

Conflict: Communication That Fuels the Fire

By Harold & Bette Gillogly

CONFLICT. That crippler that tears us apart...that alienates ...that polarizes two people so that they can not reach across the chasm they have dug with their own hands. This is the third SEEDS FOR GROWTH dealing with conflict—the greatest cause for marriage failures today.

We have been discussing the three basic reasons for conflict: (1) our differences, (2) power struggles and (3) faulty communication patterns. Having already dealt with differences and power struggles, let's forge on to faulty communication.

What do we mean by this? Don't we talk right? Maybe not. We'd like to point out six patterns of communication that fuel the fires of conflict. In other words, six ways we don't talk—or listen—right.

1. **Criticalness** This is a habit...a bad habit. That old "gripe rut" where we criticize, complain, whine and accuse. Some of you grew up in homes where the deep ruts of criticism tripped everyone in the family. You hated it, and yet you perpetuate it. Why? Because, as we said, it's a habit. But habits can be broken...with work.

Being critical leads to retaliation of one sort or another. That's why the whole family begins to live in a "gripe rut." But Scripture gives us a better way. Ephesians 4:29-32 "Do not LET any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only what is

helpful for building others up...Get rid of...every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another...."

2. **Not Talking About Concerns** When one partner fears conflict, he or she will often avoid talking about any matters of concern or frustration. This way they think they are keeping the peace. But just the opposite is true. Inside that spouse there is a storm of resentment brewing. And resentment eventually leads to indifference. Sooner or later, the one who avoids conflict at any cost will no longer care about the relationship.

Again, Scripture reminds us to "...put off falsehood and speak truthfully...for we are all members of one body" (Ephesians 4:25). To say that nothing is bothering us when there is, is falsehood. Rather, we are commanded to speak truthfully **BECAUSE WE ARE ONE.**

3. **Talking, Not Listening** We have the idea that the more we talk to our mates about a certain thing, the more we will influence them to do what we want. Again, nothing could be farther from the truth. The more we talk, the more our mates **DO NOT LISTEN.**

We can't listen when we're talking.

Someone has said that if women are prone to nag, men are prone

to badger. They both come down to the same thing, don't they? Talking instead of listening.

We need to learn to practice the very opposite. James 1:19 "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak...." So, put a sock in it.

4. **Speaking in a Foreign Language** In the first SEED on conflict, we talked a lot about differences. These differences are really conspicuous in our communication patterns. Because you and your mate were raised with different values, beliefs and customs, you can be using the same words, but they may have entirely different meanings.

Study your mate like you would study a foreign language. Work at understanding what that is ticking inside him or her. We believe this is one reason God intends marriage to be for life. We need our whole life time to discover each other. And we can't afford to waste any time.

An illustration of learning to speak your mate's language is how Bette learned to "speak" Harold's visualness. For years she would nag him about things he needed to do around the house. He wouldn't remember to do them, so she would remind him (gently, of course) 10 or 15 more times. Finally, she realized how visual Harold is. He writes everything he needs to do on 3x5 cards and keeps them in his pocket for reference (no

Conflict (cont')

kidding). So, she (smart woman that she is) began to write Harold's "to do" list on 3x5 cards and simply handed them to him to add to his stack. Eureka! No more need to nag, because she started 'speaking his language.'

5. Negative Expression

Someone asked a guy what his favorite wine was. And he said, "Why don't you ever listen to me?" That's spelled w-h-i-n-e.

We get so used to expressing ourselves in the negative instead of the positive. We set ourselves up for failure when we say things like, "You don't have time to talk to me right now, do you?" Or, "Why don't you ever...?" This again is a habit.

Is there a way to say it in a positive tone?

There are ways that each one of those negative whines can be phrased in the positive. Instead of, "You don't have time to talk to me right now, do you?" you can say, "I would really like to talk with you right now. Do you have time?" And "Why don't you ever listen to me?" can

change to, "I have something important to tell you. I would really like you to listen to me." Sure, it will take practice. Think of all the years you've practiced the negative. It's time to start practicing the positive.

Silence can be a "sword to the soul" of one we love.

6. Using the Weapon of Silence

Norm Wright says that more marriages today are dying from silence than from violence. And we would have to agree with him.

We think of one couple who was talking with us about the silence in their marriage. He said that silence to him wasn't a weapon, but merely a shield that he used for protection. But the problem with shields is that they have two sides. The inside looked like smooth, polished metal to him. But she saw the outside of the shield, and it had long, sharp spikes that were very painful. Silence is a deadly weapon that can utterly destroy your relationship. Lay it down, and use instead the oil of Ephesians 4:32. "Be kind and compassionate to one another...."

We've said it before, and we'll say it again: if what you are doing is not working, then do something else. If you are using any of these faulty communication patterns, then you know they DON'T work. So it's time to start practicing something that does work. If you saw yourself in one or more of these patterns, then you must commit yourself immediately to the process of change. You learned that faulty pattern. Now it's time to relearn a better way. If you need reminders, write them to yourself. Perhaps the verses quoted in this SEED could be written on a 3x5 card (thank you, Harold) and taped to the bathroom mirror to be read every morning. We all have an amazing capacity for change if we are committed to it. And that's what God is in the business of doing in our lives... conforming us to the image of His dear Son. And that, dear friends, means CHANGE.

Having talked about WHY we have conflict, next time we'll go on to specific steps we can use in conflict.

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