

Rules of Engagement

By: Dr. Bob Huizenga

Rules of Engagement

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

To what degree do you believe you know the rules for engaging your spouse?

Very Much So					Very Little
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

What images or thoughts come to mind when you think of learning the rules for engaging your spouse?

What type of feeling do you get when you think of learning the rules for engaging your spouse?

What does it mean to learn the rules for engaging your spouse?

What is your level of comfort when you think of learning the rules for engaging your spouse?

Comfortable					Uncomfortable
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Engaging Your Spouse

I'm offering two more resources: "8 Rules for Engaging Your Spouse" and a transcript of a coaching session with Coryn, as she attempts to engage effectively her spouse.

I hope you learn, use and apply.

Readiness to Engage Your Spouse or Partner

8 Rules for Effective Engagement of Your Spouse

- ✓ Do not use the word "you." In other words, refer to the other person at a minimum. The word "you" usually invites defensiveness (oh, oh, I'm going to be criticized, etc.) or reactivity. (Notice how difficult it is to make a strong statement to your spouse or partner without using "you." Using "you" gives away your personal power. More on this important topic will be covered later.
- ✓ The converse of using "you" is the importance of using the word "I." The word "I" expands your personal power, invites self disclosure and reduces negativity and reactivity. And, no, it's not selfish to talk about you, if it's legitimate self-disclosure.
- ✓ Make distinctions. Don't talk in generalities. Peel back the layers of an idea or concept. I often tell my coaching clients "Paint a picture, so I can see in my head what you are talking about." I.e. don't use the word "love." Describe the behaviors you have in mind when you think of the word "love."
- ✓ Don't be afraid to say you are wrong or that you failed. Say it matter-of-factly, without an underlying desire to manipulate or elicit pity or guilt. Making the other right can be powerful. And the other IS right, if you look beneath, at his/her intentions.
- ✓ State your boundaries, or those conditions that will protect you.
- ✓ State your standards.
- ✓ State your values.
- ✓ Do a 180 if communication is terribly reactive. A 180 is where you assume the opposite strategy or tactic. If you pursued like crazy, back away. If you've been begging, pleading and talking constantly, STOP. Do the opposite. The other often has an interesting response. But, please remember, use this only temporarily. It is NOT great communication, only a stop-gap measure until you can calm yourself and regroup to use more effective skills.

Coaching Call with Coryn

Below is a transcript of a session I had. Notice the shift Coryn experienced in moving away from a feeling of frustration, weariness and helplessness to one of empowerment.

Coryn began to welcome her "voice" and could imagine initiating a conversation that moved the relationship off center of its previous pattern.

Bob: What kind of comment or question might you have?

Coryn: My question is, first of all, my husband and I have been married for 30 years.

Coryn: And he has in the last 18 months just had two affairs.

Coryn: : And he has had two affairs previous to this years ago. He's realized that he has a sexual addiction.

Bob: OK.

Coryn: What I found so amazing is that, when he ended this last affair, suddenly he was happy and attentive towards me until I confronted him with it. Then the minute I confronted him with it, even though it was supposedly over, he left. He walked out the door.

Coryn: How on earth does one communicate? All I wanted for him to know was that I knew of the affair and that it had to stop, which it had at that point. Why on earth does he see that as his opportunity to walk out the door? Now he says he wants to talk, but we haven't really talked yet. He just says, "No." He needs time. So I'm sick of not knowing where I am, what I'm supposed to do or anything like that.

Bob: OK, gotcha. Often with addictions an underlying issue is one of shame. Is he ashamed of what he did?

Coryn: I guess.

Bob: You're not sure? OK?

Coryn: No.

Bob: Have you ever said to him, "Are you ashamed of this?"

Coryn: I'm sure I have. [laughs]

Coryn: Yes, he is. I mean we are religious people, and he has taken an active role in church and stuff like that. So everything that he does has gone exactly against what his belief structure is.

Bob: So you pick up that he's avoiding this, avoiding conversations? Is that part of what's happening?

Coryn: Yeah, I think so. I think so. I mean he said to me, "We need to talk." Then when I send, when I send him a message, "What do you want?" he says right now he just wants to be on his own.

Bob: OK.

Coryn: That's it. That's his level of talking.

Bob: OK, how do you respond?

Coryn: So how do I get close to this man?

Bob: Is this a pattern for him? Does not self disclose a lot or is this something new? Or what's the longterm habit for this in his life?

Coryn: This is exactly how it happens. When I found out about the second to last affair, he walked out the door saying that he needed time to work things, figure things out. Well, during that period of time he then went and embarked on another affair. He then came home. He said he figured things out. He came home, but continued with the other second affair.

Bob: OK.

Coryn: When he finally ended it, suddenly he was acting loving and kind and attentive towards me for the whole of May, not realizing that I had just found out about it. So I was beside myself because here I had, suddenly he was back home being attentive and kind and loving, and yet I knew what he had just been doing. So I put my foot in my mouth and I confronted him about it. And so he left.

Bob: OK. Well, what's this been like for you?

Coryn: It's horrible! It's terrible! It's a nightmare.

Bob: How is it horrible and terrible? What's that like for you?

Coryn: And I'm the one that's left to hold the family together.

Bob: Gotcha.

Coryn: And continue to be the parent.

Bob: You sound frustrated and tired.

Coryn: [laughs] Yeah.

Bob: Which one's more powerful, the frustration or the tiredness?

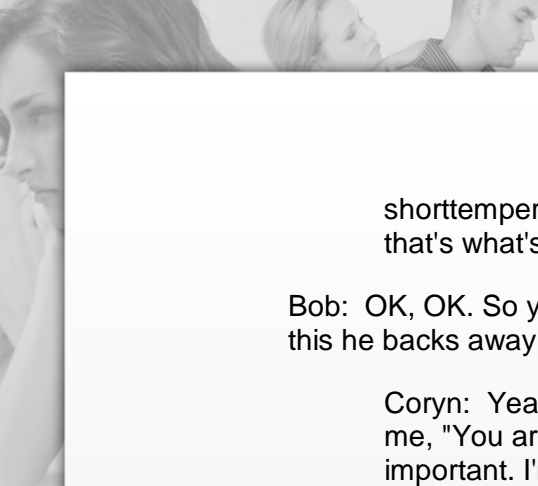
Coryn: It's everything. It's everything. The thing is though, is that I actually think I love this man. This thing that you say with all the, how to, what's this last thing that you did, was to avoid, how can I get to talk to him and to stand in judgment? He hasn't. I mean I really do love him. I think that during our course of our marriage we had some very good years together and there's been a lot of love.

Bob: What do you mean "love"?

Coryn: Well, I have felt his love for me, and he has demonstrated love towards me and it's been a mutual thing.

Bob: OK.

Coryn: But then suddenly what happens is he starts withdrawing and going on frequent business trips and never home. When he is home, he's aggressive and



shorttempered and then cold and indifferent. And then, of course, I realized that that's what's going on.

Bob: OK, OK. So you're frustrated, you're weary and it seems like when you disclose this he backs away.

Coryn: Yeah. And that's the thing that's upsetting for me is why doesn't he say to me, "You are important to me. Our marriage is important. Our children are important. I'm sorry, I wanna say it. I want to work things out. Let's work on this together," but instead he just runs away.

Bob: OK. Have you ever told him that that is what you want to hear from him?

Coryn: Yes.

Bob: OK. How does he respond to you then?

Coryn: He said, "I'm sorry."

Bob: OK so he says, "Sorry." What if you would say, "Well can you say that to me?" Can you say I'm important to you? You say, "I don't need you to feel sorry I just need to hear those words from you that I'm important to you. Can you do that for me right now, at this moment, this time?"

Coryn: I can, I can do that.

Bob: I'm not sure where that would go but it's a little bit different strategy for you isn't it?

Coryn: Like, he's told me the he thinks that it's time to quit.

Bob: To quit?

Coryn: Yeah.

Bob: To quit what?

Coryn: He says he loves me. Our marriage. He says he loves me, but he thinks it's time to quit.

Bob: What does that mean?

Coryn: To end it.

Bob: He wants a divorce?

Coryn: I think he, I think that's what he's contemplating.

Bob: OK. But you're not sure.

Coryn: No.

Bob: And he hasn't taken any action on it?

Coryn: No. Uhuh.



Bob: OK. OK. So he's kind of a mystery for you.

Coryn: Absolutely. Yes.

Bob: Which means he's maybe a mystery to himself as well.

Coryn: How do I get by and how do I get past this? How do I, how do we get some meaningful honest communication? I mean, he has lied so badly.

Bob: Well, I'm thinking of, you sound like you've been very accommodating for him, very patient with him. Is that true?

Coryn: Yes.

Bob: And you've been working hard at holding things together. Is that correct?

Coryn: Mhm. Absolutely.

Bob: OK. What would happen if you would just be more direct with him and say, "I'm tired, I'm weary of holding things together and I'm not sure how long I can do it. And maybe you're right. Maybe we need to talk about ending this. Because I'm at my wits end. It seems like I have a lot of needs that are not met in a relationship, that are not being met here, period."

Coryn: Sounds wonderful.

Bob: Does it?

Coryn: I'm just trying to, yes.

Bob: OK.

Coryn: I'm trying to write it down on... I have a lot of needs.

Bob: Yeah.

Coryn: I need to say this to him?

Bob: Very, very strongly.

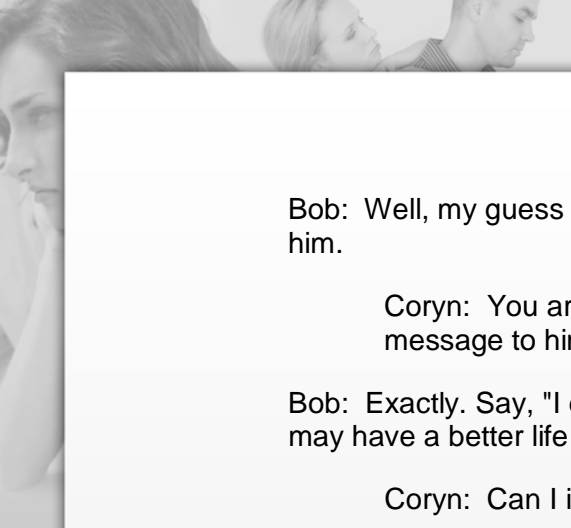
Coryn: Could you repeat that? I have a lot of needs that are not being met.

Bob: Right, "And, I want them met. I want to be in a relationship where they're met and it's not happening here. So maybe you're right. Maybe it's time for us to think about pulling the plug on this, because I want something else. I want to be with someone who stands by my side, who doesn't want to run away."

Coryn: I love that.

Bob: OK. Can you imagine yourself saying that?

Coryn: You know what? [laughter] I am petrified to say that because I'm scared of what I'm going to hear back.



Bob: Well, my guess is it'll scare the pants off of him. He needs you more than you need him.

Coryn: You are absolutely right. How do I convey that, is that how I convey that message to him?

Bob: Exactly. Say, "I don't need you, I don't need you. I can live my life. Matter of fact, I may have a better life without you. Considering what were going through right now."

Coryn: Can I interject though that I love him and would prefer it to...

Bob: Well, I wouldn't use the word love. Say, "There's still a part of me that kind of hopes that we can create that kind of relationship together."

Coryn: Love that. There is still a part of me that hopes that we can, in the hopes that we can what?

Bob: Create that together. What you say is, "As time goes on and on it just seems less and less likely that it's going to happen. I've become more and more frustrated. And I've become more and more weary. And I am sick of it."

Coryn: I love this. It sounds really harsh though.

Bob: Well. You can say it as harsh as you want. You can frame it in real nice words. All right? But you can still be very, very direct and the harshness will come in your nonverbal communication. I'm saying it kind of harsh right now because I want to make a point. And the point is that there is some power in you that you want to use.

Coryn: OK.

Bob: You've been hiding under a blanket or something. You're not fully you here. And you don't have to...

Coryn: I'm not.

Bob: You're not. And you don't have to hide. He's the one that's hiding.

Coryn: Right.

Bob: OK. Is that helpful?

Coryn: Bob, it's been fantastic.

Coryn: Awesome. Thank you so much.

Bob: I hope it works. And it will work. There is no guarantee how he's going to respond but my guess is it's going to scare the pants off of him. Because you're really upsetting the apple cart here and he probably doesn't like that. Anyway, go ahead and see what happens. Thanks for your question. Thanks for sharing, appreciate it very much.

Reflection:

Which of the above information speaks most powerfully about the rules of engagement?

What has this been like for you to read the information about the rules of engagement?

Begin to make the mental and behavioral 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 reflect on your beliefs about the rules of engagement and check where you belief system fits now.

Destructive Belief	Check what you believe now			Constructive Belief	
It's not ok to talk about me.				It is vital I talk about me,.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I don't know what to say.				I have an opportunity to learn exactly what I can say.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It seems like a lot of work to explore and put into words effective engagement.				I get excited thinking about my power to say something important and be truly heard.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I really want to know what s/he's thinking and wants.				S/h can state what s/he's thinking, although the process begins with me.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
We seem to always get stuck at a particular point.				There are so many options for us to break free from where we get stuck.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<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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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.

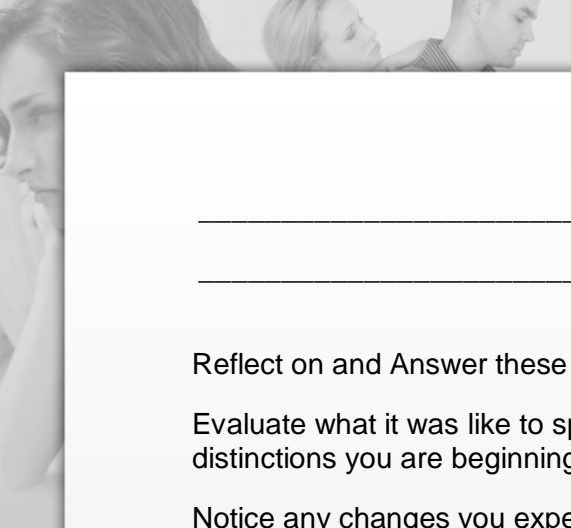
Engaging your spouse means sharing the above exercise in constructive ways.

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/we 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.



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.

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.

Review checklist:

Review	
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am very aware of when I use the word “you” as I communicate with my spouse.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I talk in fewer generalities or at least am aware of the need to be more specific.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I am beginning to think about the standards and values I want for different aspects of my life.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have more resources to engage my spouse more effectively.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I read the Coryn transcript.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I feel more optimistic about engaging my spouse in ways that benefit both of us.