

SOLVING THE MARRIAGE CONUNDRUM

THE *REAL* REASON WHY COUPLES
FIGHT... AND HOW TO STOP!



PAUL MCNIFF

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The *REAL* Reason Why Couples Fight
... and how to STOP!

Paul McNiff

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The author of this book does not dispense medical advice or prescribe the use of any technique as a form of treatment for physical, emotional, or medical problems without the advice of a physician, either directly or indirectly. The intent of the author is only to offer information of a general nature to help you in your quest for emotional and spiritual well-being.

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DEDICATION

If you're struggling in your relationship in some way—whether
you're fighting a lot, or avoiding spending time together,
or even if you're trying to get past an affair...

If you're ready to put all of that behind you
and make your relationship great,
this book is for you...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My sincere and heartfelt thanks go to my partner in life—who has stood by me for the last 18 years, and to my amazing parents (my mom and my step-dad). You have all inspired me to reach above and beyond—and to become the best version of myself. Thank you for all of the support, love and constant encouragement. I truly could not have written this without you...

My thanks also go to the countless couples, families and individuals I've had the honor and privilege to work with. Thank you for letting me into your lives and for inspiring me to expand my thinking and develop and refine my approach. I feel humbled by your openness, your honesty and your incredible resilience.

Thank you – thank you – thank you!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul McNiff is a Psychotherapist and Relationship Specialist who works in Private Practice in sunny Brisbane, Queensland—on the east coast of Australia. He holds a Degree in Counselling and Human Change (Psychotherapy) and is extremely passionate about helping couples, individuals and families to stop fighting and get past their issues, so they can re-connect—and make their relationships amazing.

Paul has been passionate about helping others to grow, evolve and transform for as long as he can remember. And it's this passion that led him to specialize in the area of relationships and families, and to develop the powerful approach that he's sharing with you in this book.

As you might have guessed, Paul doesn't believe in using confusing words or writing in highly technical language. He sees this book, and indeed all of the work he does, as an ongoing conversation that needs to be easy to read, easy to understand, and definitely easy to apply.

As well as working with couples, families, and individuals in Private Practice, Paul is also an educator, speaker and presenter in the area of relationships, anxiety, and personal empowerment. If you wish to contact Paul, you can do so via his website.

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INTRODUCTION

IF YOU'RE STRUGGLING in your relationship and you want to find a way to fix it—or you want to find out if it's *even possible* to fix it—then you're definitely in the right place. This book outlines an approach I've developed over the last several years that has been getting phenomenal results for couples who were struggling. But it's not just about arguing and fighting. Based on the results I see every day, this approach has the power to help you completely transform your relationship—no matter how it looks right now, whether you're:

- Fighting, bickering and arguing a lot
- Living more like housemates than lovers
- Trying to act as if you're happy, but not feeling that way
- Holding on to a lot of resentment towards your partner
- Feeling like you've fallen out of love
- Questioning if you're in the right relationship, or even
- Trying to get past an affair or infidelity.

If you're struggling in any of those ways in your relationship, then believe me; all of that's about to change! Within these pages I'm going to show you:

- The REAL reason your relationship isn't great (this will probably surprise you)
- Why struggling in those ways is not your fault—and not your partner's fault either!
- Why the things you probably do to try to fix your relationship not only don't work, but often end up making things even worse, and
- Exactly what you CAN DO to stop fighting, bring down those walls, and re-connect with your partner (husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, or lover), so you can completely transform your relationship—starting today!

Now obviously I don't know you personally. So I don't know anything about your relationship. But if you're anything like the thousands of couples and relationships I've worked with personally, the things you've probably been trying to do to fix your relationship haven't worked.

Maybe you've read some relationship self-help books, or maybe you've had some marriage counseling or couple therapy before. But if nothing has worked, then I'm not surprised, because many of the things other approaches often suggest just don't work. For example; have you tried any of the following?

- Looking for the good in your partner
- Ignoring, or “pushing down” your anger or pain to avoid conflict
- “Walking on eggshells” around your partner to avoid them getting angry, or feeling hurt or upset
- Not talking about certain topics because you worry that if you do, you might end up fighting
- Counting to ten before you say anything, or
- Prioritizing your partner's wants and needs ahead of your own to avoid an argument or to keep them happy.

These are some of the common tools suggested by other approaches. So if you've done any of those things, then it's no wonder your relationship isn't getting better. While these things sound good—and sound like *they should work*—believe me; *they don't*. And not only do they not work, but they generally make things even worse in your relationship over time, rather than better.

The things most couples do to try to stop fighting and fix their relationship... often make their relationship worse instead.

That's the first part of what I mean by my term: “**the Marriage Conundrum**”. Despite a couple's great intentions, the more they do these types of things—to try to stop fighting and fix their relationship—the worse their relationship generally gets. This is **the Marriage Conundrum**, and it happens for most couples. And it's not

limited to the things I mentioned above either. Most of the things that couples are often told to do to fix their problems, and make their relationship better, actually create **the Marriage Conundrum**.

Now as I've said, obviously I don't know anything about you or your relationship. But if you're reading this and struggling in your relationship, you've probably tried a bunch of things to fix it. So you might be wondering if there's *ANYTHING* that can help your relationship, especially if nothing has helped. But before you give up, let me promise you that there are definitely things that can work—you just need to know how to use them! In fact, that's how my approach started to evolve in the first place.

When I completed my Degree in Psychotherapy and then did my internship and also my Advanced Couple Therapy training, I had a set of tools that I expected to be great. These tools were supposed to help couples get past their issues and turn their lives around completely. But as I started to use them, I started to get really frustrated. They just didn't work the way I was expecting. Sure they'd help the couple I was working with to stop fighting about the single issue they were fighting about. But a month or so later that same couple would be back with yet another problem. And as far as I was concerned, this wasn't good enough.

I wanted to help couples to solve their problems in a way that would last, not just give them a Band-Aid. So I kept looking at other models of therapy, hoping one of them might offer me some tools that would actually work for the couples I was working with.

One of the theories I tried to use was called "Transactional Analysis" (or "TA"). I liked a lot of what TA covered, and I liked the basic TA model. But the more I used it, the more I realized that I saw things quite differently. And not just that, but I thought it fell a little short, in that it lacked what I think of as "*how to*" tools—tools that show people **exactly what they need to do** to get past their problems and resolve their challenges once and for all.

In my mind, "**how to**" tools are crucial, because let's face it; it's one thing to **know about** a model or an approach, but it's another thing entirely to **know exactly what you need to do with it**. So I started to develop, test, tweak and compile a set of "*how to*" tools

and strategies that would help the couples I was working with to get past their issues and make their relationships great. And that's how the approach I'm about to share with you started to evolve.

So who am I? My name is Paul McNiff, and I'm a Psychotherapist and a Marriage & Relationship Specialist. I've worked with thousands of couples, families, and relationships to help them to make their relationships amazing. And the approach and the strategies I've developed are getting phenomenal results. And that's the number one reason why I've written this book—I want to give you, your partner, and your family, an opportunity to get great results for your relationship as well.

So as I'm sitting here, I'm wondering what I can say to you, so you'll truly get a sense of just how powerful and relationship-changing, and based on the feedback I get—even *life-changing*—this approach is. I want to show you a set of step-by-step strategies that will allow you to quickly, easily and seamlessly transform your own relationship just like the couples I've worked with have transformed theirs.

And as so often happens, my phone has just beeped, and the answer arrives in the form of a text message from a couple I worked with about a year ago. Before I tell you what the text says, let me give you a tiny bit of background about Jan and Peter's relationship.

I met them about a year ago. At that time their relationship was in a challenging place. They were struggling—big time! They'd been through the wringer. They'd spent years arguing, bickering and fighting. They'd also had long periods—several months at a time—when they'd basically avoided or ignored each other, barely talking. And to top it off, they'd even experienced some physical violence as well. So when I met them, their relationship was definitely in need of some help—and quickly!

Before they scheduled an appointment with me, they'd seen a few other Counselors, Therapists, and Psychologists. But even though Jan and Peter had done everything they'd been told to do, nothing had worked. And it was no surprise to me when Jan told me their relationship had gradually been getting worse by doing those

things rather than better. After all, the things they'd been told to do were those same old tools that just don't work.

But things were dire. In our very first session, Jan told me that the Therapist they'd seen before seeing me had literally told them that their relationship was hopeless and they might as well split up. But despite how bad things were Jan wasn't ready to give up at that time. So on the advice of some of her friends, she scheduled an appointment with me.

And I remember it as if it was yesterday—in that first session Jan told me I was “their last hope”. She said if I couldn't help them, they'd take that advice and split up. No pressure—right!?!

In truth, I felt fairly confident based on the results I'd been getting with my approach. But I knew that at the beginning of my career as a Therapist, even though I would never have said it to a couple, I might have thought the same way their previous Therapist had. But knowing the approach and the strategies that I'm about to share with you, I knew I could help them turn things around—if they wanted to.

So I worked with Jan and Peter for a short time. I taught them the approach and the strategies I'm about to share with you. And they realized that the real reasons why they were fighting were very different to what they'd previously thought. And as they started to use the strategies I showed them, their relationship started to do a complete turnaround. So thank goodness Jan didn't just take that previous advice and give up on their relationship because the text message that just arrived reads:

*“I'm almost scared to say it out loud... but here goes: We are doing really, REALLY well! A number of things have changed for us and we're probably the strongest we've ever been together. We're happy and appreciative, patient and kind to each other. It's just great. I/we feel safer and happier together than we have for a very long time. You're right. This stuff just works! Thank you, Paul, we could never have survived long enough and grown enough to reach this point without you!
Jan”*

So even if you think you've tried everything—and even if you're questioning if there's *anything that could help*, please don't give up yet. What you're about to read is going to change everything. Within these pages I'm going to show you:

- the REAL reason your relationship isn't great yet (and believe me; this is going to surprise you)
- the reasons why the tools used in most Marriage Counseling and Couple Therapy typically don't work
- why your past attempts to fix things haven't worked, and
- what you CAN DO to get past the issues, stop fighting and re-connect with your partner so you can completely transform your relationship for the future.

My goal isn't just to help you 'survive' in your relationship. Definitely not! I want you to thrive! I want you to wake up every day feeling loved, supported, valued and respected—and knowing without any doubt at all, that you're exactly where you need to be, and that you're definitely with the right person. Sound like a plan? I hope so. So let me ask you:

- Are you ready to transform your relationship?
- Are you ready to find out what's really been keeping you and your partner stuck?
- Are you ready to create a future together where you can wake up every day, feeling supported and loved—and knowing, without any doubt at all, that you're exactly where you need to be, and in the right relationship?

If you are, then get yourself comfortable and let's get going.

Paul McNiff

Paul McNiff

Psychotherapist & Relationship Specialist

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

THIS BOOK is in three parts:

Part 1: What is the Marriage Conundrum?

In this section, I'll help you understand what **the Marriage Conundrum** is and why it happens. I'll talk about why, despite their best intentions, most couples are almost programmed to end up struggling. And I'll show you the REAL reasons why your attempts to fix things not only haven't worked, but have probably been subtly making things worse instead.

Part 2: Solving the Marriage Conundrum

In Part Two, I'll take you through the core parts of my approach. I'll also show you exactly what you CAN do to stop fighting, reconnect with your partner, and stop **the Marriage Conundrum** in its tracks—once and for all.

Part 3: Strategies for Relationship Mastery

In Part Three I'll share with you 21 extremely powerful and easy-to-use, step-by-step strategies. These will show you EXACTLY what you need to do—and EXACTLY what you need to say—so you can stop fighting, dissolve the resentment, and reconnect with your partner—thereby taking your relationship to the next level.

While it might be tempting to jump ahead to chapters that look interesting, if you want to get the most out of this approach, my suggestion is to read this book from cover to cover. As a very wise man (my dad—Syd) said to me this morning: “if all else fails, read the instructions”. And I think that's a great motto. This book is about to become the primary instruction manual for your relationship. So read it from cover to cover—and then take action, and watch as your relationship completely transforms before your eyes.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

The word: “Partner”

I’ve chosen to use the generic term ‘partner’ to mean the person you’re in a committed emotional relationship with, such as your husband, wife, boyfriend, girlfriend, fiancé, live-in-partner, or spouse.

The word: “Unconsciously”

I’m using the word “unconsciously” in a colloquial way, to mean that someone does something without consciously thinking about it, or choosing to do it. So when I say: “We often do this unconsciously”, what I mean is that we often do that *automatically* or ‘*without consciously thinking about it*’. It’s not that we’ve fainted or fallen asleep.

Emphasis is IMPORTANT!

In this book, I provide lots of examples of dialogue and communication. And because you can’t *hear* the way something is said (because it’s a book), it’s important to read each example, applying the level of emphasis that is shown. There are few graduated levels of emphasis:

1. *italics*
2. **bold text**
3. UPPERCASE
4. UPPERCASE BOLD TEXT

Please note that contrary to email communication, where uppercase has come to imply that someone is YELLING at you, that’s never the case in this book. I will ONLY use uppercase in this book to stress or emphasize a particular word or phrase.

PART 1:

WHAT IS THE MARRIAGE CONUNDRUM?

Sienna reached over and gently put her hand on Roy's shoulder. She couldn't believe just how quickly their relationship had changed. It felt like she could finally rely on him to be there...to really support her. What a huge change.

Only three months ago he was withdrawn, distant, shut-down, and he constantly acted like another one of their children, rather than the husband and partner that she'd been longing for.

Sienna looked at Roy, feeling peaceful and happy for the first time in years. She couldn't help herself. She had to ask him what had changed—what had clicked for him—so quickly.

Roy turned to her and said "I don't know what you did, and I don't know why... but I finally get it. I suddenly realized that I had to grow up—and be your partner. Until then, I never really understood just how much I'd been taking you for granted. I'm sorry..."

Chapter 1

WHAT KEEPS COUPLES STUCK?

IF YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ARE STRUGGLING in your relationship, then believe me; you're definitely not alone. In truth, most couples struggle in their relationship at some point in time. But that struggle can take different forms and look quite different, depending on the couple. Some couples struggle in ways that are quite obvious. They might bicker, argue or fight a lot. To anyone who spends time with these couples, it's really obvious that things aren't great.

Other couples, however, struggle in much less obvious ways. These couples might give the impression that they're fine. But all is not always as it seems. Sometimes these couples are living more like housemates than lovers. And while one person in the relationship might genuinely believe that everything is okay, the other person might be going through the motions and pretending everything is fine, while secretly seething—and feeling a huge amount of resentment, frustration, hurt or anger towards their partner.

So even if you think your relationship is fine, that doesn't mean you're right. Maybe your partner is just going through the motions and surviving the relationship, rather than feeling great. But no matter what it's about, whether it's about fighting and arguing, or spending time apart—trying to avoid each other, or one person having an affair. Did you know that these are all based on the very same underlying issue? I'll talk a bit more about this further on, but for now, what's important to know is that if you're struggling in your

relationship, you're definitely not alone--and it's easier to turn things around than you might think.

Why Do Couples Really Struggle?

Based on my work with thousands of relationships, it's become obvious to me that most couples are likely to struggle at some point in time. And this is quite normal. In fact, based on what I've seen, struggling in this way is almost like a *rite of passage* couples *need* to go through so their relationship can grow and move into the next phase. But even more than that, what if I was to tell you that the *real* reason why couples struggle is not either person's fault? Yes, you read that right—when couples find themselves struggling, it's generally not their fault. There's actually something much bigger going on.

We often assume that when a couple is struggling it's a result of some bad intentions or negative behaviors from one or both people in the relationship. And while this might be true at times, in most cases it's nothing like that at all. In fact, would it surprise you to know that most couples actually end up struggling like this because of *good and positive intentions* towards each other, rather than bad intentions? Let me show you exactly what I mean, using a story about a couple, Lisa and Todd.

Lisa and Todd

Lisa's last relationship had lasted for three years. While Ron, her ex-boyfriend, had been good to her when they were alone, he was quite anti-social. He wouldn't attend any events with Lisa and her friends. No matter how much she tried to get him to come to things with her, he dug his heels in and decided to stay home, saying he wanted to watch TV. Of course, he was happy to go out if it was with *his* friends. But Lisa could count on one hand the number of times Ron had gone to anything with *her* friends in the three years they were together.

WHAT KEEPS COUPLES STUCK?

But even though Ron wasn't very social, she'd stayed with him because he was good to her in other ways. When they were together he was kind, considerate and he was incredibly thoughtful at first. But Lisa then found out that Ron had been having an affair with his co-worker Marla. She discovered that many of the times that Ron had stayed at home while she went out, he'd actually been spending time with Marla instead.

As you'd imagine, she was furious. She ended their relationship. It wasn't so much the affair that upset it. It was the fact that he'd been lying to her for so long. She felt like a fool—hurt and devastated. Lisa decided to throw herself into her career and to avoid dating altogether. Despite her best friend, Daniella's insistence, she wasn't willing to get hurt again. But about eight months later, she was out for a drink after work with her co-workers, and she met Todd. At first, she was reluctant to pursue anything. After all, she'd been so hurt by Ron. But Todd was extremely keen and very persistent. And after several calls, text messages, and even flowers delivered to her office, despite her reluctance, Lisa finally agreed to go on a date with him. And of course, this led to more dinners and dates, until they were spending a lot of time together.

While she was still a little cautious, Lisa was excited to be dating Todd. He was extremely sociable and happy to spend time with Lisa and her friends, which was the exact opposite of how Ron had been. And best of all, Lisa couldn't ever imagine Todd cheating on her—ever! He just wasn't *like that*. So Lisa was happy and their relationship started to grow.

But as time went on, Lisa started to notice that Todd would get a bit snappy and grumpy at times—especially if he'd been drinking. But she took it in her stride. After all, Todd's work was stressful, and she genuinely believed that when his work calmed down, he'd get back to his usual, happy self. And besides, they had fun when they went out because he was so much more sociable than Ron had been. So rather than saying anything to him about being grumpy, Lisa just let it go and said nothing.

But a few months later they were having dinner together at a restaurant when Todd got really grumpy and snapped at her again—this time over something she'd asked the waiter. Lisa knew Todd was stressed, and she could see he'd had a little too much to drink. So she gently suggested they both change to water or soda, rather than have any more alcohol. But Todd snapped! He yelled at her that she needed to stop telling him what to do and treating him like a three-year-old. And he stormed out of the restaurant, leaving Lisa alone at the table. Suddenly Lisa was alone with everyone looking at her. She was completely embarrassed. She knew Todd's job was stressful at that time, but despite his stress, she was horrified he'd do that.

The next morning, she tried to talk about what had happened. But that didn't go very well either. Again, Todd reacted badly and stormed out of the house, which worried Lisa. She started to worry that she might have ruined their relationship. She thought about how tired Todd was. He hadn't been sleeping very well because of his stress at his work. And this made her feel a bit guilty about pushing the alcohol issue so hard.

So she sent him a text message, apologizing for her behavior and telling him she loved him. She made his favorite meal for dinner, Spaghetti Bolognese, which they ate a few hours later when he came home. But that was that! Nothing was said about what had happened. And Lisa wasn't going to risk another blow-up.

But a month later something similar happened. Todd was drinking a lot again, and Lisa suggested that she get them both some water instead of another round. And again Todd reacted badly and stormed out. But this time it wasn't just the two of them. It was in front of her best friend, Daniella. But even though she was embarrassed, Lisa didn't want to rock the boat with Todd. She remembered how angry he'd become the last time she'd tried to talk to him about his reaction.

So instead of creating another argument, Lisa said nothing. She really loved Todd and she knew he was just stressed at work. And

she definitely wasn't going to risk fighting again, in case they broke up. So that was that.

As you can see, Lisa did try to talk to Todd about his behaviors initially. But that didn't go very well, so the next time something happened she said nothing. She blamed his behaviors on him feeling stressed from work. And she genuinely believed that as soon as his work situation settled down, so would his behaviors.

This story is very common. When most people are in a new relationship, they'll do almost anything they can to keep their new relationship safe, and on-track. So at that time, if something their partner says or does annoys them, they might decide to hold back and not say anything—so as not to 'rock the boat'. After all, the last thing they want is for their partner to react badly, or for them to fight and put their relationship at risk of breaking up. It's all about avoiding any conflict and keeping their relationship safe. And that's exactly what Lisa did.

And it makes sense. Lisa's intention was to make sure her relationship with Todd stayed on-track. So instead of saying what she wanted to say in that moment—addressing Todd's less-than-great behaviors—Lisa decided to avoid conflict and say nothing. This is all about keeping the relationship safe and we call it 'Peace-Keeping'.

Peace-Keeping Behaviors

As the name implies, *'Peace-Keeping Behaviors'* are things that people do to keep the peace and avoid conflict in their relationships. It's all about keeping their relationship safe for the future. And believe me; these are extremely common. Some examples of *Peace-Keeping Behaviors* include:

- Holding back and not saying what you want to say (because you worry that saying that might make your partner angry or upset, or create an argument)

- Choosing **not** to talk to your partner about their ‘less-than-great’ words or actions (to avoid conflict and keep your relationship safe)
- Regularly going along with what your partner wants, even though you might not want to (to prevent your partner from getting angry, hurt, or upset)
- Avoiding talking about certain topics at all
- Not talking about your partner’s feelings or reactions.

Of course, it makes complete sense that new couples want to keep the peace and avoid putting their relationship at risk by arguing or fighting—especially if they believe their relationship has a potential future. And that’s why most couples engage in Peace-Keeping Behaviors early on in their relationship.

Some people use Peace-Keeping Behaviors consciously and on purpose, because they’re worried about upsetting their partner. Others, however, fall into using Peace-Keeping Behaviors without even realizing they’re doing it—maybe because that’s what their parents did. So it’s not always a conscious choice. But those Peace-Keeping Behaviors often become a habitual way of communicating and avoid conflict for many couples.

Do those Peace-Keeping Behaviors Actually Work?

Surprisingly, the answer to that question is a bit complicated. People use Peace-Keeping Behaviors because they give them *the illusion of working*. They *appear* to work for a short time because they actually do prevent arguments in the relationship—for a while.

But before you get too excited, it’s not all good news. In fact, what if I was to tell you that those Peace-Keeping Behaviors are one of the main reasons why most couples end up arguing at some time?

Yes, you read that correctly! Even though those Peace-Keeping Behaviors are designed with positive intentions in mind, and even though they’re about keeping the relationship safe... and even though they might **appear** to work for a little while, Peace-Keeping

WHAT KEEPS COUPLES STUCK?

Behaviors are actually *the very reason* why most couples end up struggling down the track.

Before I tell you why this happens, answer the following questions:

- Would you be happy in a relationship where you felt like you needed to constantly hold back and not say what you want—just to keep your partner happy?
- Isn't a relationship supposed to be your safe place—where you can be exactly who you are without having to pretend or censor yourself?
- Would you be happy having to give up what you want and walk on eggshells around your partner, just to prevent them from getting angry, upset, or hurt?

Obviously, none of those sound like great relationship ideas. When you were a teenager, if you were thinking about your future relationship, I'm pretty sure none of those would have been part of your plan.

No-one wants to constantly give up what they want—or hold back and not say what they really want to say, just to avoid their partner being upset or angry. Your partner is supposed to love you exactly *as you are*, and not treat you like a member of the 'supporting cast'—who has to give up things to keep them happy. Definitely not!

So even though Lisa's intention in holding back and saying nothing about Todd's negative behaviors was to keep their relationship safe and peaceful—how do you imagine things would look for them a few years down the track? Let's find out.

* * *

It's now three years later, and Lisa and Todd are married. They have a three-year-old daughter, Eliza, who they both dote on. Todd still works in the same stressful job, but Lisa left her job and is now a stay-at-home mom. Nowadays Lisa does most of the housework and most of the cooking. And because Lisa does the lion's share of

the housework, Todd has agreed to take out the rubbish bin and to load the dishwasher and wash up after dinner each night.

But even though Todd agreed to do those things, he doesn't follow-through and do it. In fact, Lisa could count on one hand, the number of times he'd done that. Instead, Todd just moves to the couch after dinner and watches TV, drinking his beer—while Lisa has to clean up. Lisa had tried a few times to get him to help her, but each time she'd tried, Todd reacted so badly that Lisa gave up—telling herself that it just wasn't worth the argument. After all, Todd's reactions often upset, or woke up their daughter, Eliza. And Lisa would then have to spend hours trying to get Eliza back to sleep again.

But as you'd understand, Lisa's resentment has been growing exponentially. She's now totally exhausted and completely fed up with how things are. And that makes sense. She never really gets a break. She has a busy three-year-old at home and a partner who is not willing to help out either. So the more she sees Todd relaxing on the couch drinking, while she's left to do everything else, the less supported she's feeling, and the lower her respect for Todd is getting.

And then finally, without even thinking about it, one evening Lisa just snapped. She'd been feeling so much resentment and frustration towards Todd, who was on the couch—drink in hand—watching her clean up. And that was it! Lisa just 'lost it'. Rather than doing what she'd always done, which was to say nothing, and just do everything herself, Lisa did something very different. She told Todd to "get off the couch and do his job!" She told him that *she* was "no longer going to do *his* chores—and that from now on he can get off the couch and do them himself!"

Well as you'd imagine, this didn't go down very well. Todd yelled at Lisa, telling her she "doesn't appreciate how hard he works and that it's her job to do the kitchen stuff anyway." And then, in his fit of rage, he told her that she was "lazy and unappreciative", and that she was "lucky he even came home at all".

If you've heard the saying '*the straw that broke the camel's back*', that's exactly what happened in this moment. Instead of backing down when Todd got angry, as Lisa had done in the past, this time she stood up to him and yelled right back at him—for the first time ever. She was furious—and I mean absolutely furious. And she couldn't help herself. She had to say something. And then it was on! Todd kept yelling at her and Lisa was yelling at him, until she got so angry that she threw the saucepan lid she was holding in her hand at him, out of anger. Luckily she missed his head and hit the couch instead. But they both continued to yell at each other, barely taking a breath, for five more minutes—until Lisa realized Eliza had woken up and was screaming. So Lisa left the room to calm her down. Todd, who was still furious, grabbed his keys, stormed out of the house, got in his car, and left, not returning until the following morning.

Several days actually passed with them barely saying a word to each other. In fact, they only started to speak to each other again when Eliza fell down the stairs and ended up in the hospital getting stitches in her arm.

What do you think Happened Here?

As you can see, Lisa tried to use those Peace-Keeping Behaviors to avoid conflict and keep their relationship safe. Of course, she DID try to talk to Todd about his behaviors at first—as part of her initial attempt to fix things. But because that didn't work, and because Todd had reacted so badly, rather than risk more arguments, Lisa fell into Peace-Keeping Behaviors and didn't risk talking to Todd about his less-than-great behaviors. It was all about keeping their relationship safe and conflict free.

And yes—at that time, the Peace-Keeping Behaviors Lisa was using did appear to work. They *seemed* to stop the conflict between them for a while. But believe me; they're only ever a temporary fix because they don't *keep* working. Here's why; the more Lisa held back and said nothing, allowing Todd to get away with not helping

her, and also allowing him to keep disrespecting her, the more resentment she felt towards him.

Lisa's feelings of resentment started small at first. At that time she said nothing. Instead, she made excuses for Todd's less-than-great behaviors, blaming his work-stress. She might even have *second-guessed* herself, wondering if she was wrong to expect so much from him because of how stressful his work was.

But as time went on and Lisa's resentment continued to grow, things were about to get worse. That's because, as I've come to realize in my work with couples, there's actually a direct link between the amount of resentment someone feels towards their partner (and their relationship), and their ability to tolerate their partner's less-than-great behaviors.

The more resentment Lisa felt, the lower her tolerance became for Todd's selfish behaviors. And that's because the higher our resentment towards our partner is, the lower our tolerance level for them will be. Let me show you what I mean.

Resentment Lowers Tolerance...

Imagine plotting the level of someone's resentment and the level of that same person's tolerance on a graph. Let's start with Resentment.

Resentment

Imagine thinking about the resentment that someone feels towards their partner and putting that on a scale from zero to ten. Let's make ZERO mean that they don't feel any resentment towards their partner. And TEN mean that they feel a lot of resentment towards their partner.

People enter new relationships with no resentment towards their new partner. So we'd obviously plot that at ZERO.

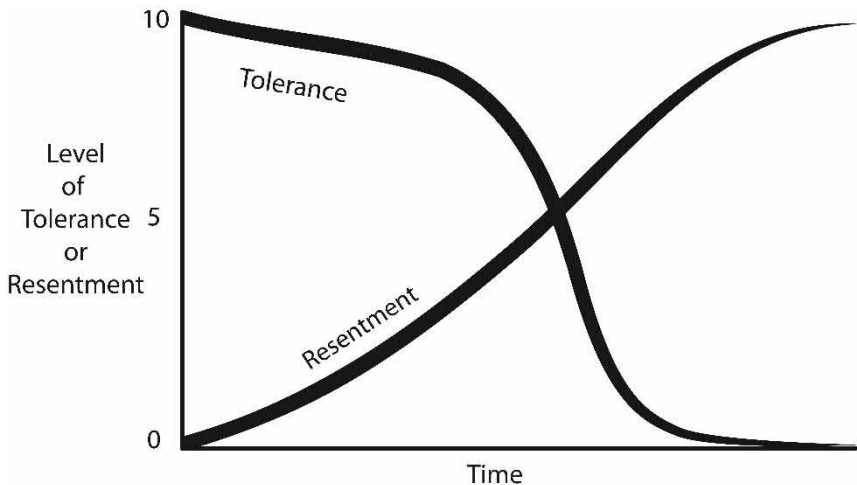
Tolerance

Now let's do the same with that same person's ability to tolerate their partner's not-so-great behaviors. ZERO means they have absolutely no tolerance for their partner's behaviors—and TEN means they have a huge amount of tolerance for their partner's behaviors.

People enter new relationships with a high level of tolerance towards their new partner's less-than-perfect behaviors. At that time, no matter what their partner does or says, they'll typically see their behaviors as cute or quirky, rather than annoying or frustrating. Let's call that level TEN tolerance.

Now Let's Include another Factor—Time

If we plotted both of those on one side of the scale, and we used the other side of the graph to represent the amount of time that their relationship problems continue to remain undealt with, or unresolved, we would end up with the following diagram:



Let's work through this model using Lisa, from the previous conversation, as an example. The vertical axis represents both Lisa's level of resentment towards Todd, as well as her level of tolerance

towards his behaviors. And the horizontal axis represents *the length of time that their issues keep going without being addressed and fully resolved*.

- At the start of their relationship, Lisa had no resentment towards Todd—let's call that 'level ZERO resentment'.
- And at the start of their relationship she could easily tolerate Todd's less-than-great behaviors—so let's call that tolerance level TEN.

Lisa's did try to talk to Todd about his reactions early on. But he just got angry. So she felt she had no other choice, but to accept his behaviors and say nothing—otherwise he might get angry again, which could put their relationship at risk. And while Lisa was able to hold back for a while, the more she felt like she had to do that—to avoid Todd's negative reactions—the more frustrated she'd get, and higher her level of resentment would grow.

And as Lisa kept feeling like she couldn't say what she wanted to say, her level of resentment continued to grow—until she had so much resentment that, without even realizing it, she snapped and yelled at Todd. That's because her ability to tolerate Todd's less-than-great behaviors had shrunk to an all-time low. And this meant that she just couldn't hold back and censor herself any more.

And that's what happens with all of those Peace-Keeping Behaviors. The more you have to give up on your own needs, or hold back and say nothing, or censor yourself in anyway, the more your resentment rises. Until you have so much resentment that almost everything they do annoys you. And that's when you're likely to find yourself nagging, bickering, snapping, and arguing—almost constantly. Here's the cycle:

No Resentment (level zero)

When someone starts in a relationship, they tend to have little-to-no resentment towards their partner. Almost everything they do is 'cute'. At this stage not only are people falling in love with their

partner, but they're also falling in love with the idea of being in love. And at this time nothing their partner does or says annoys or bothers them very much. They might even think of their partner's less-than-great behaviors as cute or quirky, rather than annoying or frustrating.

Some Resentment (level five or six)

When someone's level of resentment reaches level five or six, this is generally because of Peace-Keeping Behaviors they've put in place to avoid conflict and keep the relationship safe. They've probably had some issues or reactions that they haven't been able to talk about or deal with effectively. And this means their resentment will have increased, thus lowering their tolerance. At this level of resentment, what they previously saw as their partner's cute and quirky behaviors will now start to look like 'annoying habits'.

But that doesn't mean they'll stop engaging those Peace-Keeping Behaviors quite yet. At this stage couples tend to argue a little bit more. Of course, if they manage to talk about the issues that are causing them problems, and if they then manage to resolve them, that's great. Their resentment will shrink, and their level of tolerance will rise again. But if they try to talk and it doesn't go well, their resentment is likely to rise even further. And this will reduce their tolerance even more. And at that stage, they face a *conundrum* again. They want to keep their relationship safe. But because they don't know what else to do, they'll just keep using those Peace-Keeping Behaviors. But this is a conundrum because the more they do that, the more resentment they build up.

A Lot of Resentment (level nine or ten)

So let's look at what happens when their level of resentment reaches nine or ten. When someone's resentment reaches a high level like this, almost everything their partner says or does will annoy the heck out of them. Their partner's previously *cute and*

quirky behaviors will now feel like major frustrations and annoyances.

Couples at this point bicker and constantly argue—about almost everything that happens or is said. At this point, one person, and sometimes both of them, will try to find ways to avoid spending time together. They might suddenly ‘need’ to spend more time at work, or they might schedule more time and activities with their own friends and family. This is all about avoiding conflict and avoiding that uncomfortable feeling of resentment they’d be feeling at home.

In my work with couples, I will often hear someone criticize and judge the way their partner does even the smallest thing, such as the way they chew their food, or the way they walk, or even the way they breathe. When someone is annoyed by their partner to that extent, their level of resentment is at an all-time-high, and their level of tolerance is definitely at zero!

So even though those Peace-Keeping Behaviors are well intended, and are designed to *avoid conflict*, ironically they end up creating a lot of resentment. And this resentment lowers their tolerance and leads to the very thing they were trying to avoid—conflict.

As I mentioned earlier, I’ve created the term **the Marriage Conundrum**. This is a challenge couples face when the things they try to do to make things better in their relationship, actually typically end up making things worse—despite the best of intentions. As we can see here, those Peace-Keeping Behaviors that were designed to avoid conflict, end up creating that very thing—conflict. And that’s the first side of **the Marriage Conundrum**:

*The things couples do to try to avoid conflict
actually end up creating that very thing: CONFLICT!*

Isn’t it ironic that the things couples do to keep their relationship safe, and to keep the peace between them, actually end up creating the very problem they were trying to avoid in the first place?

WHAT KEEPS COUPLES STUCK?

Here's a step-by-step summary of how that happens:

- People do things to try to avoid conflict, which absolutely makes sense—after all, they don't want to fight, argue, or risk their relationship ending
- The things they do to avoid conflict—those Peace-Keeping Behaviors—end up creating high levels of resentment
- Resentment is incredibly toxic to relationships and the longer that resentment and the underlying problem not resolved, the bigger it gets
- There is a direct relationship between resentment and tolerance, so the higher each person's resentment gets, the lower their tolerance for their partner's *less-than-great behaviors* gets
- Small things happen that that person reacts to, because of their high level of resentment and their lowered tolerance level
- They might fight or argue a little, but then, because that doesn't go well, that person might second-guess themselves and then use even more of those Peace-Keeping Behaviors to try to avoid further conflict
- And as they do that, their resentment grows even more, until...
- Their partner says or does something that pushes them too far...
- And suddenly... BAM! Without even thinking about it—and maybe without even realizing it, they're in the midst of a major argument or fight.

So despite the best of intentions, Peace-Keeping Behaviors actually lead to the very thing they're designed to avoid or prevent: *conflict*. And that's why I say that when couples struggle like this, it's not necessarily their fault. It's actually a result of their positive attempts to keep their relationship safe. And that's also why I say

that most couples are almost destined to struggle at some point—because they do things to try to keep the peace in the first place.

And you might be thinking that the notion that most couples will find themselves struggling like that at some point might sound like a bad thing, what if it's not? What if *that struggling phase of the relationship* is not only important, but something that's actually necessary for your relationship's growth? Not convinced? Let me show you what I mean.

Everything in life evolves and grows over time and relationships are no different. It's normal for relationships to go through different phases as they grow and evolve. And it's become extremely apparent to me that this struggling phase is not only normal, but it's actually necessary. I see it as almost a rite of passage most couples need to go through so they can build a deeper connection, and take their relationship to the next level—a level that is about feeling more connected, balanced, supported, respected, and loved.

So even though it might not feel like it right now, if you and your partner are struggling, that's actually a gift for you and your relationship, rather than a problem. You just need to know how to navigate that struggle so you can use it to stop those Peace-Keeping Behaviors in their tracks and catapult your relationship to the next level. And that's exactly what I'm going to show you.

Chapter 2

WHY MANY ATTEMPTS TO STOP FIGHTING WILL NEVER WORK

IN THE LAST CHAPTER we looked at a range of ‘Peace-Keeping Behaviors’ that people use, both consciously and unconsciously, to try to avoid conflict and keep their relationship safe. We realized that most couples are destined to struggle in their relationship at some point in time. But we also realized that if they navigate that ‘struggling’ phase well, it can catapult their relationship to a much better place.

We also found out that the real cause of that struggle for most couples isn’t necessarily either partner’s negative intentions or bad behaviors. Surprisingly, we discovered the real culprits, which cause major problems down the track, are those well-intended Peace-Keeping Behaviors. And we now know that even though ‘Peace-Keeping Behaviors’ might appear to work for a moment, over time they end up creating the very thing they’re designed to prevent—conflict! And that’s what I mean by the first part of **the Marriage Conundrum**.

So what can we do with that information? It’s obviously about stopping those Peace-Keeping Behaviors in your relationship, once and for all. But it’s not quite as simple as that. You cannot just ‘stop’ doing those things and expect things to be instantly better. It doesn’t work that way.

For example, think about Lisa and Todd’s story from the last chapter. Imagine if Lisa just stopped peace-keeping and confronted

Todd about his behaviors directly. Based on how their relationship had been in the past, doing that would probably just create even more arguments. Todd would probably react even worse. He might get angry and storm out again. And this time he might stay away for days. And then, even though Lisa might want to change things, she might eventually end up giving in and continuing to do the lion's share of the housework, just to avoid fighting.

So it's not just about stopping those behaviors and dealing with the problems head-on. It's about replacing those Peace-Keeping Behaviors with new behaviors and failsafe strategies that *will* work. You need to know exactly what to do, so you can dissolve that underlying resentment and resolve your issues—once and for all. And unfortunately, just stopping those Peace-Keeping Behaviors, without knowing how to deal with the underlying resentment, is likely to lead to even more problems down the track.

And this leads us to the second side of **the Marriage Conundrum**. This is what happens when couples try, unsuccessfully, to deal with the issues in their relationship. Let me ask you a question: in your relationship, have you ever tried to bring up a topic that you and your partner had previously argued about, only to have that second attempt erupt into an even worse argument than before—making things even more difficult between you? That's the second side of **the Marriage Conundrum** in a nutshell:

*The things that couples do
to try to fix the issues in their relationship
often end up making things even worse instead...*

Has that happened in your relationship? If you find yourself actively avoiding certain topics, or not bringing up things that you really think you and your partner need to talk about—but you're worried that discussing them might lead to a fight, then you'll know exactly what I mean. And that's quite common. But that doesn't mean that you can't resolve your issues. You definitely can! You just need to know *how*. And that's what this approach is going to help you do. So let's talk about resolving issues...

What Does Resolving Issues Really Mean?

It's obvious that *resolving issues* **doesn't** mean doing things to avoid conflict, such as:

- Not saying what you want to say because you're worried your partner might react badly
- Avoiding discussing certain topics because they might cause conflict, or
- Saying "yes", even though you'd rather say "no" to keep the peace and prevent your partner from feeling sad or getting mad.

These are Peace-Keeping Behaviors, and as we talked about, they're extremely unhelpful. So what *does* resolving issues mean?

People often believe that resolving the issues means that they have to *agree with their partner's ideas or opinions*. But that's definitely **not** true.

Resolving your issues does NOT mean that you both have to see things in the same way, or even agree with each other

You can still resolve issues even if you and your partner don't agree with each other's ideas or opinions. In fact, resolving issues has very little to do with having to agree with your partner's ideas, or pushing them to see things your way? It's actually much simpler than that. Resolving issues is about accepting each other's opinions as they are, even if you don't necessarily agree with them. It's about:

1. Trying to understand as much as you can about how your partner sees things, and then
2. Accepting that your partner *has a right to see things their way*, even if it's completely different to how you see things, or you struggle to understand it, and then
3. Negotiating the *wiggle room* between your two different ideas—and then working out a plan you can both agree on going forward.

Notice that I said it's about respecting your partner's *right to see things in their own way*, not about agreeing with their actual opinions or ideas. This is important to remember as we keep going. You don't have to agree with each other's opinions every time. Of course not! But you *do* have to negotiate and jointly agree on a plan going forward. And this plan doesn't necessarily have to be set in stone, or seen as the final solution. It might be an interim plan that you put in place to see what might work. And you might tweak or adapt this plan over time.

For example: imagine if you and your partner are arguing about how to discipline your children when they misbehave. *You* might want to use a 'time out' process, such as making your child sit on a certain chair, 'the naughty chair', or in a certain spot 'the naughty spot' for a length of time as a consequence of misbehaving. Your partner, however, might prefer to use a 'currency consequence', meaning that the child would lose access to something they hold dear, such as their favorite toy. Or limiting the amount of time they'd be allowed to watch television each day.

If you couldn't agree straight away, you might formulate a plan to try both ideas. For example; for one week you might use the 'time out' consequence. And the following week you might try the 'currency consequence'. And then you and your partner would talk about it and decide which worked better for your children. You might also find the 'currency consequence' works well for some of your children, and the 'time out' consequence works better for others. So you might then decide to use different consequences for different children. But that's how you work as a team and negotiate the plan when you have different ideas or opinions.

Of course, some issues won't be as straightforward as that. But as we keep going, I'm going to show you a new way to negotiate with your partner, so you'll easily be able to agree on a plan going forward, regardless of what you're talking about—and even if you both have extremely different ideas.

Now let's look at a few other challenges that couples often face, which can make it really hard for them to resolve their issues.

Are You Talking About the Right Thing?

The first challenge that many couples face when they're trying to resolve their issues is that they're often not talking about *the right thing*... or focusing on *the most important part of the problem*.

Now right now that might sound a little odd, or confusing. You might be thinking something like: "of course we're focusing on the right thing... we're talking about what caused the fight in the first place." But even though this might feel true right now, believe me; it's often not the case. Let me show you what I mean, using a story about a farmer. Let's call him James.

James has a huge farm where he grows a few crops, such as wheat and barley. One morning, James wakes up bright and early, and steps outside to see that it's raining heavily. The sky is dark and the rain looks really 'set in'. James checks the weather forecast and finds out that it's going to rain heavily for the next few days. How do you think James will feel about that?

If you answered: "*it depends*", you'd be absolutely right. It definitely *depends*! Let's look at two very different scenarios:

* * *

On one particular day when James wakes up to find that it's raining, he'd be **overjoyed**. That's because it hadn't rained for the six months prior to that day. And that meant that his crops weren't growing. And if his crops didn't grow, his family would struggle financially the following year.

So when he wakes up and sees that it's raining—and even more than that, that it looks like it's going to rain for several days, he'd definitely be happy. This would mean he'd be able to feed his family and not struggle the following year. So on that occasion, of course he'd be thrilled that it's raining. He may even do a happy rain dance... (Or maybe not—James is a bit of an old-fashioned kind of guy.)

* * *

It's now several months later, and James wakes up to see that it's raining heavily again. And again, he can see that it's going to rain heavily for the next few days. But this time he's not feeling overjoyed at all. In fact, on this day he's frustrated, angry, and disappointed. There definitely won't be any kind of 'happy dance' today. That's because it's now time to harvest his crops, which grew well because of the earlier rain. But the rain at this time will limit how much wheat and barley he'll be able to get. And not just that, but James will also have to pay for some help, because rain makes harvesting slower and more difficult.

So raining at this time means that James and his family might struggle the following year because he won't have as much wheat and barley to sell. So on this day, James is feeling very different than he was a few months before.

* * *

What Do You Think James is Really Reacting To?

Is James reacting to the rain? Well, "yes" and "no"! After all, it's the same amount of rain, the same farmer, and the same farm in each scenario. So it can't just be *the rain* that he's reacting to. So what *is* James reacting to?

James is actually reacting to what the rain MEANS to him. In the first scenario, the rain meant James would be able to feed his family for the next year, which was great. But in the second scenario, the rain meant the opposite—that he might struggle to feed his family the following year. So it's the same rain, the same farm, and even the same crop—but that same amount of rain has an entirely different meaning for James, depending on the situation. And that makes sense.

And this is the same for all of us. Until we know better, we often believe that we just react to what happens. But the reality is actually quite different. We don't just react to what happens or to what we see. Just like James, we actually react to the *meanings* that we apply to things.

So How Does this Apply to Relationships?

Consider the following conversation between Kate and her husband, Mike:

Kate: “What? You're wearing those shoes into the house again. Seriously! What were you thinking?”

Mike: “Oh Kate, shut up and leave me alone! ...”

* * *

Thinking about that short conversation, do you think Kate is angry at Mike for wearing shoes in the house?

Well “yes”, of course she is. Kate is definitely angry with Mike about wearing those shoes in the house. But is that all that’s going on?

While Kate is obviously annoyed that Mike wore those shoes in the house again, just like farmer James above, not only is Kate reacting to the fact that Mike wore those shoes in the house, but she’s also reacting to the *meanings* she has applied to that.

What do you think Kate might make ‘Mike wearing shoes in the house’ *mean*? To start with that would depend on what their relationship had been like recently. For example, have Kate and Mike been arguing and fighting a lot? Does Kate feel supported and considered by Mike? Does Mike often say he’ll do something, but then not do it? Does Kate think Mike is angry at her and this is his reaction?

But that’s not all. It’s not necessarily just about their relationship. The meanings Kate applies to that situation might also be based on her own fears, beliefs, rules and expectations, and not just on what’s happening in their relationship. Maybe when she was growing up shoes were forbidden in her family home.

Naturally, without actually asking Kate directly, we can’t really know what she’s made that situation *mean*. But let’s consider some *possible meanings* she might have applied to ‘Mike wearing those shoes in the house’.

Kate might think that:

- Mike is selfish and doesn't care about what she needs
- Mike is irresponsible, careless or thoughtless
- She can never rely on Mike to keep his word or follow-through and do what he says he'll do
- Mike cares more about others than her (because he'd never wear those shoes in their houses)
- Mike knows she doesn't want him to wear those shoes in the house, but he did it to punish Kate for something.

There are many possible meanings that Kate might apply to this situation. Some might be based on things that happened between them in the past, so they might be understandable and realistic. But others might be a result of Kate's fears or beliefs, or her rules growing up.

But regardless of why Kate thinks the way she does, and regardless of where they come from, it's these *meanings* that Kate applies to this situation that they need to talk about directly if they really want to resolve their issues.

Earlier I mentioned that one challenge that many couples face when they're trying to resolve issues is that they're often *not talking about the right thing*. That's exactly what I mean here.

If Kate and Mike only talk about 'Mike wearing shoes in the house', and they don't talk specifically about the meanings that each of them holds around that situation, they won't be able to truly resolve things. And that's because they won't be talking about 'the real issues'. The meanings are a big part of the 'real issue'. In fact, it's the meanings that someone applies to what their partner has done, that directly impact how much resentment that person will feel towards their partner—or should I say: towards their partner's past actions and behaviors.

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Let's look at another conversation, which took place between Kate and Mike later that same day:

Kate: "It really annoyed me that you wore those shoes in the house!"

Mike: "Fine... I'm sorry! I didn't mean to wear them in the house. I won't do it again! "

Kate: "That's what you always say and yet it happens again and again! Seriously..."

Mike: "I didn't mean to. I forgot! Can't you accept my apology? "

Kate: "Some apology! You'd never do that in Gemma and Nick's house!"

Mike: "I said that I'm sorry! I won't do it again!"

Kate: "But don't you get it? That's what you always say! And then you do it again! How can I ever rely on you?!"

Mike: "You just WANT to be angry, don't you?! I apologized! And as far as I'm concerned, it's over! I've said I'm sorry... There's nothing more I can say! I won't do it again! What more can I do? You need to learn how to accept apologies!" (He walks away frustrated.)

Is their Issue Resolved?

What do you think of that conversation? Even though Mike apologized, we can see that the issue isn't resolved. Based on that conversation, it's obvious that even though Kate was frustrated with Mike wearing those shoes in the house, that's not what the real problem was. We can see that when Kate compares the way Mike treats Gemma and Nick (Mike's sister and her husband) to how he

treats her. At that point it becomes pretty obvious that Kate doesn't feel considered or respected by Mike.

And that means that for Kate, 'Mike wearing shoes in the house' is not the real problem, but what we call '**a surface issue**'—a *symptom* of a bigger problem that's bubbling away underneath. This is where couples often get stuck. They often try to talk about something, thinking it's the 'real problem', when it's really just a surface issue. And that means that they're talking about the wrong thing. No matter how much time Kate and Mike spend talking about 'Mike wearing those shoes in the house' in that way, and no matter how many times Mike *apologizes* for doing this, it won't help them resolve the real problem, which is about Kate feeling more supported. They need to talk about that directly if they want to resolve it.

And that's why it's crucial to look at the meanings each person applies to a situation if you want to resolve the issues in your relationship. And that's exactly what Kate and Mike needed to do—because unless they deal directly with the underlying meanings, they won't be able to address, and therefore resolve the real problem.

Unless Kate and Mike talk directly about the *meanings* that Kate applies to that situation, and unless they talk about any underlying resentment that Kate might be feeling towards Mike or their situation, it won't be resolved. And if that was the case, Kate would continue to build up more resentment and frustration, which would make things even worse as time went on.

But it's not just important to talk about what Kate makes things *mean*. Mike might be applying some *meanings* to that situation too. While it's possible that Mike accidentally wore those shoes in the house, he *might* also have done that on purpose for some reason because of his own feelings of resentment.

Maybe he wore those shoes in the house to punish Kate for something that she'd done earlier? Or maybe he sees Kate as being a bit too controlling, so wearing shoes in the house was his way of rebelling against her 'rules'? Or maybe Kate lets her family wear

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their shoes in the house, but not him, and Mike therefore resents her for that?

So it's not just Kate's underlying resentment and *meanings* that are important. Mike's *meanings* are equally as important. Kate and Mike could have talked about that situation and the meanings that each of them held in a much more direct way.

Here's how that conversation might have gone:

Kate: "It really annoyed me that you wore those shoes in the house!"

Mike: "Fine... I'm sorry! I didn't mean to wear them in the house. I won't do it again! "

Kate: "Mike, I know that you ARE sorry... And I know you mean it! But can I tell you why it upsets me so much?"

Mike: "Sure!"

Kate: "It's not just the wearing of shoes in the house... I want to be able to rely on you. And when you SAY you won't wear them in the house and then you DO... It feels like you don't care about what I want. Can you see that?"

Mike: "Yeah, I guess I can... I'm sorry. "

Kate: "I know you are. Do you think you'd wear those shoes into Gemma and Nick's house?"

Mike: "No, probably not!"

Kate: "So can you see that because you wouldn't wear them in *their* house... when you wear them in here, even after I've asked you not to, and even after you've AGREED not to, that it feels like you don't care about me as much as you care about them?"

Mike: “Sure. I never really thought of it that way. Babe, I really am sorry and I definitely do care about what you want and about you. I’ll remember in future... Let me work on that!”

* * *

In that conversation, Kate is actually talking specifically about the meaning that she applies to what happened. She tells Mike that she wants to be able to rely on him when he agrees not to do something. She also clearly expresses that for her it feels like he doesn’t care about what she wants at those times. This is powerful because they’re talking about what’s really important, rather than just dealing with the surface issue.

And of course, if Mike had worn those shoes in the house because he was feeling some resentment towards Kate, then they’d need to talk about that as well. But this is one of the main reasons why couples often struggle to resolve their issues: they often get stuck talking about the surface issue, rather than dealing directly with what’s really important, which is each person’s level of resentment, as well as the meanings that each of them applies to what has happened.

There are a few other things that can really get in the way and completely prevent couples from truly resolving their issues. And believe me; some of them will surprise you. We’ll look at these in the next few chapters. But for now, here's a Golden Tip...



GOLDEN TIP:

*Change this one thing: start to talk specifically about **what each of you makes things mean** and you’ll start to see big changes in how quickly and easily you’ll be able to resolve your relationship issues.*

Have you enjoyed what you've read in "Solving the Marriage Conundrum"?

In the rest of the book I'll show you several other things that couples do, that not only create major problems in their relationships, but can also make it really hard for them to get past their challenges and truly resolve their issues.

Then, in Parts Two and Three, I'll outline my approach, and share with you 21 step-by-step strategies that will show you exactly what you need to do... and exactly what you need to say to get past all that resentment, and make your relationship great...

If that sounds like something you'd like, and if you're ready to find out how you can completely transform your relationship, use one of the links below to get the rest of the book from Amazon. It's available in both paperback and eBook format.

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Are you ready to stop fighting, stop struggling, and make your relationship great?

- Are you bickering, arguing, or fighting a lot?
- Do you feel a lot of resentment, frustration, or anger?
- Are you living more like housemates than lovers?
- Are you struggling to get past an affair?

No matter what your relationship looks like right now, and no matter what you've already tried to do to fix things, please—whatever you do—don't give up quite yet. Because it's really not your fault! In fact, it's a conundrum...

Did you know that many of the things that couples do to try to stop fighting and make their relationships better, not only don't work, but often make things even worse?

In *Solving the Marriage Conundrum*, Psychotherapist & Relationship Specialist, Paul McNiff, outlines a powerful new approach that will completely change all of that. No matter how your relationship is right now, this revolutionary approach will show you *exactly* what you need to do to stop fighting and stop struggling—once and for all—even if your partner won't work on it, and even if they won't admit there's a problem—yet.

In this groundbreaking approach you'll discover:

- The *REAL* reasons why you've been arguing, fighting, or struggling in your relationship (*these will probably surprise you*)
- Why your past attempts to resolve relationship problems haven't worked—and why they *NEVER* could have
- How to influence your partner to work on the relationship with you, and
- 21 powerful step-by-step strategies that will show you exactly what you *CAN* do to fix things in your relationship—for good!



PAUL MCNIFF is a Psychotherapist & Relationship Specialist who works in Private Practice. He has developed a powerful approach that has helped thousands of people to completely transform their relationships—and their lives.

**Are YOU ready to stop struggling and
transform *YOUR* relationship?**

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