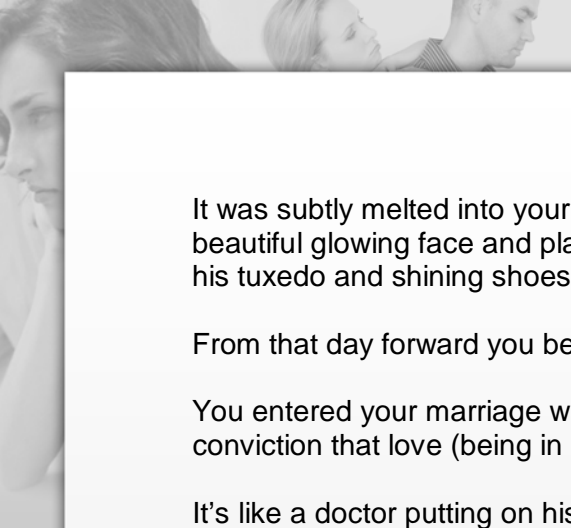


**Decision Points in Your Marriage
Your Wedding Vows are not enough**

By: Dr. Bob Huizenga



It was subtly melted into your subconscious the day that you lifted the see-through veil over your beautiful glowing face and planted that warm lingering kiss on that handsome man dressed in his tuxedo and shining shoes that your wedding vows would take care of everything.

From that day forward you believed you were good to go.

You entered your marriage with a Pollyanna shine to your wonderful skin and an unspoken conviction that love (being in love) would conquer all.

It's like a doctor putting on his blue gown and friction free shoes, scrubbing his fingernails until almost raw and sauntering to the operating room, ready for open heart surgery with a couple anatomy classes as a resume.

In reality you know more about how your cell phone operates than about any understanding of marital dynamics.

And that total cluelessness about the intricacies, pitfalls and how to attain islands of marital joy and bliss continues beyond the thrown rice, frozen and preserved wedding cake, the first child, the dream home and beyond.

And so...

- Your marriage suffers along with a low grade fever; functional but barely.
- You meet each other both exhausted at the end of the day and grunt at one another.
- Sex is the same ole, same ole; once a week, maybe, for a while.
- Weekends are errands, more errands, tv, activities for the kids and a to-do list that demands you scroll down the online planner with your cursor.
- You talk, maybe, about the kids, frustrations at work, what to get Aunt Bessie for Christmas, how the kids are doing in school - maybe.
- You drive to together to the summer cottage with barely a spoken word; each ruminating in your stale world.

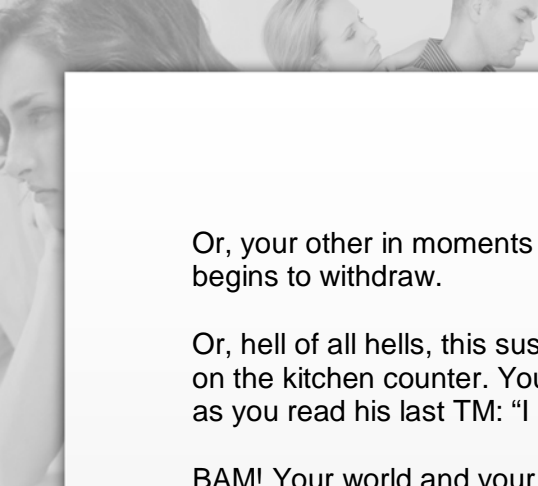
I would gather with my cousins as a child, take small pieces of old wood, attach a "sail" to the wood and watch the stream in the small creek in our pasture take it where it willed.

After a while you feel lifeless, powerless; almost a victim of your marriage, allowing it to take you where it wills. You feel like a leaf blowing in the wind.

And, you keep on keeping on until....

Your other, in a moment of exasperation and weariness mutters the "D" word.

Or, your other perms his hair, buys a red convertible and starts acting "weird."



Or, your other in moments of her boredom, “hooks up” with an old flame on Facebook and begins to withdraw.

Or, hell of all hells, this suspicious little voice suggests you pick up his cell phone, left innocently on the kitchen counter. Your face turns a dull pale and your heart sinks into a churning stomach as you read his last TM: “I had a great time with you! Can’t wait to see you again. Love...

BAM! Your world and your marriage will never be the same.

You are unprepared.

You never saw it coming. Or, you didn’t want to see it coming.

You never thought it would happen to you. You thought the wedding vows were enough.

You never thought there was more, much more, to a marriage other than the wedding vows.

No one told you; helped you understand, there was more, that there could be more than a dry, stale, lifeless and finally imploding marriage.

No one gave you the vision for a marriage that was forever changing, forever offering opportunities for change, for mutual excitement and joy and a deepening appreciation for one another.

...For a marriage that was alive, pulsating with an excitement about the present and future.

...For a marriage in which a smile and nod carried a thousand “you are the love of my life.”

...For a quiet moment meaning, “Tell me more about you. I want to know you better.”

...For a marriage in which every alive, vibrating, in-tune cell of your body knows you are wanted and loved.

...For a marriage that knows that there are challenges, death valleys to cross and steep mountains to climb; believing that gold truly is refined through intense heat.

No one told you how to get there; how it CAN happen, easily and without layers of fear.

Please know if I had told you on that wedding day that your wedding vows were NOT enough and that being in love would NOT see you through, you would not have believed it anyway. You had the answers then.

You would never be the one to take the bullet.

Maybe it takes years of emotional barrenness and quiet desperation or a knock or two to wake us from our relational coma and create a deep longing for something more - deeper, richer and more powerful.

You now know what you DON'T want.

Now it's time to scurry after what you truly want.

Right now, this moment is certainly not late for you to pursue your marital degree and seek out what is vital for allowing the relationship of your heart to emerge.

Your Marriage (or Relationship) is Dynamic

A place to start is to recognize that your marriage or relationship is dynamic: it's always changing, moving, evolving and providing new challenges and opportunities.

Being aware that decision (crisis) points are inevitable in a marriage counter intuitively helps you view your marriage in a more hopeful light.

Your capacity to give and receive love, to grow love, to grow self in the midst of that love is unlimited. Your marriage will push you, in seeming times of crisis and change, to experience more deeply that capacity to give and receive love.

You are taught that love will always (should) be the same.

You are Taught that Your Marriage is Static, and You will Live Happily Ever after.

There's one part of you when the veil is lifted and you seal the vows with a warm kiss that believes indeed you will live happily ever after.

That's what you are taught, since watching Cinderella as a little girl or reading the fairy tales.

You are in love. Love conquers all. Your marriage is headed down a long, forever road, with warmth and love smothering your life long journey.

Someday you will walk hand and hand into the sunset with that same love and devotion.

This love will forever be the same.

But, then there's another type of sameness that marks your journey together. (This is much less enticing, but is a powerful undercurrent that is a counter weight to the life lasting love.)



You are taught that Marriage takes away your fun and freedom.

Have you ever reflected on the purpose of Bachelor or Bachelorette parties?

In the USA it is a common tradition that friends of the male and female respectively throw a party for each person before the wedding. The party often involves raucous behavior where those in attendance “let loose” in a variety of ways. It’s like the last hurrah before the marriage.

It would appear the underlying message is: This is your last chance; your last chance to have some “fun” to be “free.” After all, once you are married, responsibilities kick in and you will have little chance to “let go” again.



You are getting married and tying the knot – a very interesting choice of words!

Although a couple often anticipates the marriage with positive expectations and celebrates the wedding, the underlying thought is; my life will be much different. It’s time to grow up and enter the world of responsibility whether it is children, vocation or meeting the needs of another.

There is a sense in which a person often believes that s/he must put aside the carefree and unrestrained single life.

You are taught that Marriage means giving up yourself.

For some, I believe it is carried a little further. One may subtly think that his/her life not only loses its freedom and capacity for spontaneity, but it must be subjugated to the wishes of another. My very self will be shoved away and aside.

Of course, most do not entertain these thoughts before the marriage. (Although my experience in premarital counseling tells me that more have these thoughts than most know.)

However, as the “demands” of married life are assumed these fears of loss of self emerge, whether it is 5, 10, 20 or 25 years down the marital road.

Other Marrieds imply that passion and good sex will fade.

Another dilemma for the newly married couple is observing the married people around them.

They often observe married couples who struggle. They have friends who recently married describe the frustration and conflict they encounter.

The marriages that struggle and endure with pain far outnumber those they observe that offer life and health to the couple. Reality indicates to them that just perhaps marriage will be difficult.

Or, the recently married couple will observe the “perfect married couple.” Everything about this couple seems ideal. They do perfectly what married couples are to do. By looking at them interact; you would never know they have problems.

However, intuitively such a couple often seems fairly plastic and contrived. They play the roles of a happily married couple, but each person seems to lack the spark which comes from being accepted as a fully unique person in that marriage.

They play the roles, but their “selves” are submerged under the perfect roles they play. They seem to have lost their humanity.

Good sex and intimacy will die the longer we are married is another latent belief. It is expected, especially if they talk to other married couples, that the marriage will grow “cold.”

The passion will fade. The advent of children, the pressures of vocation and intrusion of a number of factors will dull the senses.

At some point we will be too tired, too overwhelmed, too busy to have good sex.

I will lose my passion, my excitement and my spontaneity as I give to my spouse, my children, my work and my community.

The underlying fear seeps through one’s self; I will lose more in this marital process than I personally will gain.

Out of your marital crystal ball emerges a picture of sameness: responsibility, loss of personal freedom and a dulling of passion.

On the one hand you have a marriage viewed as forever idyllic; on the other hand, a marriage forever life sapping.

In both cases your view of marriage centers around an animal that is unchanging, and constant in what it offers.

Such static understanding of marriage leaves you unprepared and often surprised (and shocked) by what, in reality, comes your way.

Marriage is not all love. And, marriage is not all gloom.

Marriage is dynamic, changing, growing, adjusting and offering new opportunities for deepening acceptance, understanding, warmth, passion and a richer love.

What you will Learn from this Guide



The ever adaptability of marriage you were not taught to expect, let alone how to deal with the natural and sometimes not so natural crisis and decision points that emerge.

This guide gives you an overview of the life of your marriage; what you can expect and the decision nodes during that life.

You will learn:

- Marriage (love or not loving) is dynamic and always changing.
- Particular decision points arise in your marriage.
- Specific events trigger change and adjustment.
- You choose to consciously or unconsciously move through your decision points and change.
- Moving through your decision points and change consciously gives you more freedom, confidence and potential for joy.
- The critical big picture question is: "CAN my marriage be saved?"
- The role of chemistry in your marriage.
- The presence of a long term maladaptive coping pattern in your marriage.
- The capacity to emotionally connect.
- The presence of infidelity and/or abuse.

Let's take a look at the reality of the marital journey.

The meat of this guide looks at:

- The Process of Deciding to Stay (or not) in the Marriage
- Can Your Marriage be Saved?
- Crises Emerge at Different Marital Points



- Decision Point's Critical Questions, such as:
 - Was there Chemistry?
 - Is there a Long Term Maladaptive Coping Pattern
 - The No Option Path
 - Infidelity
 - Abuse

The Process of Deciding to Stay (or not) in the Marriage



Consciously, but mostly unconsciously, particular times in a marriage or relationship of mutual investment calls forth the need to evaluate: Do I stay or do I go?

You typically invite your spouse to relate to you.

Your spouse may say or imply "no," which leaves you evaluating the marriage.

You decide, yes, I want to be married to him/her.

You become a door knocker – experimenting with different ways of expressing yourself and offering an invitation for him/her to join with you.

At some point your spouse may say, yes, I too want to be with you.

Your process of intentional engagement begins

(perhaps using the material I provide.)

You embark on your journey of increased awareness and disclosure.

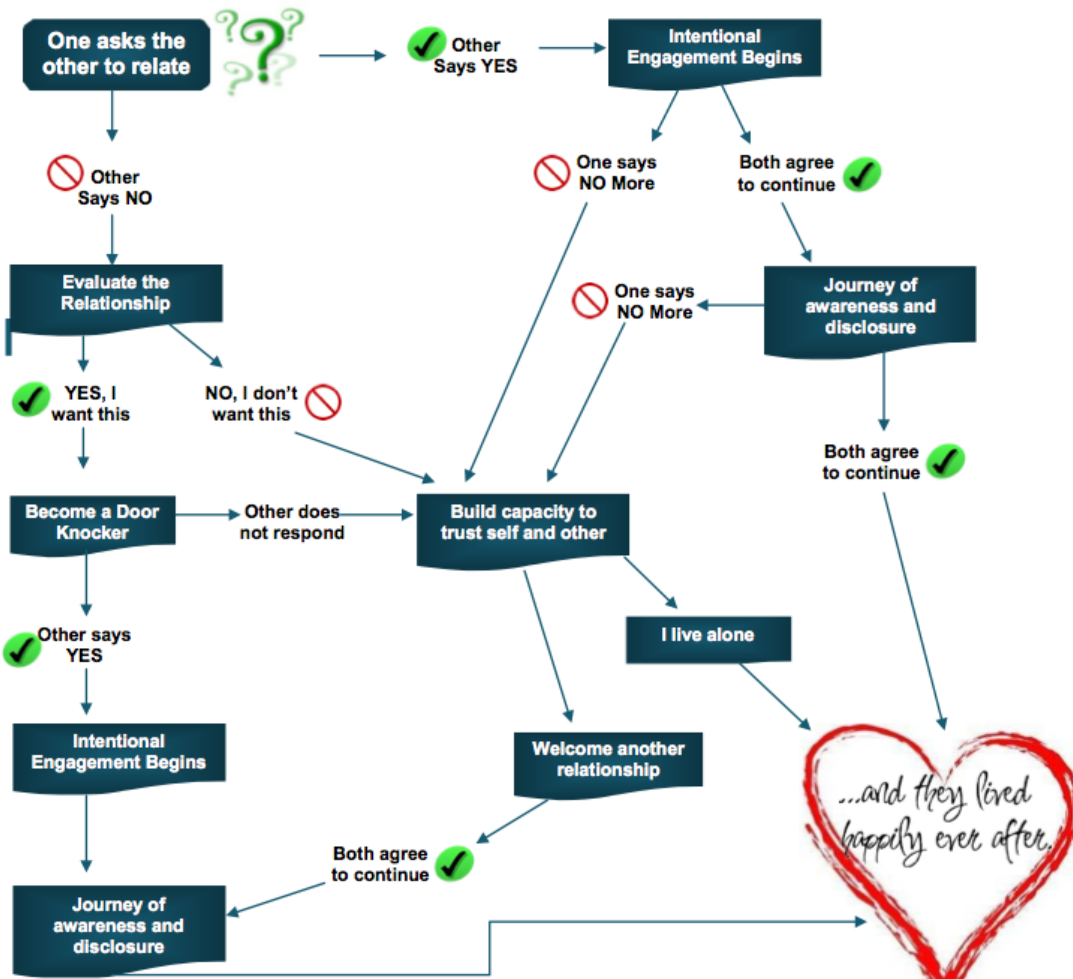
You live happily ever after. :)

Or, you decide, no, this marriage will not work or cannot work.

I've outlined the process in the chart on the following page.

Take a few minutes to identify your place on this process chart. Circle your place now and the next two decision points you face.

The Marriage/Relationship Process Chart



Part of the decision making and evaluative process for staying in your marriage may center on the question, "Can My Marriage be Saved?"



You may be wondering, "Is it worth it? Can my marriage truly be saved, or am I just kidding myself?"

Or, am I so needy and desperate now that my needs overwhelm my good judgment?"

I will point you to some distinctions that will help you decide whether to stay or go, but that is ultimately your decision.

There is one exception. If you are in a physically abusive relationship or one that holds extreme danger for physical harm, GET OUT NOW! Or, get the help and support you need to make an exit.

And now, I want to offer thoughts about divorcing.

A marriage in which both are happy and satisfied is rare; extremely rare! In reality, a marriage is where we often experience the worst side of ourselves. This is not all bad, for in that turmoil, pain, confusion and fear we are offered the opportunity to move to a new and enhanced level of ourselves and the relationship. The pain or emptiness often points us in the direction of what we truly want and desire.

Crises Emerge at Different Marital Points

Your marriage may be in the midst of situational stress or crisis. This is temporary.

The negativity, pain and/or emptiness you encounter now will pass. Again, after spending literally tens of thousands of hours with direct client care, it's become apparent that marriages suffer most during critical times.

Marital crises are more likely to occur at particular phases or points in time in the development and evolution of the marriage. There are tendencies and patterns or crunch points in the marriage that leave a marriage most susceptible to questions of divorce.

Awareness of these points in time in a marriage may help a couple address the underlying issues and short-circuit the marital crisis or recover from it more quickly.

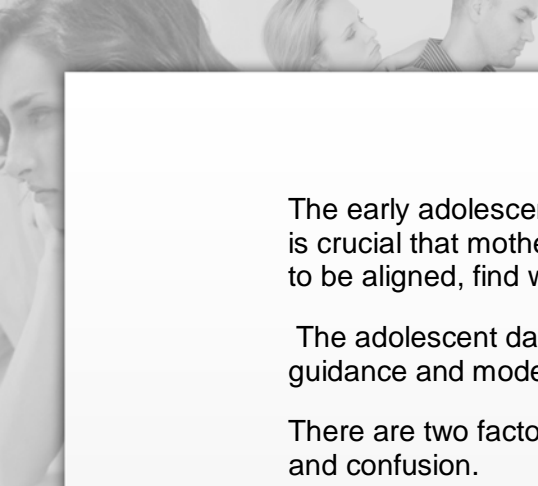
- ✓ "I Don't Want to (Don't Know How) to Grow Up." Soon after a couple marries (I'm referring to a younger couple, first marriage) the issue of personal freedom emerges. The romantic feelings fade along with the excitement of creating a new household. The sense of responsibility and challenges of "adulthood" take on reality.

Some enjoy the challenge and opportunity. Others, (my experience tells me it's mainly men) begin to feel constrained and "trapped." They report a loss of freedom. They find it difficult to put their desires on hold and negotiate with another for their needs. They balk at assuming responsibility for the new tasks demanded in managing a new lifestyle.

Underneath their disquiet is a reluctance to leave their perceived personal freedom of the single life and to embrace the adult world. Closely related to this time period for many young couples is the birth of the first child. This usually is a joyful time, but soon after the birth, the reality of caring for a new life and the natural change in the family dynamics (3 in the family is MUCH different than 2) become problematic.

The husband frequently resents the loss of attention and affection and may withdraw. Or, the wife may feel overwhelmed or terribly uncomfortable with the "mothering role" and withdraw as well.

- ✓ The oldest child reaches early adolescence. This is a particularly difficult time for the family. The dynamics in the family are significantly altered.



The early adolescent son begins to push mother away and wants to battle with father. It is crucial that mother and father be aware of the resulting tension and the two, needing to be aligned, find ways to deal with the tension and parent the burgeoning young man.

The adolescent daughter will begin to distance from father and will look to mother for guidance and modeling. Father may feel displaced, unneeded or unwanted.

There are two factors at this time in the marriage that make the marriage ripe for tension and confusion.

The emerging psychosexual development of their early adolescent child will serve a trigger, reminding a parent of his/her psychosexual development. If there is "unfinished business" for the parent, or that part of his/her life was traumatic or undeveloped, the parent may find it difficult to cope with the internal tension.

✓ Mid life Crisis. Here's my take on a mid life crisis.

In our 20s and early 30s we think we have the answers. We KNOW what it's going to take to be successful, however we define that. And, we continue to use the coping patterns we think serve us well.

If we were an achiever, we focus on achievement.

If we knew how to get our needs met from people, we focus on others as our source for success.

If we seemed to find comfort and solace in creativity and our imagination, we major in that part of us.

As well, we have preconceived ideas of what it will feel like and be like, once we reach that success. We have a dream.

For 15-20 years we give it our all.

And, we wake up one day and discover we are not there. Our dreams seem a long way away. We thought achievement would do it, but we seem to fall short. We thought we could "work" people to get what we want but others fail to be cooperative. We valued imagination and creativity but it becomes our prison.

We then, look for something else or try to find something else to replace our disappointment and emptiness.

A person may pull away from the family, the marriage and a spouse may suddenly be confronted with unpredictable, sometimes bizarre behaviors.

✓ The empty nest. Raising children demands time, energy and effort. Parents frequently focus on the raising of children to the exclusion of their marriage.

One day, the children are gone and husband and wife stare at each other across the breakfast table, wondering, "Who are you?"

The thought of moving closer or developing a greater intimacy seems frightening, almost terrifying. One or both may look for some form of pseudo-intimacy to serve as a buffer from developing the next stage of intimacy in the marriage.

- ✓ Moments of mortality. We age and in our 50s it's not uncommon to suddenly be faced with our mortality. We will die! It seems a much closer reality.

A wave of sadness bordering on panic envelops as we focus more intently on our virility and our sagging attractiveness. This is our LAST chance to have it, get it, find it... that which we think we missed along the way.

To escape the inevitability of our physical and mental demise and to ferret out what then is left, we may throw ourselves into different behaviors hopefully closing the door on our fears and dread.

- ✓ The Tarnished Years. It's supposed to be the "Golden Years," correct? The time when we retire, the time when we can play, volunteer, give and enjoy the years we have left.

For many, it's the tarnished years rather than the golden years.

Retirement means an end, an end to roles and structure that kept life together, that kept one functioning, providing, and contributing.

With the external roles and functions removed, a vacuum emerges. And, in this vacuum may emerge new values, standard, goals and dreams. A couple, used to the structure of the old roles and goals may discover a difficult time in making this life-changing transition.

This last phase may seem a little farfetched, but my practice over the past 5 years has encountered those in their early retirement years struggling with infidelity.

Awareness of these crucial times in a marriage and attention to the potential crisis in each can help a couple manage the phase much better and hopefully lessen the chances of marital breakdown.

As well, an awareness of the different points of time in a marriage will help a person encountering the "uncharacteristic behavior" "normalize" the event and assume less personal responsibility for it, therefore, accelerating the healing and change process.

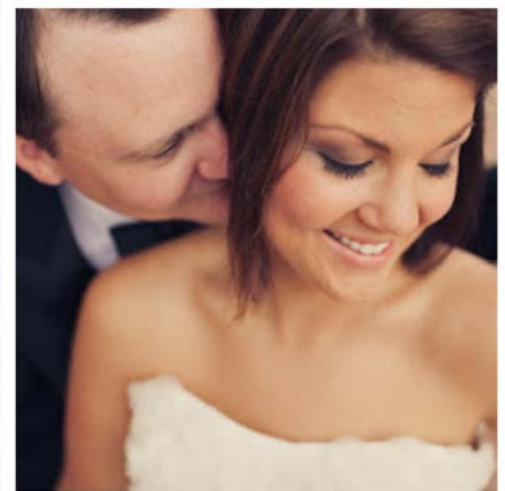
Decision Point's Critical Questions, such as:

Was there "Chemistry?"

Why did you marry? What was the baseline for your marriage?

Now, the reasons we marry are varied. When I was in college a few years ago, word spread that particular women were after the MRS. Degree. They were husband shopping. And, to be accurate many men were probably after the MR. Degree. A cultural bias told young people that they were to get a degree, get married (maybe not in that order) start a career and then a family.

As well, parents often have an influence, often subtle but powerful, that tell a young person when and whom to marry (in general terms.) And someone may "choose" a spouse who fit the criteria or rebel and choose a partner





seemingly opposite of the criteria.

Some professionals suggest there are archetypes that unconsciously draw and attract us. (I remember as an early adolescent having a dream that I was marrying a person with dark black hair, which eventually happened.)

Sexual attraction plays a hugely significant role in bringing partners together, as well as various personality patterns. I cannot do full justice to this topic in a short chapter.

The bottom line: was there an initial strong attraction between you and your spouse? Did it hold you? Did it sustain itself? Do you now hope for that attraction to return or are you looking for something different?

What role does this initial attraction and reason for coming together now play as you think about creating the love you want?

Is there a Long Term Maladaptive Coping Pattern?

We bring along with us in this life journey particular ways of coping with others and life.

I don't want to get too technical here but suffice it to say that some of these patterns serve us less and less well as we move through life.

Someone may withdraw to recharge him/herself. Over time this withdrawal may become a recurring and frequent form of escape, from family the marriage and responsibilities of life.

Others see life through a depressing filter. This depressing filter may increase in power until a person is close to immobilization.

Others use aggression to manage their way. The aggression may be productive for a period of time, but may be used with more force and insensitivity as a person ages.

Rather than seeing the aging process as an opportunity to face challenges, grow and evolve, some retreat to negative coping patterns that become more and more deeply entrenched and negative.

A spouse, intent on embracing life, may find it extremely difficult to deal with the imbalance of living with such a person.

Does a Person have the Capacity to Emotionally Connect?

This concern follows closely the above mentioned way in which a coping pattern may become more destructive and alienating over time.

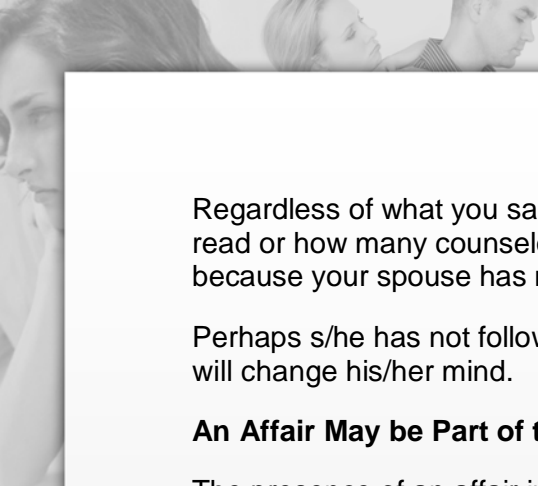
Some lack the internal wiring to move toward another. Or, again, a person may bring along an alienating pattern learned as a child as a way to protect him/herself, but never let go of that pattern or embraced more productive patterns as an adult.

The No Option Path: Maybe you CANNOT Stop the Divorce or Save the Marriage

A hard truth may be that your spouse has decided to end the marriage. It's finished. It's done.

Maybe s/he has told you so, maybe not.

However, at some level, s/he has checked out and you have no options.



Regardless of what you say, regardless of what you do, regardless of how many books you read or how many counselors you see, the marriage is finished. Not because of you, but because your spouse has made the decision.

Perhaps s/he has not followed through with legal papers, but there is no effort on your part that will change his/her mind.

An Affair May be Part of the Marriage

The presence of an affair in the marriage sends a marriage into turmoil. Words of divorce, separation and ending the relationship for someone else may predominate.

It may appear that the marriage is over.

An affair brings a complexity to question of should I stay or go that I will not cover here. Feel free to join the [Infidelity Recovery Center](#) as a guide for this issue.

Two Suggestions

Whether to stay or go is a complex question; far too complex question to cover in one chapter.

I will, however, make two suggestions:

1. If you live in an abusive relationship and there is the fear of physical harm, take action now. If you are unsure of the degree of danger, go to the Red Marriage Section, fill out the questionnaire and do some serious thinking about the steps you will take to manage and care for yourself and perhaps your children as well.
2. Don't focus on the question of whether you should stay or go right now. Put the question of divorce aside. Take the next 27 days to work through the Modules. At that point you will have much better information available to formulate your decision. I observe too many couples divorcing or threatening divorce out of reactivity and negativity. "I can't stand this anymore, s/he will never change, I won't settle, I will never find the love I want here and s/he is the ultimate jerk, etc." are all statements of reactivity and poor criteria to base your divorce or not divorce decision upon. The grass is NOT greener on the other side of marriage.

Conclusion

Your marriage, your relationship, your love and the demands placed on that relationship is always changing and adjusting.

Viewing your marriage as a work in progress eliminates some of the pressure, illusions and betters prepares you to face what must be faced.

Having the capacity to stand back and see the larger picture of your marriage or relationship enables:

You to identify where you are now in this process of being married. Such knowledge results in less fear and confusion.

You to not be surprised when your marriage births a crisis. Your panic level will diminish.

You to have a sense of control and personal power. You no longer feel like a leaf blowing in the wind.

You to stave off thinking you are unlovable.

You to move off center and experience that “stuck” feeling less often and with less intensity.

You to know there are answers.

You to validate your uneasy feelings and inklings.

You to feel normal.

Checklist

Check the items that indicate accomplishment.

Review

- ☐ I know that marriage offers opportunities to discover the worst and best in me.
- ☐ I better understand the saying, “Gold is refined through intense heat.”
- ☐ My pain and emptiness can help me better define what I truly want or am looking for.
- ☐ I am better able to ascertain whether my marital pain is the result of temporary stressors or long term patterns.
- ☐ As I look back, I become aware of particular times that generated stress for our marriage.
- ☐ I've spent time reflecting on the “chemistry” that existed when we first met and can rank it on a scale of 1-10 (10 being extreme “chemistry.”)
- ☐ I can identify one or two long term coping patterns that hopefully can be altered.
- ☐ I've given sufficient and honest thought to the question, “Can my marriage be saved?”
- ☐ I've faced and contemplated the possibility of infidelity in our marriage.
- ☐ I can rank order on a 1-10 scale (1= yes, 10 = no way) the likelihood of my marriage being saved.
- ☐ I feel freer to pursue saving my marriage once I've faced this question, Can my marriage be saved?

How to Save Your Marriage



- Learn How to EXPERIENCE Love
- Learn How to Reduce the Tension, Fear and Hostility
- Learn How to Engage Each Other Differently

[**Click Here for More Information**](#)