

Restoring spark to marriages

If a reputable person came to you and said, 'Marriages need all the help that they can get these days to ride the inevitable waves. I know half an hour's exercise that could make a radical difference to the way you relate together,' would you be interested? My wife and I came across a simple exercise that we along with many others have found helpful. It focuses on identifying what we, and our partners, are really looking for.

At its simplest, many of our problems revolve around the fact that we tend to give to our partners what we would most like to receive for ourselves. Take an extreme example. Suppose the husband's primary need is for financial security. Mistakenly assuming that his wife is wired the same way as himself, he presumes that buying expensive gifts for his wife, or presenting her with a healthy bank balance every month, will make her happy, contented and eternally grateful to him. But his wife might have had no interest in receiving a brand new Rolls Royce each year -- though she would greatly have welcomed some help around the house.

Over time, partners become weary of making strenuous efforts to please the other if they receive scant encouragement for doing so. Sooner or later, resentment is likely to set in. If the giving were more accurately targeted in the first place, however, the results would often be quite different. To ensure that the support we give each other is relevant, we need to have a much better idea of what forms of support our partners most need. The following exercise can also be done in contexts outside of marriage, for example, with colleagues or ministry partners to help everyone see where their real needs lies.

Trust	Acceptance	Admiration & Appreciation
Approval	Encouragement	Care, Comfort & Affection
Understanding	Respect	Devotion
Validation	Reassurance	Other specific qualities or kindnesses that make you feel blessed.

- Step 1: Take time out to work out your top three needs from the list above. Separately! Keep these to yourselves for the time being.
- Step 2: Write down what you suppose your partner's top needs are.
- Step 3: Here comes the interesting bit – compare your notes! Again and again, we find that even people who thought they knew each other really well end up missing or mistaking their partner's top needs.

If you think you are too busy to do this exercise, it may indicate just how much you really *do* need to do it!