

9- The Giver and the Taker

Have you ever suspected your spouse of having two personalities -- one that is caring and considerate and one that seems impossible to get along with? I'm sure you've not only noticed, but you've probably been horrified by the impossible one. I call these two personalities the Giver and the Taker.

We all have them, Givers and Takers, and they make marital problem solving much more difficult than it should be. To help you understand why it's so difficult to communicate in marriage, and why it's so hard to be consistently kind and considerate, I'll explain to you who these characters are and how they make marriage so difficult.

The Giver is the part of you that follows the rule: **do whatever you can to make the *other person* happy and avoid anything that makes the *other person* unhappy, even if it makes *you* unhappy.** It's the part of you that wants to make a difference in the lives of others, and it grows out of a basic instinct that we all share, a deep reservoir of love and concern for those around us.

But the Giver is only half of the story. The other half is the Taker. It's the part of you that follows the rule: **do whatever you can to make *yourself* happy and avoid anything that makes *yourself* unhappy, even if it makes *others* unhappy.** It's the part of you that wants the most out of life, and it grows out of your basic instinct for self-preservation.

In everyday life, our Givers and Takers usually solve problems together. They recognize our need to give and take simultaneously. For example, when we buy groceries, we give money and take groceries. We don't give more money than the grocer charges us and we don't take groceries without paying for them.

But in marriage, a strange thing happens to the way our Givers and Takers operate. They seem to work independently of each other. Either the Giver is in charge, and we give unconditionally to our spouses, or the Taker is in charge where we take what we want from our spouses without giving anything in return.

When the Giver is in charge, we are loving and considerate. But we tend to make personal sacrifices to see to it that our spouses are happy and fulfilled, because our Takers are not there to defend our personal interests and our Givers do not care how we feel.

But when the Taker is in charge, we are rude, demanding and inconsiderate. All we seem to think about is ourselves, and what our spouses can do to make us happy. We expect our spouses to make sacrifices for us, because our Takers don't care how our spouses feel.

I want to emphasize to you that this is normal behavior in marriage. You might think you're married to a crazy person, or you may think you're crazy yourself, but let me assure you, marriage is one of the very few conditions that bring out the pure Giver and Taker in each of us. And that usually makes us seem much crazier than we really are.

It should be no surprise to you that it isn't the Giver that ruins marriages -- it's the Taker. But the Giver plays a very important role in creating the problem. It's the effort of the Giver to give our spouses anything they want that sets up the Taker for its destructive acts. After you have been giving, giving, giving to your spouse, and receiving little in return (because you haven't bargained for much), your Taker rises up to straighten out the situation. It sees the unfairness of it all, and steps in to balance the books. But instead of coming to a more balanced arrangement, where you get something for what you give, the Taker just moves the Giver out of the picture altogether. It says, "I've been giving enough, now it's your turn to give."

Sound familiar? We've all been through it, but it doesn't work. All our Takers do is rouse our spouses' Taker and before we can say, "Bull in a china closet," we're having fight.

Which brings up a very important observation -- The Taker's instinctive strategy for getting what we need in marriage is to make demands, show disrespect and have an angry outburst. Does that also sound familiar? They are the stupid instincts that I call, Love Busters. And that's precisely what the Taker usually does when given control of our marriage -- they ruin the love we have for each other.

But I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Before you can understand fully how Takers make us argue instead of negotiate, I need to explain my next concept to you.