

Faulty Belief: We Must “Work on” the Marriage and/or Relationship to Rebuild or Keep it Fresh

**Groundhog
Process**



Step #1

Identify the Problem

Take a couple minutes to reflect on or write out your responses to these questions:

1. To what degree do you believe you must work on your marriage or relationship?

We must						Not that important
<input type="checkbox"/>						

2. What images or thoughts come to mind when you think of working on the marriage:

3. What type of feeling do you get when you think of working on the relationship?

4. What does it mean for you that you must work on the marriage?

5. What is your level of comfort when you think of working on the marriage or relationship:

Comfortable						Uncomfortable
<input type="checkbox"/>						

Many stuck in the negativity and reactivity of a downward spiraling marriage believe they must “work on” the marriage to make it better or reverse the momentum.

- ✓ “Working on” the marriage may mean:
- ✓ Attend joint counseling sessions
- ✓ Attend a Marriage Encounter or Retreat specifically for couples
- ✓ Read self help books on rebuilding a marriage (this ebook included!)
- ✓ Date... again
- ✓ Be more “romantic”
- ✓ Set aside specific times to “talk” about feelings and/or the marriage
- ✓ Make an extra effort to meet his/her needs
- ✓ Make an extra effort to be “nice”
- ✓ Do more errands or work around the house for the other
- ✓ Go on a vacation together
- ✓ Be a more involved parent
- ✓ Be more appreciative and showing it
- ✓ Learn new communication skills
- ✓ Talk...and talk...and talk
- ✓ Etc.

Perhaps you have tried one or more of these strategies and perhaps they reduced some of the tension (or submerged it) for a period of time.

However, you knew that much was left on the table, unspoken, and the ignored elephant still haunted the marriage.

As well, “working on” the marriage is often a one-sided effort. One wants to “work on” the marriage to alleviate the hurt, pain emptiness or whatever the internal suffering may be and the other is often a reluctant participant, IF s/he even chooses to accommodate the request.

This happened in my private practice:

A colleague was having a terrible time with a couple in marriage therapy. This couple had gone through some very difficult times (he had been involved with another woman.) The OP (other person) was legitimately and in all ways out of the picture and they were both committed to "working on the relationship."

However, they were having a terribly frightful time making headways. My therapist colleague finally out of desperation referred them to me, hoping I could see them through the impasse.

They walked through my door, took a seat and the session began. Both told me they truly wanted a better relationship and were working hard to make it happen. They were sincere.

She described what she would do when he came home after work, trying to make him comfortable, affirmed and welcome.

He explained how he tried to talk more, be present for her and meet her needs. He listed 3-4 ways in which he was trying to make her feel more desirable and loved.

Each was hanging on the other's words.

In addition to a rather large aura of tension that surrounded them, the couple exuded a deep sense of weariness and tiredness. They were exhausted. Emotionally they were spent. There was little life in each of them and in the relationship.

They looked at me as if, "OK, the last therapist tried her bag of tricks to make us better. And we worked diligently on every one of them. What do you suggest we do to make this better?"

So, I gave them a very simple but counter-intuitive assignment and followed it with an exclamation point.

I said to them, "Stop working on the relationship. Stop trying to figure out how to make this dead marriage better. Stop trying to make the other person feel better. Don't go there. Don't even think about it, ever, for one week!"

They walked through the door the following week smiling, light, like a breath of fresh clean air sweeping through my office.

She, especially, thanked me profusely.

I saw them for 3-4 more sessions and they were happily on their way.

I helped the couple make a simple, but MAJOR mental shift that catapulted their marriage to a new level of intimacy.

(Please know that ALL couples do not respond this way, nor do or did I as a therapist, always implement this rather radical intervention.)

However, what often "works" is counter-intuitive to "working" on the relationship or marriage.

Groundhog Process



Step #2

Seek out new information

6 Common Traps for Couples who believe they must "Work on" the Marriage or Relationship

Here's new information and distinctions you most likely have not entertained that will enable and set off the mental shifts that will help you approach the rebuilding of your marriage and love in a more helpful and productive manner.

Well intentioned couples, who truly want to feel better in their marriage, often find their marriage grinding to a halt when they believe they must "work on the relationship."

Here are some difficulties and traps typically experienced when a couple commits to "working on the relationship:"

1. "Working on the relationship" often implies that each "should or must" act, feel and think particular ways to make their efforts successful. A "should" sets one up for failure and disappointment, for no one ever fully acts, thinks or feels as they "should." An atmosphere of effort and grinding it out permeates the couple. And, each holds his/her breath, as they both believe that failure follows the next interaction. Talk about pressure! I assume you want a different environment created in your relationship.
2. "Working on the relationship" for a huge percentage of the couples I encounter means being "nice," accommodating the other and being on your best behavior. Conflict is seen as a catastrophe. Such a strategy, in essence, obscures and clouds the truth. The truth, which sets a couple free, is relegated to the background and buried under the surface.
3. "Working on the Relationship" often means trying to find a "middle ground." There must be "something in common" that holds the couple together and make it better. Well, maybe there isn't any "common ground!" And, just maybe that is good. Perhaps the differences, the extremes, give the couple fire and passion and create, together, that which each, at one level, is looking for.
4. "Working on the relationship" often means working hard to meet the needs of the other. I "sacrifice" my needs, or at least put them on the back burner, and intentionally go about "making my partner happy" by attending to his/her needs. This may work for a period of time but resentment at some point emerges since one or both believe that the need meeting is not being reciprocated to the degree he/she would like.
5. "Working on the relationship" often is thwarted because there is not enough depth. Individual differences are not pursued with a curiosity and intensity that allows for maximum growth of the individual and therefore couple. "Issues" are not torn apart,

looked at, marveled at, appreciated and seen as a resource for further self exploration and self disclosure.

6. "Working on the relationship" often comes up short because a couple easily reverts to old patterns. They begin to "swirl" in the old communication patterns and ways of thinking, feeling and acting. When lacking adequate exploration of differences and avoiding conflict the couple easily slides back into that which was familiar, not pleasant or comfortable, but certainly known territory.

Reflection:

Which of the above distinctions speaks most powerfully to what your experience in working on the marriage?

What has this been like for you?



Step #3

Shifts to Implement

In the next step of the Ground Hog Process you begin to make the mental shifts that you will place you on a more productive and effective path to marriage and love construction or reconstruction.

The constructive belief may not make full sense to you at this point. However as you proceed through the rebuilding steps you will see and experience the validity and power of each constructive belief.

Take a couple moments to place a checkmark in the box that most closely fit where you are now relative to the two opposing beliefs.

Destructive Belief	Check what you believe now			Constructive Belief	
We need to work on the marriage. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I want to know myself and him/her better. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We should be doing something to build the marriage <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I want to discover the feelings and behaviors that best fit and are me. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We must meet each other's personal needs. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I want to examine my personal need system and get them met once and for all. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I must carefully do what is correct and proper in this marriage. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I want the freedom to be fully me. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We must avoid or skip over important issues. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I fearlessly face what is crucial in a radically constructive manner. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I fear that we will revert to old habits with each other. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I can stop when I begin to go where I don't want to go. <input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you want to take this a little further:

List other shifts you would like to make:

	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	
	→	

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Step #4
Engage Self

I do not want you at this point to share your findings and thoughts with your spouse or partner.

You engage you. You don't engage the other.

Engage yourself means spending some time in the next day or two consciously and intentionally thinking about the above exercise; specifically the distinctions and shifts you desire.

Shift your focal point away from him/her to a degree. This, in itself, may be a significant shift. (Be aware that s/he will probably notice and may react. If able, plan your response if s/he reacts.)

Choose one shift and give that shift your full attention. What would that shift feel like? What would you be doing as you make that shift? What would that shift bring to you?

Reflect on and Answer these questions:

I will be most aware of these new distinctions and/or shifts at this time and place during the next day.

I will use this trigger (mantra: I will do this, word: power, feel good, etc., rubber band around wrist, etc.) to keep me on track.

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Step #5

**How did I enhance my personal
power and/or voice?**

Reflect on and Answer these Questions:

Evaluate what it was like to spend a day or two focusing on your desired shift and the distinctions you are beginning to make.

Notice any changes you experience in terms of your personal power, feelings and thoughts about yourself.

Remember, you are just beginning. Don't be upset or alarmed if you find it difficult to pinpoint change and shifts.

Employing the Ground Hog Process for most takes a number of attempts. It gradually will become part of you. And, when it becomes part of you, you will have it for life.

These questions will help you evaluate your experience:

On a scale of 1-10 (10 being as bad as it can get) I now rate my bad feelings as _____.

I notice this new thought coming to mind after the engagement.

I notice this new image coming to mind after the engagement.

I notice this feeling _____ located in this part of my body
_____ emerging after the engagement.

I now think this of myself after the engagement.
