

## What's the First Step in Solving your Relationship Problems?

Before you can change anything about your marriage or any other relationship, you must be willing to do something that most human beings find very difficult. In studying people in general including myself, I've discovered that this step is one of the hardest to take. Even little children have problems with this sometimes.

You must be willing to change.

I know it's not your fault, it's really your wife's fault. If that woman would just change everything would be OK. Right? When a couple come for counselling, especially when there's a problem in their relationship, each party think there's nothing wrong with what they said or did. It's always the other person who said this or did this.

I've noticed that when couples come for their first counselling sessions, they're looking for you to say who is to blame for all their problems. They want you to point the finger at their partner and say, "Look Chomp, you have to repent, or else!"

Some others want you to wave a magic wand over them and say "Presto, now you're going to live happily ever after with each other." Sorry mate, that's not how it works.

You see, resolving marital problems isn't about assigning blame and saying who's at fault. It's about looking for a solution that will help the relationship move forward.

I remember the first counselling session I had with a particular couple. Because the lady was the first one to initiate counselling for their problems, she was expecting us to look at her husband with the same condemnatory attitude she had developed towards him. Before the counselling started, she had given us a catalog of all HIS problems. She kept on saying, "He never listens to me."

I'm a woman, but I thought to myself, "If I were your husband, I wouldn't listen to you either." She had developed a habit of nagging him. Oh Lord, big communication mistake. The man either shuts off, or only comes home at night to sleep. And that's what was happening among a myriad of other problems. It wasn't a happy home.

Anyway, they had been through this counselling song and dance several times. She would make them go for marriage counselling and he had gotten used to being "reported" to the counsellors for his bad behaviour and getting reprimanded during the counselling sessions. You see, there were many things that she wanted him to change. At our first session he slouched back in his seat with this bored expression on his face as if to say, "OK, let's get it over and done with."

His eyes almost popped out of his head when after listening to his wife's catalog of woe, I began to show her where SHE needed to change some wrong thought patterns that were part of the root cause of their problems. For one thing, she related with him like a mother to a son. Actually, I thought if I was her son, I wouldn't listen to her either.

He was surprised and so was she. Well, that's an understatement. She was shocked. For all these years, she had been thinking that he needed to change and everything would be all right. But because she had this attitude, whenever he did make effort to change, she thought he was pretending. As a result, he got frustrated and went back to his old ways and she got more bitter.

When you come for marriage counselling, one of the first things the counsellor should point out to you is where you can make changes. This is because if you don't change first, there is a 99.99% chance that your spouse won't. If both of you come together seeking help for your shaky relationship, then you must BOTH be willing to change.

The couple in question have both begun to make several adjustments and changes in themselves. One of the first exercises I gave them was to list all the areas that they each thought they needed to change. I wanted them to look inwards and see their own faults first, before looking at the other's. Not everyone would like to do this because it's a very humbling experience. It's uncomfortable and sometimes unpleasant. It's very difficult for proud people to do because they're never wrong.

"And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." - Jesus Christ

This has helped their relationship a lot because now they consider each other's faults with more tolerance and compassion since they had to expose their own faults as well. Seeing that they each had things to change made them more patient with each other. They also knew that the resolution of their problems would be more equitable. One person wouldn't be more disadvantaged in the process than the other.

You know how they say that every action has an equal and opposite reaction? Well your spouse has always been used to responding a certain way to your words and actions. If you change them, he or she would necessarily have to adjust in their reaction to you as well. Get it?

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#### About the Author

Valentina Ibeachum has been counselling pre-wed and married couples for some years. She helps them prevent and resolve relationship problems by providing effective guidelines for building strong relationships. For FREE advice, visit her website <http://www.relationshipwrks.com> now.