

HOW TO BECOME A 24/7 VALENTINE WITH YOUR MATE

I will be speaking at the Newport Beach Public Library on February 8th at 7pm. The title of my talk, like the title of this column, is “A 24/7 Valentine.” I intentionally chose a date close to Valentine’s Day because that is the one day of the year, more than anniversaries or birthdays, that we think of our spouses/partners in terms of being sweethearts and lovers. We either rejoice in the fact that we are still sweet together or feel sad that the sweetness has gone out of the relationship. Mostly, it’s the latter that people experience, not surprisingly since the busy-ness of raising a family, making a living, etc leaves so little time and energy for the softer aspects of life in which relationship flourishes. So the question is, “How do you get the sweetness back?” because in our heart of hearts, we all yearn to love and be loved.

The purpose of my talk is to provide specific guidelines that will reawaken sweetness in your relationship. These are based on the research of John Gottman, Phd. who is the foremost expert on what makes marriage succeed or fail. Since 1973, Gottman has studied ordinary people and their marriages and is now able to predict with 90% accuracy which couples will make it and which won’t based on monitoring their heart rates, facial expressions, and how they talk about their relationship with each other.

Here’s a preview of my talk and some of Gottman’s findings.

SOFTEN YOUR START-UP

Arguments frequently start because the topic is brought up in a way that is inflammatory, such as with a critical remark or in an irritated tone of voice. Gottman found that women start difficult conversations much more often than men because the majority of men try to avoid dealing with unpleasant topics. So women.....try beginning an important discussion with something positive, such as talking about the issue in terms of it being a problem for

both of you rather than just his fault or commenting on the last time your partner did what you wanted him to do before telling him what's wrong.

EDIT YOURSELF

Choose your words carefully. Avoid saying every little thing that you truly think when you're discussing touchy topics.

LEARN TO REPAIR AND EXIT THE ARGUMENT

In marriage and in the martial arts, you have to yield to win. Don't allow an argument to escalate totally out of control. Use humor, change the topic to something completely unrelated, or take at least a 20 minute time-out.

ACCEPT INFLUENCE

This means, allow yourself to be persuaded by your spouse even if you want to do something else. Research shows that women are way better at this than men and that marriages succeed to the extent that men can allow themselves to be persuaded by their wives. Men must learn how to yield at times. It's as simple as saying yes when your wife asks for help even if you've already decided that you were going to do something else.

BID FOR CLOSENESS

One of the ways in which a relationship is sweetened is to share with your partner. For instance, if you are reading the newspaper and something interesting catches your eye, you might tell your partner about it. If he/she responds by engaging, she/he has accepted your bid and bid back. In marriages that are working, there's a lot of bidding back and forth. In marriages that are not, there is little bidding and when bidding does occur, it is often not even noticed or seen as an annoyance rather than an effort to promote closeness.

FOCUS ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

A good relationship requires a rich climate of positivity. There needs to be at least five positive interactions—moments of humor, having fun together, being caring, etc—for every negative one.

This is just a sampling of all the ways in which you can make your relationship sweeter. I will be talking about these in more depth and about many more steps you can take. You, too, can sweeten your relationship, if you know how.

Please come join me at the Library.