

Three little words: *I love you*

Dear Reader:

Those three little words, I LOVE YOU, often offer empty promises or come with multiple strings attached. Often, they are conditional. When I'm sitting with couples I ask them if they love each other. I ask him, and he says with tears in his eyes, YES. I ask her and she looks at him lovingly and echoes his response....YES. By the end of the session, wherein they have blamed, criticized, judged and guilt their partner, I remind them that LOVE is simply not enough to keep a marriage (relationship) together. When I learn their history I find out that he walks away from her when she is complaining, nagging, yelling, spewing, and if I were to ask them then if they love each other I might get a very different answer.



There is something so much more important to having a successful, "loving" marriage (relationship) than a claim to love one another. By the way, and not completely off the subject, did you know that only

- 10% of arranged marriages fail,
- 50% of marriage **by choice goes south**
- A whopping 70% of second marriages follow suit.
- Third marriages fare better at a modest 30%, but it isn't because they are happy. It's either because they are just too old to start over again or too poor.

Why only 10% of arranged marriages fail, you may ask? Neither love nor lust-at-first-sight sets the groundwork for a healthy relationship as much as respect that exists in the family and community of the couple who are being brought together. The idea of having an arranged marriage between young people (usually 25 years of age) is a notion well established early on in a child's rearing. By the time they are ready for marriage there are many aspects of their personalities, interests, education, and style that are accounted for in the selection by the parents for their child's life partner. Mutual respect is built in; it is part of the arranged marriage paradigm.

But even well intentioned parental selection isn't enough for establishing a long lasting, working, successful, life enhancing and satisfying marriage although they fare better than selection by "love." There are three words that have a much greater influence on the above than "I love you." They are **respect, dignity and integrity**. When those are honored there is an excellent formula for marital bliss either by selection or arrangement. Excellent!

Respect

Let's start with respect for the Planet Earth that we call home. We're here as stewards of this beautiful Eco-system and respect it we must. Then let's move on to respect for all the people of various cultures that we share Earth with. In that we have a more evolved and complicated brain than our animal co-inhabitants we're elected stewards of them as well. Respect for the planet, the people and animals are essential to our survival, or at least our grandchildren's survival. But if respect does not start at home, with your spouse or partner there's little hope that it will be taught to the next generation. Without respect in the home the generational legacy of dysfunction will just continue.



It is so easy to forget politeness, the little please and thank you that is just common courtesy. When couples are in a power struggle it is more about winning than caring, more about my needs versus his needs and may the better man/woman win.

Respect requires us to move beyond the ego, to engage mindfully with our partner without judgment. It requires that we respect their needs as much as we respect our own, that we respect their thoughts and opinions, their feelings. When that is mutual abiding love flourishes. Abiding love is the love that is unconditional and without expectations. It is the kind of love that marriages of long standing can grow into. You know when you see it in some couples....can't miss it.

Dignity



A long time ago, practically another lifetime, I owned a beauty salon. It was not one of my more successful ventures but one that offered many valuable lessons for my life. One lesson I learned was taught to me by a very old couple. The wife had had a stroke and was partially paralyzed on her right side. Her husband walked her into the salon and asked if there was someone who could give her a manicure. As we made arrangements to get her comfortable and start her manicure he asked the manicurist how long it would take. She said, about a half an hour. "Very well" he said looking at his wife. "I'll be back in a half hour promptly" Then he looked at the young manicurist and said, "you know you never keep a lady waiting." I listened to this and was impressed by the way he treated her with dignity.

When you love someone words are just not enough. Abiding love is expressed in behaviors that speak volumes about the degree of love you carry in your heart for your partner. When you treat your partner with dignity you are actually being dignified yourself. On the other hand, if you treat your partner as if they are dispensable it reflects on your own self-esteem. Yup, it's a definite boomerang effect.

Integrity

When I work with couples I tell them that when they finally reach that place of abiding love, after they have become totally conscious of their behaviors, they will have to give up expectations of their partner. Now I early on make it quite clear that abuse is a deal breaker. That being said, expectations are not part of the successful marriage equation. How is that, I hear. How can I not expect my partner to help with chores, enter checks in the check book, put the toilet seat down/or up, remain faithful to our vows??? Well, a big part of successful marriages/relationships is communication. When you communicate your needs and desires and there is a mutual agreement reached it is no longer about expectations. There are two operative words here, *mutual* and *agreement*. After that is established it is a matter of integrity. Simple, no?

And, by the way, don't think that you will bring respect, dignity and integrity to your relationship only **IF** your partner deserves it. No, no! These three little words are a way of life, a way of being in the world, and we all, every one of us, deserve it.

Sincerely,

Coach Marianne Harms, LCSW

Center for Personal Reflection