



Blind Spots in Marriage

Ten harmful behaviors couples can avoid on
their path to intimacy

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Early Warning Signs

Van Halen

What if you could identify the early warning signs of a problem with your children? What if you could detect a child going astray? What if you could give yourself video game like (neutral) feedback that is an instant indicator of possible problems lurking below the surface?

Google executives can predict a flu outbreak by the number of Internet searches for 'flu' and 'influenza.' As a result, Epidemiologists (disease control specialists) can now spot a flu outbreak one to two weeks faster than before the invention of Google and search engines.



Remember the rock band Van Halen? On tour, the band would show up with nine 18-wheelers full of gear. Because of the technical complexity, the band's standard contract for venues (concert halls and stadiums) was thick and convoluted. It required the venue's stagehands to pay close attention the contract's details in order to properly prep for the band's arrival.

If the management of the venue did not adequately conduct their due diligence in reading the contract, it compromised Van Halens' ability to setup in time for the show. Furthermore, it put the show at risk for an electrical malfunction if the contract was not followed with precision.

In a stroke of genius, Van Halen's lead singer, David Lee Roth, embedded an obscure clause in the middle of the contract that became known as clause 126 and read something like this:

"There will be no brown M&Ms in the backstage area, upon pain of forfeiture of the show, with full compensation."



Upon arrival at the venue, Roth would walk backstage to check out the M&M bowl. If he saw any brown ones he knew the contract had not been thoroughly read and it was very likely they were going to have a technical error. He would then demand a line check of the entire production.

Without knowing it, the venue, by not reading the contract, operated with a huge blind spot completely unknown until Mr. Roth ordered a line check or full payment.

With what blind spots do you operate as a parent that you don't know about? A blind spot is a belief or behavior that signals a red flag to the child with whom you are conversing. You most likely don't know about it, your child can't explain it, but she is very uncomfortable and it hinders your relationship.

Your credibility, trust and respect are all at risk. (Notice that their affection [love] is not being discussed. That's another topic.)

The 10 Blind Spots

Here is a list of 10 blind spots: phrases, beliefs and behaviors to avoid in a marriage or committed relationship. These are toxic and considered poisonous.

Things we say...

1. I know what you mean
2. If I were you
3. Don't take this personally
4. You don't get it, do you?
5. If you'd only listen to me
6. We need to... (fix)

Things we do...

7. Mind reading expectations
8. Conflict avoidance
9. Trying to change or rescue
10. Seeking agreement

Bonus Concept:

Why Trust?

Concept 1

I know what you mean:

Your spouse comes home from work and tells you a detailed story of frustration with incompetent co-workers and know-it-all managers. Having some corporate experience you

nod your head in attentive agreement, signaling you are present, and in the right moment, between his breaths you say: "I know what you mean."

Now that the wind has been transferred to your sail, he mutters a few more diatribes of frustration and moves on. Your attempt to relate and console had an inverse effect. Your husband is not sharing his frustration with you so you can relive your past. Your partner needs a sounding board. Someone who is really present and interested in what he has to say.

With skill, you can develop the ability to question and get to the root cause of the frustration. Many times there is more to the story than the initial emotional outburst within the confines and safety of home.

Furthermore, you have no idea what he experienced at work. It doesn't matter how much corporate experience you've had, you are not your spouse/partner/friend/child/or whatever. Any time you attempt to relate, you change the focus of attention and remove trust and respect from the mutual space.

Concept 2

If I were you:

You are not me, so don't try. That is judging. If you are asked for your opinion, that's fine, but offering your opinion when none is requested is seeking agreement and manipulative.

This is the Solution King at his best. Typically the male gender is guilty of problem solving within the marriage, but this is not an absolute. Early in my marriage, whenever Cheri explained a problem to me, I felt it was incumbent upon me to solve her problem.

It took me years to figure out how much this irritated my bride. She would explain a frustration or a problem and without so much as a clarifying question, I would spew out a brilliant solution that only I could think of.

In my mind, these solutions, if written down, could be the equivalent of Presidential memoirs. Gradually, Cheri discontinued sharing her frustrations with me, and when she did, she was very selective.

I wasn't very present during those times, and it wasn't until a friend clued me into the concept of listen don't solve that Cheri again felt safe enough to share a full frustration with me.

I remember the first time I practiced the skill, I came home from work and asked her how the day went. She was guarded in her response, only because she didn't think the memoirs needed additional chapters, and she glossed over her day.

I knew there was something beneath her answer because of who she mentioned in her avoidance summary, so I probed. She really wanted to talk about it but it was clear she didn't feel safe. As she started sharing more details, I could my urge to solve start simmering.

Thank goodness I caught myself before I violated her trust again, so I asked, "Am I listening or am I solving?" What a breath of fresh air that was in our shared space and in our marriage. I was no longer heavy baggage at the end of the day trying to manipulate myself into her growth pattern.

She freely let me have the entire story and I listened, asked questions, and listened some more. It worked so good, she has since given me permission to solve once or twice since that day. Wow! What a reward.

Over the years as we've discussed this issue, Cheri has pointed out that she just wants me to listen to her. She typically knows what to do, but airing the problem with a trusted confidant strengthens her resolve and brings clarity to her mind.

Learning to ask good questions without judgment greatly adds to the space when she shares intimate parts of her life. When I listen without solving or interjecting opinions, there is a deeper level of trust and respect, the two required ingredients for intimacy.

And intimacy is the end result of a successful and happy marriage.

Concept 3

Don't take this personally:

This is a very illogical, ill-conceived and self-centered qualifier to an impending litany of criticism. Your spouse has done something wrong and you are about to unload. Anytime somebody starts with "*Don't take this personally, but...*" I cringe and await the impending bomb of another mistake I've made or worse, I hear why I'm a mistake.

If you are guilty of this line, how do you respond when someone qualifies your discussion with "*Don't take this personally, but...*?" If you don't want your wife or husband to take something personally, then don't make it personal.

There is no room for criticism within a marriage. NONE! Constructive criticism is an oxymoron and the politically correct way of masking your real intent which is to prove you are right at the expense of the other.

To be constructive is to build up. Criticism breaks down. They are polar opposites. There is a better way to initiate change, if change is actually what you want.

The most effective way is to seek complete understanding of why your loved one acts a certain way without judging, manipulating, or persuading. Spend some time to discover and listen to what makes him or her tick.

The story is told of a young couple 3 months into their marriage when the husband sits the wife down after dinner with the introduction: "I want to share with you some constructive criticism to help you improve."

Gathering her thoughts, the wife holds her husband's critical tongue at bay long enough to take a deep breath and say: "I want you to know that the flaws and weaknesses you will expose are the cause for me not marrying someone better than you. Now what is it you wanted to say?"

Any time your spouse offers an unsolicited opinion you can rest assured that person is in pain. Pain at the underground truth that he or she must tear you down to temporarily lift themselves higher than you.

If that person is you, what weakness are you avoiding or ignoring? This Blind Spot will deteriorate to the point of a divorce, or worse, an Invisible Divorce, and you will become a controlling dictator, if you haven't already become one.

Concept 4

You don't get it, do you?

What about that statement elicits safety, trust, and respect? Would it not be easier to say: "What's it like being an idiot?" If you are guilty of this line ask yourself right now, "What do I want when I say this line?"

If you want cooperation, growth, conflict resolution, greater attentiveness to detail, deeper listening, and greater intimacy with your loved one, you will never get it using this strategy.

Think about the role of a spouse or even a friend.

A spouse's role is to...

1. See your partner as an equal (Help Meet not mate) and as a human
2. Listen and be present
3. Develop a deep level of trust and respect
4. Learn to resolve conflict and avoid contention

5. Effectively communicate (Clarity is Power)
6. Elevate each other to higher ground
7. Work interdependently
8. Achieve intimacy
 - Physically
 - Emotionally
 - Spiritually

Remember Econ 101? Opinions are like commodities and they have value based upon supply and demand. If your opinions are in large supply, there is little demand for them and their value is very low.

Concept 5

If you'd only listen:

This is another way of saying,

"I'm not interested in what you think, how you feel, or what is right."

"I'm only concerned with WHO is right and that's ME."

You are an agreement seeking missile who is only concerned with opinion, not truth. What's good for you is good for all, especially your spouse. This is a great way to remove the possibility of ever getting honest cooperation. Once you tell someone why she should do something, you've given her permission not to do it.

Remember the definition of communication is to seek understanding. Seeking agreement, doing it your way because of an emotional outburst, hinders growth and thwarts trust and respect.

If you really want someone to listen to you, try listening to them. Perhaps you are thinking, "but I'm right." You might be right. That is possible. But no matter how right you are, trying to get your wife or husband to agree with you is manipulative and persuasive, and that person won't budge because it's not safe, and now you are in competition over who is right and not what is right.

Cooperation always outperforms competitive.

Hearing a truth is a belief...maybe.

Learning a truth is a truth.

When you tell someone a truth, it's a monologue. You are the only one talking. When you delegate thinking to the other person and allow them to self discover truth in a space of neutrality, meaning no judgment, they own the results.

Ask yourself what you really want. Do you want to be right or do you want to be happy?

It's your choice!

Concept 6

We need to...

Fix the leak in the bathroom, call the electrician, stop payment on the Time Share we didn't want to buy. In my home, for years, whenever my wife heard, "We need to..." it meant, she needs to. At least that is how she interpreted it.

I am searching for some kind of rebuttal to her perceptions and nothing is coming to mind. In organizing this report, Cheri was a primary source of information as I've participated in most of the Blind Spots and she is our residence expert on how to handle my many faults.

The other day, Cheri was in Walt's getting her oil changed when she overheard the manager speaking with his wife on the phone. He was very sweet and respectful with his wife, but during the conversation he said: "Honey, we need to start packing lunches to work in order to save money."

The conversation ended and Cheri apologized for listening in as she sat in the waiting room with only her and the manager in the room. She indicated she overheard part of the conversation, explained that her husband (me) had discussed a similar concept with her the night before and wondered if he (manager) could explain the meaning behind "We need to start packing lunches?"

He blushed and she asked: "Who packs your lunch?" "I know. I know." he exclaimed. "She makes the lunch. I know I do that."

He handled this well and humorously. He is either aware of the meaning behind his words because his dear wife has brought it to his attention or he's always known deep down inside what he is doing and hasn't figured out a better way to communicate his intent.

There is no clarity in the statement. What you are really saying is, “will you do this” or “I want you to...”. This removes the ambiguity. Saying “we need to” becomes manipulative and confusing.

Concept 7

Mind Reading Expectations

There are some families who primarily communicate nonverbally. Dr. John Lund tells the story of his own family’s Mind Reading Expectations. His mother came from a long line of mind readers. She and her sisters could prepare a full Thanksgiving meal without so much as a word exchanged, right down to the table settings.

One school day afternoon he was in the living room doing homework as his father sat in his chair reading the paper, when he heard his mother sniffing vigorously in the kitchen. Since he grew up with his mother, he was clued into her Mind Reading Expectations. His father, on the other hand, was without a clue.

“Honey,” she called from the kitchen, speaking to her husband, “the trash smells funny.”

“Uh, huh,” was all he said without breaking his concentration on the newspaper.

He missed the sniff completely. He heard that the trash was emitting a foul odor but the meaning behind it never reached his space. John knew what was happening and chose silence.

“Honey,” came a louder cry, “can’t you smell the trash, it’s aaawwful?”

“Nope, can’t smell it dear,” dad stoically muttered.

A few more minutes went by, John knows what the end result looks like, but he decides to play it to the bitter end.

“Sweetheart, didn’t you hear me asking you to take the trash out,” came the exasperated call from the kitchen?

“Ah, no dear, you didn’t ask me to take out the trash. You seemed concerned about it’s putrid smell, but no, no you didn’t ask me to remove the trash,” was her husband’s honest and non sarcastic reply. He was not playing a joke or making fun of his wife.

“That’s the point,” she complained, “it stinks and I asked you to take the trash out.”

“No you didn’t dear. You complained that it was stinking up the kitchen, but you never asked me to take out the garbage,” he answered.

“But that’s what I meant.”

“What’s that dear? You want what?” he sincerely asked.

“I want you to take out the garbage.”

To which his father calmly replied: “Johnny, your mom wants you to take the garbage out. Right now.”

Concept 8

Conflict avoidance

One of the most common sources of contention and anger within marriage is when one partner avoids conflict at all costs. The eternal peace maker or the person who always wants everybody to get along has conditioned herself to avoid conflict. She thinks that conflict is bad and does harm to the relationship.

It’s probable that her father or mother were very violent when she was a child and she doesn’t want that kind of behavior as a part of her life or her children’s lives. By way of definition in this context, conflict is having the same goal or vision but seeing a different path on which to obtain it.

Conflict is *what* is right versus *who* is right. It is necessary for progress. In fact, its required.

Contention is making it personal and arguing about it. Contention is all about *who* is right at the expense of *what* is right.

Peace makers usually confuse disagreement (conflict) with contention. Few people are trained in conflict resolution. What we do know is from the school of hard knocks and our skills are rudimentary.

Knowing that conflict is okay and realizing there are skills that can remove contention in almost every situation can infuse great hope, confidence, progress and safety into any relationship and marriage.

When a man flees conflict, he usually employs the silent treatment and will often freeze out his wife instead of yelling at her. He runs to man cave and hides there behind his pride and anger.

When a woman mimics this immature behavior she saunters to her chick hut and fumes until she’s calm enough to resume dialogue. (This is not the same as fleeing because of fear. If your spouse is addicted to rage, see #9.)

Concept 9

Trying to change or rescue

Many a marriage landing on the rocks is crushed under the weight of trying to rescue or change a spouse. Stereotypically, this is the wife trying to change the husband's behavior and spiraling into depression full of anxiety because the husband doesn't respond.

Whether your husband is addicted to alcohol, drugs or pornography, rage, control, or conflict avoidance, you are powerless to change him. (This is also true in reverse.)

You are a big obstacle getting in the way to his recovery and the odds are you are enmeshed into his addiction. This means you are stuck and codependent upon his recovery or progress and you tie your happiness to him.

It is not your job to heal or fix your husband/wife, it is your job to heal and fix yourself. Here are some indicators that you might need help with codependence:

1. You lie and cover up for your loved one.
2. You don't allow natural consequences for addicted behavior to take place.
3. You constantly police his/her activities.
4. You blame your misery and pain on him/her.
5. You use the addiction of your loved one as an excuse for feeling depressed.
6. You feel shame because of your loved one.
7. You deny the reality of the addiction.

You only need to answer yes to 2 or more of these questions to determine you are codependent. What you need is immediate help. There are many free Christian based models that offer help for codependency and addiction. Seek out your local church for help or call a professional.

Concept 10

Seeking agreement

The primary purpose of communicating is to seek understanding. When you tell your spouse what to do you are seeking agreement and pushing him/her away. In effect, you are giving them justification for not doing what you want them to do.

Of all the Blind Spots discussed, seeking agreement is the most common source of friction between husband and wife because it is the most abused. Consider your last discussion with your spouse. Think back on the subject and your position.

Did you at any time attempt to get your spouse to agree with your statement through persuasion, word choice, intonation, body language, or manipulation? Were you more concerned that *you* were right versus determining *what* was right?

This is a gut check. The path to a successful relationship is the ability to be honest with yourself. Try this as part of the learning experience. Watch a TV program and simply observe who is seeking agreement versus seeking understanding.

The one seeking agreement will be trying to convince others that they are right. The entire paradigm of that person is who is right. Many sitcoms base their humor on this very narrow self-centered point of communication.

This is the difference between WHO is right and WHAT is right. Until you learn to effectively communicate, using proper tools, the space you share with your spouse will not be conducive to garnering trust and without trust you will never experience intimacy.

Why Trust?

In a world that touts cash as king, trust is the currency of any relationship. Therefore, trust is like unto money. It is the cash that builds and sustains the foundation of a marriage and the family.

The most efficient space you can share with another person is trust. Some of you will question this and perhaps opine that love makes the world go around.

Consider this: is it possible to love someone but not trust them? Can you love your teenager and not trust her to drive your car or come home on time or do her homework?

Dr. W. Edwards Deming said: “94% of all failure is a systems malfunction.” This is just as true in marriage as it is in car manufacturing. During the first years of marriage, you each become conditioned to certain reactions.

When your wife says X, you react with Y, and when topic of Z comes up, you both avoid it like the plague. This is your communication system. If you want to experience the exquisite feeling of intimate space with your loved one(s) you must develop the necessary tools.

To hope, want, and pray for change still requires learning on your part. Learning means you acquire knowledge, but there is no power in knowledge unless you can use it. Reading self-help books or taking courses gets you to the learning point. So far you know the what. Practicing, however, is developing the skill of how. How do you resolve conflict? How do you avoid Blind Spots and create trust within your marriage?

And ultimately, how do you experience intimacy with your spouse? Intimacy within a marriage requires practice. Learning to communicate with your spouse within intimate space means you avoid The Me Pyramid™, use all four levels of Ted and see your spouse as a human (The You Pyramid™).

Each of us has an innate drive for intimacy, physical, emotional, and spiritual. The path to physical intimacy goes through emotional. Spiritual intimacy, being one with God, is a catalyst to both. The power of procreation comes from God. He wants us to experience the pleasure and joy of intimacy. The only way to experience Godly joy and pleasure is by operating within the boundaries He has set.

“Man is that he might have joy.”

May this guide provide a learning tool to continued growth within your marriage.

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