



Why good marriages go bad

THE TRAINING
MANUAL

TOPIC TWO

“Live so that when your children think of fairness, caring and integrity, they think of you.”
H. Jackson Brown, Jr

THE QUOTE

There is a fundamental truth about couples who are stressed out. We want you to learn it, apply it, and beat it!

OUR HOPE

Why don't you just give up!

As one of the Sopranos might say, "Forget about it!" Don't hassle with an unsatisfying marriage. If you are not happy move on to a better life and a better spouse. You've tried everything possible. You simply married the wrong person. You are probably feeling, "I love you, but I'm not 'in love' with you." The passion has died. The romance is long gone. Don't waste another minute in a depressing and doomed to fail marriage. Give up!

Couples pleading for a better life. Couples desperate to turn a hurting marriage into a healing marriage. But you want to know something ridiculous? Once we try to give them new knowledge and skills we get dismissed with comments like: "Oh, we've tried that." "That won't work for us." "It's more complicated than that." "You're asking a lot." "He will never respond." "She will never stop." "It's too late for us." "We've just fallen out of love." (which is my most hated comment of all.)

So we'll say it once more, why don't you just give up! Throw in the towel. Kick the bucket. Bon voyage. Hasta la vista baby.

We want to give you permission to feel like leaving a bad marriage. Because if you refuse to admit you want out, then there is no place for you to begin healing. Sometimes we need to be honest about our current state of feelings. If we try to deny that we want out, then we will never be able to truly face the real reasons our marriage is hurting. So just go ahead and say it to yourself (do not say any of this to your spouse), "I want out."

Now that we've got that out of the way, let the healing begin!

Because there are 3 reasons you don't want to abandon your marriage:

1. Research shows that if you can simply wait it out, in a non-abusive relationship, your marriage will take a turn for the better. There was a study done out of Chicago years ago that simply followed several hundred couples. It tested their marital happiness and their satisfaction with life. At least half of the marriages were stressed out and dissatisfied with their marriage and their life. Five years later they tested the same couples again and found something quite amazing. For many of the couples whom ended up divorcing, they were still just as unhappy with their life and their relationships. For the couples majority whom stayed together, they reported being satisfied with their life. Sometimes it pays to have a little patience when it comes to marital difficulty. The relationship that is causing you the most difficulty is the one that will continue to define you long after the divorce. Your tendency to blame, shame and criticize will become overwhelming. Self-protection will most likely over shadow self-awareness. We truly believe life is about character not comfort. A life filled with character and integrity is valued but so often not chosen.

2. Your children are a huge reason to stay together and resolve your conflict. Research is very clear that children of divorce have a harder time resisting peer pressure, succeeding in school, and succeeding in their future relationships. Studies has shown the drug and alcohol abuse, premarital

sex,.... (get the study) are five times more likely to occur in teens with divorced parents. There was a time when therapists and psychiatrists felt couples should divorce despite the children because it was worse to stay together. Well that time has passed.

3. If you don't resolve the difficulties in your current marriage, they will simply haunt you in your second marriage. This is the most depressing news of all to couples who divorce, especially if they have children together. Because what they realize, often very quickly, is that the same negative patterns that destroyed their first marriage are creeping into their second.

Why? Because divorce doesn't solve anything. History repeats if lessons aren't learned. Divorce only makes everything more complicated and hard. This is why divorce rates are so much higher for second marriages. The real tragedy is they eventually have to learn to get along and repair the damage. Then they find themselves smacking their heads saying, "Why didn't we figure this out when we were married?"

As coach Jimmy Valvano, who was dying of cancer at the time he made this famous statement, would say, "Never give up!" It is not worth the pain of divorce. You can get help. There are therapists and relationship coaches who know what it takes to turn your marriage around. It will take effort. It will take time.

Why do you get upset?

What is fueling your feelings of disappointment, hurt, anger or resentment? Your spouse comes home - late again - why does this bother you? Maybe your spouse has had an affair, what truly hurts you about the affair? You see, what we've discovered through the years is that couples do not fight because of in-laws, finances, communication, or children. Couples fight because of something far more significant.

The reason we get upset and then get into ugly arguments with our mate is because of fear. This is not the kind of fear that prevents you from turning off the lights in a room or walking down an empty street. But relational fears like rejection, disconnection, being controlled, failure, invalidation, worthlessness, or unhappiness.

This session will finally help you realize why you get upset, and this will give you power over your most heated arguments! Once you can identify why you get upset then you can start changing the way you respond when your "buttons" get pushed (buttons like feeling devalued, unappreciated, worthless, etc.).

What you don't know will destroy your marriage!

Your groaning leads to blaming, which leads to wandering, which leads to looking in the wrong places. The importance of this session is the power of identifying why the marriage is stressed out.

INTRODUCTION CONTINUED

THE OUTLINE

Couples are not miserable because of finances, kids, or in-laws. The reason couples become miserable is because of hot buttons.

Everyone has hot buttons like:

Disconnection, Control, Failure, Invalidation, and Rejection

There are about 25 major hot buttons and we give you a list on the following page. You will want to use this list with your couple and help them identify what their hot buttons are.

You will never get rid of your hot buttons, but you can respond to them differently.

Now is the part where you will help each spouse identify his or her major hot buttons. This is not a complicated process and really involves simply learning how to ask the question, "So why does that bother you so much?" The more you ask that question the more you will encourage an individual to dig down deep to a hot button. Here is an example of what we are talking about:

Marriage coach: What is the most recent conflict you two have had?

Husband: Oh, that's an easy one. We just got in a huge fight over how much time I work.

Marriage coach (to the wife): What bothers you about your husband's work hours?

Wife: I don't like how much he works, he spends more time at work than he does at home.

Marriage coach (to the wife): Okay, but what bothers you about your husband spending more time at work than at home?

Wife: The kids really miss him a lot.

Marriage coach (to the wife): What bothers you about the kids missing him so much?

Wife: It's like they are not important enough for him to spend any time with, and me to.

Marriage coach (to the wife): Okay, it sounds like what you're telling me is that when your husband spends more time at work than at home, that makes you feel unwanted or unimportant?

Wife: Yes, that is exactly what I feel.

At this point you have finally gotten the wife down to her hot buttons. At this point, you can go through the exercise again with the husband over the same issue of work hours (or whatever they bring up as the most recent conflict). The key, again, will be for you to ask the husband something like, "So what bothers you about your wife complaining about your work hours?" Then you will be off to the races again with the husband now trying to identify his hot buttons.

One of the useful things you can do in helping an individual identify her hot buttons is to show her the list of hot buttons on the next page. It is not unusual, especially for husbands, for someone to get stuck when trying to drill down to a hot button.

When a person gets stuck, all you need to do is point him to the list of the most common hot buttons and then ask him to read the list and pick 1-3 potential hot buttons that fit the argument.

**THE OUTLINE
CONTINUED**

**HELPING THEM IDENTIFY
THEIR HOT BUTTONS**

In using this list, have the individual circle about three of the hot buttons listed below that are the most important feelings associated with the conflict.

THE HOT BUTTON LIST

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Rejection | Feeling devalued |
| Judgment | Humiliation |
| Disconnection | Abandonment |
| Loneliness | Feeling unimportant |
| Failure | Feeling Ignored |
| Powerlessness | Neglect |
| Being misunderstood | Condemnation |
| Being scorned | Feeling unwanted |
| Being invalidated | Danger |
| Feeling defective | Feeling disliked |
| Inferiority | Mistrust |
| Worthlessness | Despair |
| | Unhappiness |

Now that your couple has identified their major hot buttons, you will want to draw them on the following graph (they will actually have their own graphs in their participants workbook). The point of this graph is to show the couple their hot button dance. This is why their marriage is so unsatisfied, the cycle of dysfunction that keeps messing things up for their marriage!

All you do is fill out the hot buttons first for both the husband and the wife. Once that is completed, ask the husband or wife (it does not matter who you ask first) how they react when one of those buttons gets pushed. You might get a response like, "Well, when I feel unimportant, I guess I tend to gripe and complain." At this point, summarize what you heard by filling it in the appropriate reaction space (if the wife said it, then put something like "complain and gripe" above the line for the wife's reaction).

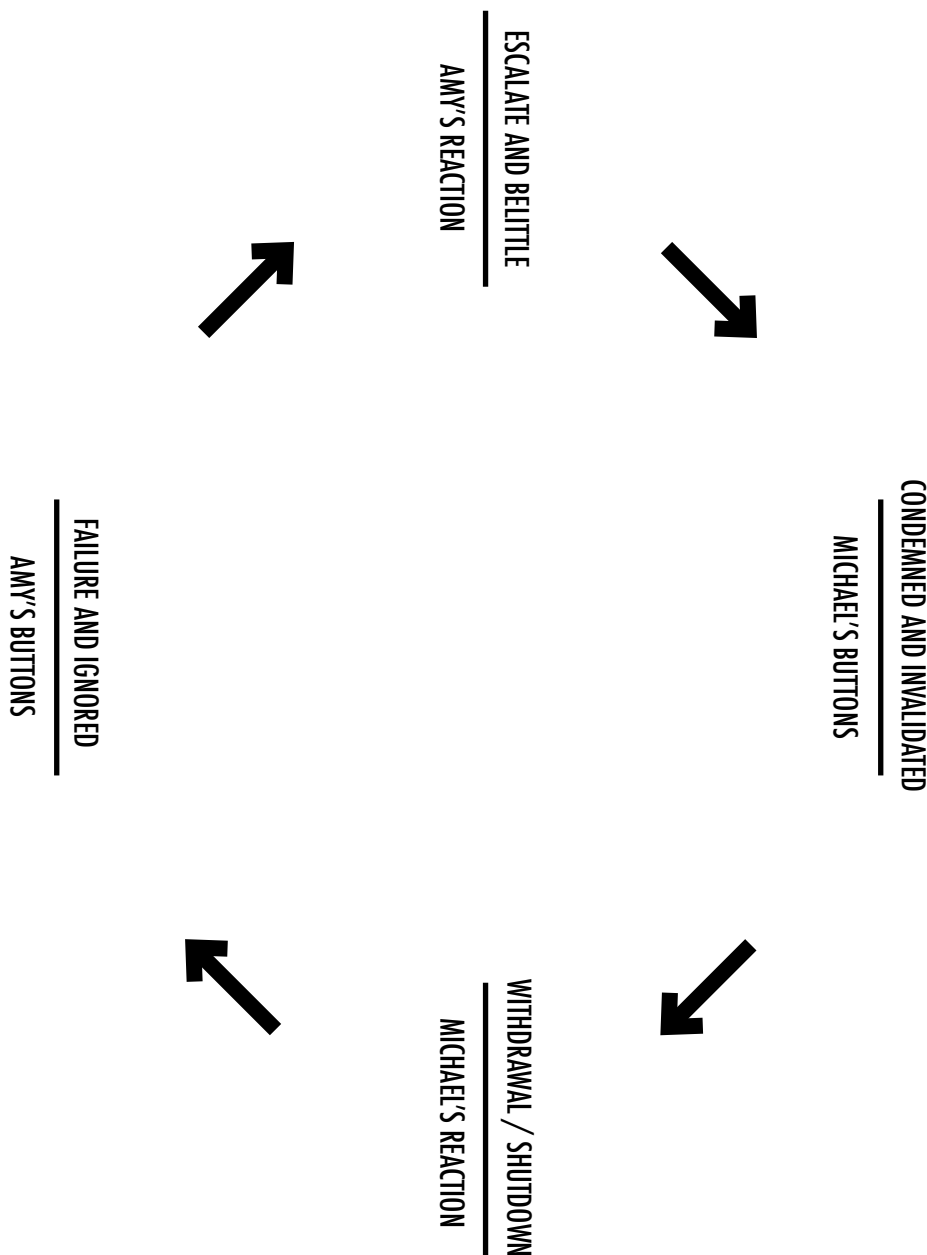
The power in filling out this graph is that the couple gets to see why their arguments spiral out of control. The important thing to remember is that the couple can not change their hot buttons. What they can change, however, is their reaction to a hot button getting pushed. That is the focus of your day together, to help them change the way they react to their buttons getting pushed.

To help you further understand the graph, we have included an example of our own hot button dance. Our hot button dance is describing a frequent fight we used to get in to when we were first married. I

(Michael) had an inability to bring home ATM receipts when I travelled for business. This did not help my wife balance the check book because she never knew how much money I had taken out during a trip. This caused a massive amount of conflict for us and it was frustrating to both of us. Hopefully this context will help you understand better our hot button dance.

Notice how our very reactions actually end up pushing our hot buttons! This is so important to point out to the couple. They need to understand that their dysfunctional reactions only make things worse in their marriage. Instead of using their old reaction style, they need to adopt the new skills they are learning in this study like validation, listening, forgiving, and creating a safe relationship.

**THE HOT BUTTON LIST
CONTINUED**



Write a short summary of the conflict here:

YOUR HOT BUTTON DANCE

THE MAN'S BUTTONS



THE WOMAN'S REACTION

THE MAN'S REACTION



THE WOMAN'S BUTTONS

Unproductive Responses (The Four Risk Factors of Divorce from Drs. Howard Markman and Scott Stanley)

1. Escalate
2. Avoid
3. Dishonor
4. Negative Beliefs