

*by Peter Pearson, Ph.D.*

Is your marriage like my computer screen?

Last Thursday Ellyn needed to use my laptop. She began typing and then I heard, “Ugh, how can you stand this? Your computer screen is really grimy.”

I looked and sure enough, it was even worse than I imagined. I simply had grown accustomed to it. But my one-upmanship came soon.

I opened her computer and exclaimed, “Holy Moley, how do you use this anyway?” The letter “J” was missing, like an open sore on the keyboard. Six letters had print so faded I didn’t know what keys I was hitting. Curiously Ellyn said this was not a problem as she was used to it.

There it is. Grime, missing letters, indecipherable keyboard. But we had slowly grown accustomed to them and barely noticed.

You’re probably wondering, “How can this help my marriage?”

The longer you procrastinate and acclimate, the longer it will take to keep issues clear and updated and the more effort it will be to tackle and change them.

So here are three exercises to clear the grime.

1. If you over- pursue your partner for time, intimacy or affection by initiating too much contact, cool your jets. Most people who pursue too much have a sense that they do it, but they often feel like they can’t help it. The harsh reality is that pining and whining is not sexy. Your partner feels suffocated and eventually will lose their passion and desire for connection. Back off for a week. You will survive OK.

2. Stop criticizing and complaining about your partner’s flaws. Mostly all you accomplish is triggering feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Even if your complaints are legitimate you are corroding your partner’s self esteem and your relationship.

3. Quit being so controlling. You know what I mean. You have to get your way on any issue you deem important. Money, vacations, leisure activities, parenting, how the house looks, etc. Listen to some things your partner has been wanting and say, "Honey I have been thinking about how you have wanted xyz. Well I have been thinking and I agree with you and want to support your wish."

There you go. That's three ways to clean some grime off your relationship. Try one or more for a week and your partner may see you more clearly.

*Note: For an in-depth tune-up of your marriage or relationship – not just cleaning off a little grime – attend my weekend workshop for couples. The next one takes place October 24-25. Click [help my marriage](#) to read about it.*