

Why do marriages breakdown? Why is the divorce rate on the increase? Why isn't this relationship different from before we were married?

Perhaps the most difficult thing we ever do is relationship. I don't think anyone would disagree that it is very hard work and often the problems that arise seem insurmountable. I don't have the definitive solution to fix relationship breakdown, but there are some avoidable pitfalls that do have solutions.

I have wondered how some couples can stay together for 30, 40 and even 50 or more years successfully, and I believe I know how this happens. I think couples who remain happily married for long periods have learned to be very intuitive around each other. They both seem to have an awareness of their partner's mind set and respond automatically to each other without the need for verbal communication.

This skill doesn't come easily, and it may be becoming a lost art as we become more and more immersed in the technological age.

Communication is 25% content and 75% non-verbal language. In a long term successful marriage, the couples have become used to the non-verbal meanings in their communications in favor of the content, so misunderstandings don't arise. An onlooker can be quite confused as they see and hear the couple responding to each other and seemingly ignoring the words.

One method of communication that will be of immense help to newly formed relationships is that of mirroring feedback. Often times, we believe that what we say is what our partner hears. This is not always the case, and can be a source of misunderstanding. It seems cumbersome but a solution to misunderstandings that will bring the couple closer is to feed back what you thought you heard and ask if this is what was meant by your partner. This is known as active listening. It has serendipity in that each communicator feels they are being heard. This is a powerful emotional linking process that makes for good feelings.

This process sounds artificial when first being used, but the rewards are immeasurable.

The other frequent source of marital breakdown is the changes that occur as the ink is drying on the marriage certificate. During the courtship phase of the relationship, both parties are on their best behavior trying to impress each other on all of their good points. Those attributes that are sources of minor frustration are put on ignore for now, in favor of the good times and of course the high sexual energy.

For some couples being married implies now I've got you I can make you change those irritations that bothered me before we were married. It's as though the marriage certificate is a license to become our true selves, different from the self we presented during our courtship.

The most useful solution to this frequent state of affairs is to be yourself, and not be afraid to put the entire relationship out there in the open.