

3 STEPS TO RESOLVING RELATIONSHIP PROBLEMS IN MARRIAGE

by Dr. Michael Haggstrom, Ph.D.

All couples struggle with communication at various points throughout their relationship. In the beginning it can be more about negotiating each other's preferences and ways of doing things. Later on it can be because life just gets busy and we lose touch with one another as friends. The happiness of each of us in a caring relationship will depend on just that: our ability to grow our friendship in the beginning stages of the relationship then to maintain the friendship throughout life's challenges and busyness. Here are three steps that can help in achieving this:

1. **DON'T BURY THE PROBLEMS: Keep your heart free of grievances**

When things get tough we can tend to avoid certain issues. It just seems safer to not bring them up anymore, that way we keep away from some of the fighting or arguing that can go on. So we then try and put on a happy face as we bottle up the unresolved problems, making due by focusing on the positives. Within itself this is healthy. We often have to choose to enlarge our perspectives and see that there are a lot more positives in the relationship than negatives, after all that's why we chose this person as our partner in the first place. The challenge though is that over time those unsettled issues can cause bitterness and resentment within us. Over the years this grows to a point where everything our partner does or says can start to irritate us or annoy. Long-term unresolved relational issues will eventually override the good that we have tried so hard to focus on. The sooner we attempt to work on the hard issues the better as this leaves then little breeding ground for resentment to build up, keeping our heart free of grievances.

“Unresolved relational issues will eventually override the good”

2. **DON'T TRY TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS TOO QUICKLY: Use each problem as a means toward greater intimacy**

As human beings we can tend toward wanting to fix whatever is not working with a strong sense of urgency. Problems make us uncomfortable. This is great for a problematic car, a difficulty at work or a needed repair around the house. But when it comes to relationships we can't take the same simplistic approach. I tell my clients that each problem in a relationship is an opportunity to learn more about each other and ourselves, about our preferences, our personalities, our values, our likes and dislikes. Compatibility is learned, not innate. If we can become more at ease with the challenges we face as a couple without panicking or turning them into a power struggle, we can use them

intelligently to discover invaluable aspects of one another that can lead us to a greater level of intimacy.

3. **DON'T BE TOO STUBBORN: Make your best attempt to discuss problems with an open mind**

When I got married my wife's uncle gave a short speech encouraging us that when we get to impasses in resolving conflicts to consider that our partner is indeed an intelligent human being even though they don't see things our way. They are not evil, stupid or intentionally being malicious toward us. They are just different, that's all. He went on to say that if you take any two people and have them live in close proximity they are bound to have conflicts. We as individuals by nature, hold to freedom of emotion, of thought and of will. It's the way we're made. As such, we should respect that our partner has the right to see things differently and that doesn't make them unintelligent, wicked or mean, just different... a different flavour of ice cream, if you will. People have the right to their own opinions and preferences. It is often the mindset we bring into our arguments that will determine the outcome. Being open-minded and accepting is the first step to more loving communication. This doesn't mean conversation can't be impassioned and vibrant though. It should be authentic and may be even somewhat heated, but within that context make your best attempt at being accepting and appreciative of your partner's right to be unique.

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Dr. Michael Haggstrom is a psychotherapist & counsellor in Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

You can find more information out at:

www.drmmichael.ca

or call **403-220-1101**

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