetime, not Apple’s version of FaceTime. Being together in person contributes to the tenuous emotion bond that must be developed for any marriage to be strong and lasting. I know first hand that children can quickly eat up any and all time in a family, and I am definitely not saying that children aren’t a priority. But at the end of the day, the marriage still needs to be first. If you and your spouse are not good, your ability to parent well with undoubtedly suffer.
6. Lastly, allow yourself to be influenced by your spouse. From Gottman’s research, this is also predictive of staying married, especially allowing the influence of wives onto husbands. Even if you genuinely have the better idea and you are the more “logical” thinker, discounting and ignoring your spouse and their wants, desires, or ideas will slowly chip away at their desire to connect. Sometimes allowing your spouse to run the show for a while (even if it is done imperfectly) is worth its weight in gold because it breeds harmony and positive emotional experiences in them towards you and your relationship.

Clearly, I could write another 100 pages of Do’s and Don’ts in marriage, but I wanted to offer some that might not be the ones first thought of, but that are still critical. Do your best with trying to intentionally implement a new one of these each week over the next six weeks and see where it takes your marriage.

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Reclaiming Intimacy

By: Doug Blocksma

The word 'intimate' holds a strange place in popular culture. On paper it reads like a placeholder for something else, a word used in the newspaper for a much larger taboo. At the department store the word is found above the ladies undergarments section. People in an 'intimate' relationship on television are often having to sneak around their other familiars, engaging in a scintillating tryst that could end in gunplay. Exciting!

Truthfully, the power of intimacy transcends both the underwear aisle and the secret hotel meetups. We are a culture surrounded by the urge to physically impress and physically connect, but ill-equipped to discuss the meaning of these interactions and the depth of potential intimacy shared within. There is also the dynamic of those who take a shortcut to intimacy via physical connection that demonstrates how attracted to - *and terrified of* - true vulnerability we are. It is easy to take a moralistic stance against the sexual images we see on our screens, or the emotional shorthand of two television characters falling in love with one another because someone spends the night. But indulging the moral outrage misses a larger point what these images are doing: cheapening true intimacy by equating it with physical intimacy.

True intimacy is a risk. It is frightening. It is allowing yourself to give in to vulnerability, to court potential emotional harm. The potential reward, though, is to receive the feeling of being truly known - and truly accepted. This is powerful stuff, these materials of relationship, and is most likely the reason why those who engage in emotional affairs can end up hurting partners just as much as those in physical ones.

Engaging the entire continuum of intimacy is the most complete way to truly learn to how to share your whole self with another. There is a physical component, to be sure, but how much that physical side of things can be emboldened by honest and tender emotional presence. Don't just fall into the trap of thinking that physical connection is all there is to intimacy. And while this idea is risky - and should be approached with the time and the respect it deserves - the freedom of authentic love is something worth the risk.

Take the Time To Turn Towards Someone (Continued)

It is affirming to have our vulnerability met with acknowledgement, kindness and acceptance. However, when our bids for connection are met with "turning against" or "turning away", we end up feeling a range of feelings, but most commonly ignored, angry, and hurt. "Turning towards" means we notice and respond when a bid is made. This doesn't always mean we can *meet the need* the bidder is requesting, but we don't leave the bidder "hanging." To give a practical example, if someone says, "Can you go to lunch on Wednesday?" To turn towards is to say, "Yes, I can!" or "This Wednesday I am booked, but I would love to try for something on Friday." To turn towards is to enter into the space in that relationship that says, "I see you have put yourself out there. I can meet you in that space of vulnerability or if I can't I will still acknowledge and care for what you have asked."

The other potential responses to bids are to "turn away" or "turn against." Both of these are equally destructive. Going back to the lunch date request example, to "turn away" is to ignore the bid or change the subject. "Can you go to lunch on Wednesday?" being met with, "Did you watch the game last night?" Basically the bidder is left with either no response via silence or a response that ignores the request, which leads to relational disengagement.

Turning against is to meet bids for connection with anger. For example when asked, "Can you go to lunch on Wednesday?" the response being, "Why would I want to go out to lunch with you? Can't you see I am busy!?" Obviously, the bidder would leave this interaction feeling extremely hurt, rejected or ashamed which leads to relational conflict.

The "magic ratio" Gottman has come up with is that for a relationship to feel good and to THRIVE (not just survive), there needs to be five times as many positive interactions and feelings versus negative. The point isn't to "do it perfectly" but to do it well and lovingly *more often than not*. It is pretty incredible to begin to notice how often bids are being made relationally. I have seen this concept transform couple's responses to each other and therefore their relationship! Take the time today to notice all the "bids" coming your way. Take the time to turn towards someone.

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