

It's Not Too Late!

We've all heard the stories. We all know people in public safety that have been divorced or split up. Statistics show public safety personnel get divorced at a very high rate, but is the reported trend really related to job stress or might it be about attitude? Before you hire that divorce attorney, give some consideration to these ideas:

Observation and Memory

The job of a police officer is to gather information and objectively make decisions about what they find. We all pride ourselves on our ability to see other people's situations clearly. How clearly can you view your own? One of the tricks to using second-hand and even eye-witness statements is to corroborate everything you can. If two people say the same thing, that's good. If four say the same thing, that's better. We do this because human memory is not all that it is cracked up to be. Memories are not like video clips; they are bits and pieces of an event, filtered through beliefs, emotions, and biases. An "eye-witness" may identify someone as a particular race not because they actually know the person's race, but because they have an expectation about the race of individuals who may break the law. Our *own* memories are the same. We write down notes for our reports because of this. When we go home, do we have the notebook out, or do we rely on those questionable memories?

Cognitive Dissonance

Another consideration is called cognitive dissonance. This is when one person holds two beliefs which are not compatible. Believing very strongly in marriage and having a "failing" marriage can cause dissonance. Often there are two approaches used to address this; change one of the beliefs, or employ overkill. Overkill involves using blame, hostility, and escalation to justify your behaviors, even though they are in conflict with your own system of beliefs. An example of this is when someone makes derogatory remarks about someone they are mad at in an attempt to make that person look bad to others, and to justify the original anger. An easier path is to look at those beliefs and reflect on how your personal decisions and behaviors might contribute to the issues. Maybe you are putting too much pressure on your belief in perfect marriage and spend too little time actually building and using the communication skills that would strengthen a marriage.

The Four Horsemen

The third consideration is what John Gottman, Ph.D. calls "the four horsemen." These horsemen ride into your discussions and arguments and take your choices about dissonance away from you. These horsemen ride directly into behaviors associated with overkill, and contribute to the end of relationships. The horsemen are ***contempt, criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling***. They are all great ways to create distance from your loved ones and hurt them.

Contempt includes cynical or sarcastic remarks, facial expressions, and hostile humor

Criticism adds negative connotations about a person to a complaint involving that person

Defensiveness is a round-about way of blaming someone or something else

Stonewalling includes disengaging from conversation, avoidance, and even hiding and impassivity

Questions to ask yourself

Are you avoiding emotional intimacy at home? Do you feel safe discussing emotional topics with your spouse or partner? Do you feel rested and re-energized after being with your family? Do you remember the good times? More importantly, can you remember what good came out of the bad times? If your memories about your family and spouse/partner are positive, and you can dial down the horsemen enough to tackle those tough conversations, then *it's not too late!*

Employ some of your positive public safety skills at home. Be objective instead of angry, see the positive in your family instead of viewing them as "suspects", give credit to your spouse/partner's ideas and try to compromise.

If you need support with issues related to observation and memory, cognitive dissonance, or the four horsemen, contact a therapist or psychologist who works with couples, and tell them *it's not too late.*

Keep your thoughts positive because your thoughts become your words. Keep your words positive because your words become your behaviors. Keep your behaviors positive because your behaviors become your habits. Keep your habits positive because your habits become your values. Keep your values positive because your values become your destiny. Gandhi

References

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Aronson, E. (2008). The social animal, 10th Ed. Worth Publishers: New York.