

5.5 Independent Behavior

Once you are married, almost everything you decide to do has either a positive or a negative impact on each other -- you are either depositing or withdrawing love units with every decision you make. So if your decisions are not made with each other's interests in mind, you will risk destroying the love you have for each other.

I define **Independent Behavior** as the conduct of one spouse that ignores the feelings and interest of the other spouse. It's usually scheduled and requires some thought to execute, so the simplest way to overcome this Love Buster is to take it off your schedule. If your Thursday night bowling, or visit to a friend of the opposite sex, or spending five hours chatting on the internet while your spouse sits alone watching TV, schedule something else Thursday night, visit someone else, and spend time doing something with your spouse. And whatever it is you decide to do that replaces independent behavior, be sure that both you and your spouse enthusiastically agree to it.

My ninth Basic Concept, the Policy of Joint Agreement, (never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse), helps eliminate independent behavior -- any event or activity that is not mutually agreed to cannot take place. It forces you to take your spouse's interests and feelings into account when you forget that your spouse is an extremely important part of yourself, and should be considered in every decision you make.

Independent behavior is a problem in most marriages because we are all tempted to do whatever makes us happy, even when it makes our spouse unhappy (the Taker's rule). We don't feel the pain our spouse feels when we are inconsiderate -- all we feel is the pleasure gained from activities that are only in our best interest. That's why the Policy of Joint Agreement is so important in marriage. It forces us to behave as if we feel each other's pain -- it makes us behave as if we were empathetic.

A wise alternative to Independent Behavior is **Interdependent Behavior**, which limits your your events or activities to those that benefit both of you simultaneously. You are both happy and neither of you suffers when you behavior interdependently, making decisions with each other's interests and feelings in mind. When you get to my tenth Basic Concept, Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation, I'll show you how to replace Independent Behavior with Interdependent Behavior.