

7- The Policy of Joint Agreement

With the Love Bank in mind, it's very important for you to resolve your conflicts in a way that makes deposits into both of your accounts: Win-win resolutions. If an outcome is at the expense of either of you, a win-lose resolution, someone's account always takes a hit causing more than just Love Bank withdrawals. It can also cause deep and enduring resentment.

In marriage, your interests and your spouses interests should be considered simultaneously. One of you should not suffer for the benefit of the other, even willingly, because when either of you suffer, one is gaining at the other's expense. If you both care about each other, you will not let the other suffer so that you can have what you want. When you are willing to let the other sacrifice for you, you are momentarily lapsing into a state of selfishness that must somehow be corrected before damage is done. The Policy of Joint Agreement provides that correction.

Before I tell you what the Policy of Joint Agreement is, I want to warn you that when you read it for the first time you may think I'm crazy to be suggesting such a rule. But the more you think about it, and the more you follow it in your marriage, the more you will recognize it as the breakthrough you need in the logjam that the Giver and Taker create in marriage.

The Policy of Joint Agreement

**Never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement
between you and your spouse**

This rule teaches couples to become thoughtful and sensitive to each other's feelings when they don't feel like it. If both spouses follow this policy, they avoid all the Love Busters because they won't mutually agree to anything that hurts one of them. Demands, disrespect and anger are eliminated because even negotiating strategy must be mutually agreed to, and no one likes to be the recipient of abuse. Annoying behavior is eliminated because if one spouse finds any behavior or activity of the other annoying, according to the policy, it cannot be done. It even eliminates dishonesty, because a lie is certainly not something that you would agree to enthusiastically. It helps plug up the holes in the sieve of the Love Bank that cause most couples to drift into loveless incompatibility.

It also forces couples to negotiate fairly. The Policy itself prevents either spouse from making unilateral decisions about anything, so they must discuss every decision they make before action can be taken. Demands are out of the question, because they are not made to create enthusiastic agreement -- they are made to force one spouse to lose so that the other can gain. The same can be said for Disrespectful Judgments and Angry Outbursts. What role do any of those Love Busters have in a discussion where the goal is enthusiastic agreement? In their place, each spouse learns to make requests and express opinions, showing respect for the other spouse's opinions. The sheer folly and stupidity of demands, disrespect and anger are vividly demonstrated when a mutually enthusiastic agreement is your goal.

Successful negotiation in marriage creates a solution to every problem that benefits both spouses and doesn't hurt either of them. The Policy of Joint Agreement forces a couple to find those solutions. None of the states of mind in marriage encourage them to do that, so they need this rule to override their instincts that prevent successful negotiation.

The Policy of Joint Agreement encourages couples to consider each other's happiness as equally important. They are a team and both should try to help each other and avoid hurting each other. It just makes good sense. Why should one spouse consider their own interests so important that he or she can run roughshod over the interests of the other? It's a formula for marital disaster, and yet some of the most well-intentioned couples do it from their honeymoon on.

When I first see a couple in marital crisis, they are usually very incompatible. They are living their lives as if the other hardly exists -- making thoughtless decisions regularly because they don't care how the other feels. As a result, when I introduce The Policy of Joint Agreement, it seems almost impossible to follow. They have created a way of life that is based on so many inconsiderate habits that it seems the policy would force them to stop all their activity -- so much of what they do is thoughtless and insensitive.

But once they start to follow the policy, it becomes easier and easier to come to an agreement. As they throw out their thoughtless habits and activities one by one, they replace them with habits and activities that take each other's feelings into account. That's what compatibility is all about -- building a way of life that is comfortable for both spouses. When they create a lifestyle that they each enjoy and appreciate, they build compatibility into their marriages.

But the most powerful incentive for following this policy is that it helps sustain the feeling of love. Once the Policy of Joint Agreement is acted upon, it helps insulate a couple from many of the destructive forces that are ruining marriages. And it helps couples learn to meet each other's needs in ways that are mutually fulfilling and enjoyable. Spouses that follow this policy and meet each other's needs fall in love and stay in love with each other.

But there are exceptions to this policy: If the health or safety of a spouse is at risk, it should not be followed. For example, if physical abuse takes place in marriage, it should be reported to authorities by the abused spouse even though the offending spouse would not agree. Exposing infidelity is another example of an exception because the emotional health of a betrayed spouse is at risk by keeping it to him or herself. Some spouses try to use this policy to keep the other spouse from having any normal contact with the outside world. Marriage should provide a safe and healthy environment for both spouses. So if you feel that your health or safety is at risk by following this policy, you should not follow it.

In this short introduction to the Policy of Joint Agreement, I have presented a broad panorama of what it is, why it's so important in marriage, and how you should apply it in your marriage. But there are many details I've left out of this introduction that I describe more completely in the Q&A section of this web site. To make it easier to find these columns and answer some of the questions you might have at this very moment, I will describe some of those that are most relevant to the subject, negotiating with the Policy of Joint Agreement.

Q&A Columns Regarding the Policy of Joint Agreement

All marital conflicts are opportunities to negotiate. And when done correctly, with the Policy of Joint Agreement, most marital problems are relatively easy to solve. But I have received many letters wondering if this policy is reasonable. Can a husband and wife be expected to agree on everything? And enthusiastically? So I posted the column, [Having Trouble with the Policy of Joint Agreement?](#)

[How to Survive Incompatibility](#) is a Q&A column I've posted that introduces the problem of incompatibility, and offers the Policy of Joint Agreement as a general solution. The problem of incompatibility and the solution are readdressed in [Following the Policy of Joint Agreement When You're VERY Incompatible](#).

What happens when the Policy of Joint Agreement is not followed in marriage? Disaster! And the disaster is seen in many forms. One of its most common forms is a Love Buster I have already introduced to you, annoying behavior. To refresh your memory, an annoying behavior is any habit or activity that one spouse does that bothers the other spouse. It may not seem like much of a disaster when annoying behavior is in its early stages, but there are many examples of it growing into ugly monsters. [How to Overcome Annoying Behavior](#) describes the seriousness of the problem and offers the Policy of Joint Agreement as the only reasonable solution.

One of annoying behavior's ugly monsters, drug and alcohol addiction, clearly creates marital disaster. If every couple followed the Policy of Joint Agreement, there would be very few alcoholic spouses. But without that rule, alcohol and drugs can sure wreck a marriage. [What to Do with an Alcoholic Spouse](#) is a column that addresses this common problem that has plagued marriages for thousands of years.

Negotiation assumes that two people are willing to resolve a conflict. But in many marriages, one spouse is not willing to negotiate, or follow the Policy of Joint Agreement, particularly when the marriage is in serious trouble. A commonly asked question is, how can one spouse negotiate when the other spouse is not interested? I have posted two Q&A columns on the subject: [Can a Marriage Be Saved by One Spouse \(Part 1\)](#), and [Can a Marriage Be Saved by One Spouse \(Part 2\)](#).

[Having Trouble with the Policy of Joint Agreement?](#) In this column I not only discuss the Policy of Joint Agreement, but I also describe Four Guidelines for Successful Negotiation, which is my 8th Basic Concept,