

Finding Yourself

You have to be strong, in order to keep loving each other after the newness of a relationship wears off. At best, the newness will last about two years. Unfortunately, each will fall into a routine and slowly take each other for granted. Lovers often see their partner as an extension of themselves; like a right arm. They become emotionally enmeshed. They will stop appreciating the other and eventually the common courtesies, i.e., thank you, please, may I, etc., will fade away. When lovers stop or fail to see their partner as a distinct person, they risk being emotionally fused to them like a conjoined twin. When one makes a move toward independence, it is seen as a personal assault or threat to their sense of self.

Communication eventually drifts away because they already know how the other is going to respond or they don't want trouble of dealing with the fall out. The relationship becomes filled with assumptions, judgments and criticisms. Most will attempt to avoid this pain and discomfort. They may try to self-soothe by avoiding and or emotionally disengaging from the source of pain (the other). Meanwhile, the other will perceive this self-soothing as abandonment and will pursue and badger from a place of desperation. The more they pursue, the more the other withdraws. And thus the cat and mouse dance cycle of pursue-withdraw is established. This dance will continue until one or both accommodate themselves to the other.

"I don't know who I am anymore."

After a while the dance gets old and is replaced by gridlock. Gridlock creeps into a relationship when each person refuses to hear and understand the other. They fear losing ground or their sense of self. Gridlock is the very process that indicates a change or evolution within the relationship is needed. Gridlock can be the reestablishment of defining the sense of self. This establishment is often seen a threat so it is rarely discussed. When it is discussed, it generally ends with conflict and arguments.

Most of us want to avoid the anxiety that comes with the choice of maturing or remaining the same. We'd rather our partner choose for us, so we sabotage the relationship in order to force their hand to decide for us, leaving us to blame them for our inability to take personal responsibility.

Gridlock will lead to Critical mass. Conflict is normal within a healthy relationship. Relationship must endure critical mass in order to mature to the next level or they risk stagnation, gridlock, and eventually the disintegration of the relationship. Critical mass is an indicator that a change is needed. It does not always come with an explosion. It usually comes from a calm place in the form of a quiet resolution. Critical Mass leaves you with two basic choices that come with high anxiety and discomfort. Do nothing or mature into adulthood. Individuals with low levels of maturity tend to choose options that tend to give them the least discomfort.

By its very nature, critical mass is designed to get the attention of the other in a way the other can acknowledge it. The message is "the gridlock has been broken and I require action as I will no longer tolerate living this way." It might sound something like this, "I want a divorce" or "I'm leaving you." Sometimes it's not verbal. It might come in the form of an affair, substance abuse, avoidance, over involvement in work or hobbies. Nonetheless, once the message is received and understood, the receiver deploys into damage control mode. Their anxiety skyrockets and they go into panic mode in an

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effort to maintain status quo. “I don’t understand... where this coming from... I didn’t think things were that bad... let’s get some help... can we go to counseling?” To which the originating partner will say, “I’ve been saying that for a while... you never listen to me until I say I want a divorce.”

By the time the message is finally heard, one or both partners will have one foot out the door. Their commitment to the relationship is ambivalent, at best. They tend to take a “let’s wait and see” attitude. By the time the relationship enters therapy, it’s almost too late. It’s no wonder why therapy does not always work. Therapy only works if the participants work.

Maturation within this context refers to a paradigm shift, growth, and a fundamental change of thinking, behaving, emoting, and relating to each other. If the couple refuses to mature and take the least painful way out with divorce, they will enter their next relationship stuck in the same level of maturity and expectation. Disintegrating the relationship is not the answer as it will merely prolong the problem and push it into the next relationship. Seeking a spousal-ectomy or a divorce is not the cure to the cancer within the relationship, just a temporary treatment. The same gridlock will eventually make its way into the new relationship. This explains why subsequent relationships tend to end with divorce at a higher rate. The solution is differentiating and defining our selves within the context of our relationships. Differentiating involves maturing into the next level of adulthood.

Differentiation of self

1. Maintaining your sense of self in the presence of someone you are emotionally and physically close to especially when they are important to you.
2. Self-validate and self-soothe without reacting.
3. Increase your tolerance to emotional discomfort for the sake of personal growth.
4. Increase your tolerance to the emotional pain and discomfort of others that are emotionally close and important to you.

Actions to take:

1. Develop a personal mission statement. This will serve as your personal “north star”. Define who you are and what your life is all about.
2. Hug until you are relaxed. As close as you can get while remaining balance on your own two feet, hug and hold each other.
3. Gaze to appreciate. With your heads on your pillow, gaze at each other in the eyes and discuss what you appreciate about each other.
4. Develop a marriage mission statement. Discuss what your marriage is all about. Start with the wedding values.