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Salvaging A Broken Relationship

It's not too late to take your relationship and make it new again.

By Stacy D. Phillips

It is far too common for couples who are struggling through difficult times to call it quits. I know. I have sat across the desk from those whom I sense have done just that: walked off the "relationship field" before giving it their all. As a family law attorney, one of the first questions I ask my client is if a divorce is what he or she really wants. Some confide that, even though they do not want to end the relationship, they feel there has been so much damage they have no other choice.

Having witnessed first hand the emotional carnage that can be wreaked by way of a split (especially if there are children involved), I often suggest that some individuals do what they can to rebuild what they have. "You can always file for divorce," I tell them, "but if you think your relationship has redeeming qualities, give it a chance—a fair chance, at least. You have to be able to look yourself in the mirror and know you have done all you can do."

In order to repair a relationship that has unraveled, I tell those who ask my advice to, at a minimum, try the following:

* **Fully commit to the concept that you will give the rebuilding attempt your very best effort.** Do not go about the task of repairing what is damaged with a half-hearted approach.

* **View the relationship from the other person's point of view.** Try to get past whoever is right or wrong because when you are working at repairing a broken relationship, blame can become petty and meaningless. What counts is that you step outside of yourself and take a peek through the other person's looking glass. Understanding and having empathy for where your partner is coming from is critical to retooling your relationship.

* **Make a list of what the pluses and minuses are in the relationship.** For instance, if he likes to party all night with his friends, nearly every night, you may be justified in deciding that his lack of priority towards you, along with an immature lifestyle is unacceptable. However, if he is just too lazy to do some of the household chores, maybe that is something you can live with after all, and do so without resentment.

* **Apologize for anything that your partner feels you did to him or her that they perceived as unkind or unfair.** Starting out with a sincere apology should be a first step for both of you. Doing so demonstrates that you are on equal ground to start the rebuilding process.

* **Give to get.** Any relationship requires giving up some things to get others, but realize in most relationships, things are not always equal. Some people give more than others. Often one party feels he or she is giving more than the other and becomes disenchanted with the relationship. For every one thing you give, ask for something. Whatever you give (like cooking every night even though you worked all day) ask for something you feel is equitable, like having the other person handle meals on the weekends. Most relationships gradually unravel because one person feels they are too much the "giver" while the other person is viewed as the chronic "taker."



* **Get to a therapist.** Make sure the therapist is a neutral party who can help you sort out your differences together and fix what is broken. It is not unusual for two people in a close personal relationship to be blinded by their own insights. An outsider, who is qualified, can help both of you identify your relationship's strengths and weaknesses. From there, you can begin to renew your relationship from a healthier perspective.

* **Share control.** One of the biggest problems in all relationships is a tendency to fight over control. If you can "take turns" with everything from who controls the thermostat to what movie you will see, you will soon find there is more equality in the your relationship. There is no better way to mend a broken relationship than to keep the balance in who "rules" what.

* **Vow to communicate what you might think is a failure to openly discuss what you think and feel is a recipe for relationship disaster.** A union may not erode overnight, but it will eventually unless you are open and honest with your partner. One of the very best ways to get your relationship back on track is to have a heart-to-heart talk over what you want and need from one another. Be careful, however, being open does not mean being unkind in any way. Be diplomatic, always.

Do each of the above eight steps along with revisiting your expectations. Are they too high? Keep in mind that there is great truth to the adage that the "grass is always greener...." Making a worthy relationship work and sustaining it is not for the faint-hearted, but in the end a close personal relationship with a significant other can be one of the most rewarding and satisfying of all life's experiences. It takes constant work.

As you go about the relationship rebuilding process, give your relationship your all. If you do, it will undoubtedly inspire your spouse to do the same.

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