

Fail Here and Your Marriage Is Over **by Mike Danchak**

When couples get a divorce, the record at the court house often states, “incompatibility.” Regardless of what the record states, behind many divorces is an unforgiving spirit. A key to an intimate relationship is the ability to forgive one another. You and your spouse are going to occasionally say and do things that hurt. When that happens you have a choice: to forgive or not forgive. It is impossible for intimacy to flourish in a marriage if one or both mates harbor an unforgiving spirit. Forgiving takes a intentional commitment to 1) understand the dynamics of forgiveness and 2) to put them into practice in your relationship.

In doing intimacy coaching, I give couples the following forgiveness guidelines:

1, Forgiving isn't forgetting. When we forgive, we don't forget the hurtful act. If you forget, you won't forgive at all. You can never forgive people for things you've forgotten about. You need to forgive precisely because you have not forgotten what someone did; your memory keeps the emotional pain alive long after the actual hurt has passed. Forgetting, in fact, may be a dangerous way to escape the inner surgery of the heart that we call forgiving. There are two kinds of pain that we forget. We forget the day to day “little hurts.” We tell ourselves “this is petty” but we hold on to the pain. These little unforgiven hurts slowly build over the years. We forget pains too horrible for our memory to manage.

The test of forgiving lies with healing the lingering pain of the past, not with forgetting that the past ever happened. The important thing is that we have the power to forgive what we still do remember. Once we have forgiven, we get a new freedom from the pain of the hurt. The experience can now be stored in our memory without it causing us emotional discomfort. In the sense that the experience is not something that we consciously think about or is an unconscious motivation to troubling thoughts and behaviors, we have forgotten. When this happens, “forgetting” is a sign of health; it isn't a trick to avoid emotional surgery. We can put the experience and the pain behind us because we have been healed.

2. Get the hurt out in the open, talk with your spouse about what they did that hurt you and how you feel. When a hurt is brought into the light and discussed, it loses it's power to control. When a hurt is kept hidden in the heart it grows into a root of bitterness. A root feeds what it is attached to, in this case it is the hurt. So the hurt continues to grow strong and so do your feelings of injustice. You feel violated. You want to strike out. In passive ways, cutting remarks, forgetting a request by spouse, causing your spouse to be late for an appointment, you express your hurt and anger. A downward spiral takes control of your marriage and intimacy is a causality.

3. Forgiveness doesn't minimize the offense. In fact, it does the opposite. It brings the hurt to light and your spouse realizes the pain they have caused you.

4. For relationship to be restored and for intimacy to flourish, there must be forgiveness extended on the part of the one hurt to the offender, and asking for forgiveness (acknowledgement) and a commitment to cease the behavior on the part of the offender.

1. Take some time to reflect on how you manage the “little” hurts in your relationship?
Make a list of things that hurt but you “ignore.”
2. Check out how you treat your spouse? Are there little things you do to dig him/her because of unresolved past hurts?
3. Follow the steps above and talk with your spouse about how you feel. Does fear of what your spouse will say or do, keep you from sharing your hurts with your spouse?