

There is a way of improving your marriage pretty darn fast. It takes awareness of one aspect of your relationship: patterns.

Here is what I mean. A pattern is a combination of qualities, acts, or tendencies that form a predictable sequence of outcomes in your marriage. The outcomes can be positive or negative.

First, start by becoming aware of recurring actions and reactions.

Here is what a negative pattern would look like.

Pat gets ignored by Terry.

Pat feels hurt and unimportant when ignored by Terry.

Pat reacts by sniping and getting critical of Terry.

Terry reacts by sniping back, getting defensive and then emotionally disengaging from Pat.

Pat feels ignored even more by Terry. Pat grumbles to friends and the friends are supportive of Pat. Pat stops sniping and emotionally withdraws from Terry.

Terry is glad Pat stops sniping. But is puzzled why Pat is distant. All they talk about are kids, roles and responsibilities to manage their complex lives. The discussions are important but both partners end up feeling emotionally shallow.

Neither takes an emotional risk to say what they feel and miss.

Wash, rinse, repeat for twenty two years. Kids leave home. Pat and Terry feel like they are strangers to each other.

And they are.

What can break this pattern?

It starts with awareness.

Here's what I mean. They each think, "When I feel X what do I do about it? Do I take the risk and speak up directly? Or do I communicate what I feel indirectly? When I communicate indirectly (for example, by sniping), what is the response I get (defensiveness)? When I get a defensive response from my partner, how do I respond (withdrawal after sniping back)?"

And then, "What happens when I stop sniping and withdraw?"

"Oh, we are civil but have no emotional connection."

Now comes the big question. ***"Do I choose to break MY pattern?"***

Basically it is very difficult to break old patterns and sustain new ones when there is no awareness about them.

Being aware is a crucial first step. The vast majority of couples in my practice have total clarity

about what **their partner** does that is dysfunctional. But they have little awareness of the impact of **their own** dysfunctionality on their partner. They simply keep repeating the dysfunctional pattern and hoping the partner gets the message and responds with new and improved response.

So here is a three step approach to a better relationship.

1. Be aware of what you both do that keeps getting repeated in a negative way.
2. Decide you want to break your part of the cycle.
3. Tell your partner what you have observed and what you are going to do differently and why you are going to do it. Your motivation is going to be for one reason only, which will keep you out of a trap. You are going to be motivated by the desire to become a better person when faced with adversity. You are going to become bigger than the problem instead of the problem being bigger than you are. You are going to do it because you will feel better about yourself and not criticize your partner if they don't immediately jump on your bandwagon of change.

And that, dear reader, is the first and most effective step to creating a better you and a better relationship.

Now, should you falter and need some additional tools to transform your relationship, there is hope in another form.

It comes in the form of a weekend workshop for couples. There is some urgency to this announcement. The next one takes place at the end of this month on Feb 27-28 and after this one, the current location in Santa Clara, California will no longer be available on Sundays. This has created a significant problem for me.

I need to find a new location that meets multiple criteria. That is not easy so I don't know when I will find a place or when I will do the next workshop after this one.

For more information or to register for this marvelous weekend click [couples workshop](#) .

As one participant put it rather eloquently, *“It is the fastest way to make the greatest change in the shortest amount of time for the least amount of money.”*

All the exercises during the weekend are just between you and your partner so you can have as much privacy as you wish.

Read the description and the testimonials on the website, and get ready of a workshop full of growth, connection and laughter. It is from 9-5 on Saturday Feb 27 and 9-4 on Sunday the 28th.

Till next time,

Pete