

10.4 How One Spouse Can Lead the other Back to Intimacy

Marriage partners do not necessarily experience the same state of mind in marriage at the same time. One spouse may disrupt the other's state of Intimacy by failing to meet an emotional need, or inadvertent thoughtlessness. In the state of Conflict, the offended spouse begins to complain, nag, and may even try to start a fight. As the complaints escalate, the other spouse who has been in the state of Intimacy, is dragged into the state of Conflict as well, and then the fighting begins in earnest.

Typically, if they fail in their efforts to resolve the conflict, and if the unpleasant effects escalate, one spouse will go into Withdrawal first and raise his or her emotional barriers. The spouse that remains in the state of Conflict continues to argue, while the withdrawn spouse tries to escape. If the arguing spouse persists, the withdrawn spouse may be goaded to re-enter the Conflict state, and fight back. Or, the arguing spouse may give up and enter the Withdrawal state, too.

One spouse may also lead the other on the road back from Withdrawal to Conflict and eventually to back to Intimacy. In Withdrawal, a husband may decide to make a new effort to restore Intimacy and toss out an olive branch. That effort places him back into the Conflict state, while his wife is still in Withdrawal.

Suppose his effort is an encouragement to her and she eventually joins him in the state of Conflict. Now they are both willing to have their needs met by the other, but their Takers encourage them to fight about it, rather than negotiate intelligently and peacefully. In all too many cases, if they follow their Taker's advice and argue rather than negotiate, they both find themselves back in the state of Withdrawal, convinced that in that state their marriage is safer, and certainly more peaceful.

But this step from Withdrawal to Conflict is a step in the right direction, and provides spouses an opportunity to regain Intimacy -- if they can resist the advice of their Takers. Withdrawal may seem more peaceful, but it is actually a shuttering down of the marriage. A return to the state of Conflict is a sign that the partners have restored hope -- the marriage is worth fighting over. By coming out of Withdrawal, they are lowering their emotional defenses and taking the risk of getting close to each other again.

While demanding and arguing is instinctive in the state of Conflict, one spouse can lead the other back to Intimacy by resisting the Taker's temptation to fight. It takes two to argue, and if one spouse makes an effort to avoid making demands and judgmental statements, and tries to be thoughtful and meet the other's needs, the other spouse usually calms down and does the same thing.

Once they see each other's caring efforts, and rebuild their Love Bank accounts, they re-enter the Intimacy stage. But there's an irony that trips up some couples. Which spouse do you think is the first to move back into the state of Intimacy: the one who makes the first effort to meet the

other's needs, or the recipient of that effort? You may have guessed it. The recipient of care is usually the first to return to the state of intimacy, and not the one who make the greatest effort to save the relationship.

If you set a good example by meeting your spouse's needs first, alas, that usually means that your own needs are met last. Your Taker is not pleased with this arrangement, and may try to sabotage it. You will need to make a deliberate and patient effort to override the Taker's instinct to retreat back to fighting and name-calling. But if you resist that instinct to argue, and instead focus attention on behaving thoughtfully and meeting your spouse's needs, your spouse will be encouraged to reciprocate.

Granted, when in the state of Conflict, it's much more difficult to be thoughtful and meet each other's emotional needs. That's because the Taker's advice dominates the Giver's advice, and the Taker isn't interested in thoughtfulness or meeting someone else's needs. So if you want to return to Intimacy, you must override this instinct with great effort. Meeting an emotional need in marriage is easy when you are in the state of Intimacy, because the Giver encourages you to do just that. But in the state of Conflict, it seems very unnatural and even unfair.

When your Love Bank balances are finally restored, and your love for each other is triggered again, the struggle is over. You will have returned to Intimacy, and along with it, everything you need to do for each other will seem almost effortless.

The passage from Intimacy, through Conflict, to Withdrawal is a slippery slope. You can get there before you know it. But it takes quite a bit of work to climb back up that hill. While one of you can help by pulling the other back up the hill, it's a lot easier when you both work together. And the best way to work yourselves back to Intimacy from Withdrawal and Conflict is by negotiating effectively.

The Policy of Joint Agreement and Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation are designed to help you negotiate in all three states of mind in marriage, when your instincts tell you to either give or take or even give up entirely. It's a rule that I want you use as a way to override the short-sighted advice of both your Giver and Taker.

You have now been introduced to the Ten Basic Concepts that I use whenever I try to save a marriage. If you apply them all to your marriage, you will do what most couples want to do but have failed to do -- fall in love and stay in love.