

Love Busters

First the love you and your spouse have for each other is directly affected by almost all of your behavior. This is a point that I will repeat again and again.

A second point is attention on behavior that will meet each other's most important emotional needs. When you behave that way, you are caring for each other. But the resulting Love Bank deposits will not do your marriage much good if other behavior leads to Love Bank withdrawals. So to help you gain control over your behavior so that you can learn to avoid making Love Bank withdrawals, I introduce you to the concept of Love Busters.

Why would any of us hurt the one we promised to love and cherish?

One of the most important consequences of our **emotional isolation** is that we cannot feel the way we affect others. And that creates the temptation to hurt others because in doing so we don't feel the pain we cause. If we were connected emotionally to others we would be far less tempted to do anything thoughtless, gaining at someone else's expense. That's because in so doing, we would be hurting ourselves as well.

That is what I am trying to do when I try to encourage one spouse to avoid doing anything that would hurt the other spouse. I want you to trigger empathy with each other. Each spouse complains about how thoughtless the other spouse is, without much awareness of his or her own thoughtlessness.

Lack of empathy helps to make thoughtlessness possible. Since we don't feel what other's feel, we tend to minimize the negative effects we have on others, and consider our thoughtlessness to be benign. An **angry outburst** is regarded by some as a creative expression. **Disrespect** is viewed as helping the other spouse gain proper perspective. And a **demand** is nothing more than encouraging a spouse to do what he or she should have done all along. None of these is seen as one spouse gaining at the other's expense, because the spouse who is inflicting the pain does not feel the pain. But whenever one spouse is the cause of the other's unhappiness, one thing's for sure -- Love Bank withdrawals are taking place.

I call all the ways that spouses are inconsiderate of each other's feelings Love Busters because that is what they do -- they destroy the love that a husband and wife have for each other.

I've found that the most common Love Busters in marriage fall into six categories:

1. Selfish Demands,
2. Disrespectful Judgments,
3. Angry Outbursts,
4. Annoying Habits,
5. Independent Behavior and
6. Dishonesty

The first three of these (Selfish Demands; Disrespectful Judgments, Angry Outbursts) are instinctive, yet thoughtless, ways to try to get what you want from each other.

When a **request** doesn't work, a spouse will often revert to a **demand** ("I don't care how you feel -- do it or else!").

If that doesn't get the job done, a spouse will try **disrespectful judgments** ("If you had any sense, and were not so lazy and selfish, you would do it").

And then, when all of that fails, an **angry outburst** often represents the last ditch effort ("I'll see to it that you regret not having done it").

Of course, demands, disrespect and anger don't really get the job done. You generally don't do things for your spouse because of these Love Busters; you do them out of **care and consideration**. If your spouse is demanding, disrespectful and angry, you tend to be less caring and considerate, leading you to do less for your spouse. Instead of giving your spouse what he or she needs, demands, disrespect and anger cause you to resist. You want you to have what you need in your marriage, but demands, disrespect and anger will not get it for you. They will prevent you from having what you want.

But when you indulge in these three: demands, disrespect and anger, you do more than fail to get what you need -- you also destroy the love your spouse has for you. All of these instincts, and the habits they help create, cause your spouse to be unhappy, and that causes Love Bank withdrawals.

The fourth, Annoying Habits, is behavior that is repeated without much thought that bothers your spouse. Marriage is a partnership of incredibly close quarters, where just about anything you or your spouse does is almost sure to affect the other. If you want to stay in love with each other, your habits, even the innocent ones, should make Love Bank deposits, not withdrawals.

The fifth is Independent Behavior, the conduct of one spouse that ignores the feelings and interests of the other spouse. If your decisions are made as if your spouse doesn't even exist, you will find yourself running roughshod over your spouse's feelings. Since it's usually scheduled and requires some thought to execute, the simplest way to overcome it is to take it off your schedule. And if you follow the Policy of Joint Agreement, Independent Behavior will never find itself on your schedule in the first place.

Finally, the sixth, Dishonesty, causes massive Love Bank withdrawals whenever it's discovered. And spouses usually discover each other's dishonesty because of their emotional closeness to each other. If you or your spouse have a tendency to lie or distort the truth, chase that bad habit out of your marriage before it ruins everything.

Selfish Demands

We were all born with instincts to help us survive the trials and travails of life. Some instincts are very helpful and others are downright stupid and abusive. One of our more stupid and abusive instincts, especially in marriage, is **making demands**.

If we make a request for something we want or need, and the request is turned down, our instincts encourage us to take more forceful steps. And the first thing that comes to mind is usually a demand.

Demands carry a threat of punishment -- an if-you-refuse-me-you'll- regret-it kind of thing. In other words, you may dislike what I want, but if you don't do it, I'll see to it that you suffer even greater pain.

People who make demands don't seem to care how others feel. They think only of their own needs. "If you find it unpleasant to do what I want, tough! And if you refuse, I'll make it even tougher," is what they seem to be saying.

Demands depend on power. They don't work unless the demanding one has the power to make good on his threats. But who has power in marriage? Ideally, there is shared power, the husband and wife working together to accomplish mutual objectives. But when one spouse starts making demands-along with threats that are at least implied-it's a power play. The threatened spouse often strikes back, fighting fire with fire, power with power. Suddenly, it's a test of power-who will win the battle?

If the demanding partner doesn't have enough power to follow through with the threat, he or she often receives punishment, at least in the form of ridicule. But if power is fairly equal between a husband and wife, a battle rages until one or the other surrenders. In the end, the one meeting the demand feels deep resentment and is less likely to meet the need in the future. When the demand is not met, both spouses feel resentment.

You want you and your spouse to get from each other what you need most in your marriage. You want to meet each other's emotional needs and be there for each other when you need help. But let me assure you that demands will not get the job done.

When you ask your partner to do something for you, your partner may cheerfully agree to it-or your partner may express his/her reluctance. This reluctance may be due to any number of things-He/she needs, their comfort level, or their sense of what's wise or fair.

If you push your request, making it a demand, what are you doing? You are trying to override your partner's reluctance. You are declaring that your wishes are more important than their feelings. And you are threatening to cause your partner some distress if they don't do what you want.

Your partner now must choose one of two evils---your "punishment" on the one hand or whatever made your partner reluctant on the other. Your partner may ultimately agree to your demand, but they won't be happy about it. You may get your way, but you're gaining at their expense. Your gain is their loss. And your partner will most certainly feel used.

"But you don't know my husband!" some wife might say. "He lies around the house all night and I can't get him to do a thing. The only time he lifts a finger is to press the remote control. If I don't demand that he get up and help me, nothing would get done."

"You can't be talking about my wife," a husband might say. "She only thinks about herself! She spends her whole life shopping and going out with her friends. If I didn't demand that she stay at home once in a while, I'd never see her."

Without a doubt, you and your spouse need to find an effective way to motivate each other to meet your needs. But demands are nothing short of abuse. In fact, it's usually the first stage of verbal abuse that ultimately leads to fights in marriage.

If you make demands of your spouse and expect obedience, you are being controlling and manipulative. Your spouse will try to escape your abuse, and instead of becoming responsive to your needs, he or she will have as little to do with you as possible. Is that what you want? Do you want to drive your spouse away from you?

Neither of you is a sergeant and neither of you is a private. You do not have the right to tell each other what to do, and if you try, you will find that it doesn't work. If you try to force your spouse to meet your needs, it becomes a temporary solution at best, and resentment is sure to rear its ugly head. Demands and other forms of manipulation do not build compatibility; they build resentment.

There is a wise alternative to **selfish demands**, and that's **thoughtful requests**. This approach to getting what you need from each other begins by simply explaining what you would like, and asking your spouse how he or she would feel fulfilling your request. If he or she indicates that the request will be unpleasant to fulfill, discuss alternative ways your spouse could help you that would not be unpleasant.

"I've already tried that, and it doesn't work," may be your immediate reaction. It may be that he or she simply indicates that whatever it is you want isn't something they want to do. But that's where negotiation should begin. If you become a skilled negotiator, you will accept a negative reaction and try to figure out a way for your spouse to help enthusiastically with whatever it is you want.

Disrespectful Judgments

When **requests** don't get you what you want, and **demands** don't work either, our instincts and habits often provide us with another stupid and abusive strategy -- **disrespectful judgments**. Without a doubt, demands are abusive, but disrespectful judgments often make demands seem merciful in comparison.

In the final analysis, **disrespectful judgments** represent an effort to force our spouses to give us what we want in marriage, but it's often cleverly disguised. Instead of making an outright demand, we present our problem as if it were really our spouse's personal shortcoming. We try to "straighten out" our spouse in an effort to get our way.

At the time we rationalize our disrespect by convincing ourselves that we're doing our spouses a big favor, to lift them from the darkness of their confusion into the light of our superior perspective. If they would only follow our advice, we tell ourselves, they could avoid many of life's pitfalls-and we would also get what we want.

A disrespectful judgment occurs whenever one spouse tries to impose a system of values and beliefs on the other. When a husband tries to force his point of view on his wife, he's just asking for trouble. When a wife assumes that her own views are right and her husband is woefully misguided -- and tells him so -- she enters a minefield.

In most cases, a disrespectful judgment is simply a sophisticated way of getting what one spouse wants from the other. But even when there are the purest motives, it's still a stupid and abusive strategy. It's stupid because it doesn't work, and it's abusive because it causes unhappiness. If we think we have the right -- even the responsibility -- to impose our view on our spouses, our efforts will almost invariably be interpreted as personally threatening, arrogant, rude, and incredibly disrespectful. That's when we make sizable withdrawals from the Love Bank.

How can you know if you're a perpetrator of disrespectful judgments? The simplest way to find out is to ask your spouse.

Disrespectful Judgments Questionnaire

Circle the number that best represents your feelings about the way your spouse tries to influence your attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. If you circle a number greater than 1 for any question, try to think of an example that you can share with your spouse and write it on a sheet of paper.

1. Does your spouse ever try to "straighten you out?"

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

2. Does your spouse ever lecture you instead of respectfully discussing issues?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

3. Does your spouse seem to feel that his or her opinion is superior to yours?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

4. When you and your spouse discuss an issue, does he or she interrupt you or talk so much that you are prevented from having a chance to explain your position?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

5. Are you afraid to discuss your points of view with your spouse?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

6. Does your spouse ever ridicule your point of view?

Almost Never-----Sometimes-----Much of the Time
1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7

The scoring for this questionnaire is simple. Unless all of your spouse's answers are "1," you're probably engaging in disrespectful judgments. Almost all of us are guilty of this Love Buster from time to time; so don't be alarmed if you get some twos or threes. But if your spouse gave you any fours, fives, sixes, or sevens, you're at risk to lose your spouse's love for you because your disrespectful judgments are rising to the level of abuse.

If your spouse identifies you as one who makes disrespectful judgments, you may be tempted to make yet another disrespectful judgment and claim that he or she is wrong! Resist that temptation at all costs because in every case of abuse, the victim is a far better judge of its existence than the perpetrator. Take his or her word for it, and start working on a plan to eliminate whatever it is your spouse interprets as disrespect.

When we try to impose our opinions on our spouses, we imply that they have poor judgment. That's disrespectful. We may not say this in so many words, but it's the clear message that they hear. If we valued their judgment more, we might question our own opinions. What if they're right, and we're wrong?

I'm not saying that you can't disagree with your spouse. But I want you to respectfully disagree. Try to understand your spouse's reasoning. Present the information that brought you to your opinion and listen to the information your spouse brings. Entertain the possibility that you might change your own mind, instead of just pointing out how wrong your spouse is.

That's how respectful persuasion works. You see, each of you brings two things into your marriage -- wisdom and foolishness. Your marriage will thrive when you blend your value systems, with each one's wisdom overriding the other's foolishness. By sharing your ideas, sorting through the pros and cons, you can create a belief system superior to what either of you had alone. But unless you approach the task with mutual respect, the process won't work and you will destroy your love for each other in the process.

In most cases, disrespectful judgments are nothing more than stupid and abusive attempts to get what you want in your marriage. As is the case with demands, disrespect doesn't work -- it's simply a form of verbal abuse.

Angry Outbursts

When **requests** don't get what you want from your spouse, **demands** don't produce results, and **disrespect** doesn't work either, your instinct has one more stupid and abusive strategy up its sleeve -- **angry outbursts**.

I view demands and disrespect as a ramping up to anger. Taken together, they define the typical fight of most couples. All three illustrate abuse in marriage, and what a tragedy it is. Instead of protecting each other, spouses become the greatest source of each other's unhappiness -- and it's all instinctive. What I mean by that is that if you don't do something to stop it from happening, you will most certainly become victim of each other's abusive instincts.

Although the primary reason for angry outbursts is trying to get what we want, our instinct makes us believe otherwise. It turns it into an issue of injustice. When we are angry we usually feel that someone is deliberately making us unhappy (by not giving us what we want), and what he or she is doing just isn't fair. In our angry state, we are convinced that reasoning won't work, and the offender will keep upsetting us until he or she is taught a lesson. The only thing such people understand is punishment, we assume. Then they'll think twice about making us unhappy again!

We think we are using anger to protect ourselves, and it offers a simple solution to our problem - - destroy the troublemaker. If our spouse turns out to be the troublemaker, we find ourselves hurting the one we've promised to cherish and protect. When we're angry we don't care about our spouse's feelings and we are willing to scorch the culprit if it prevents us from being hurt again.

But in the end, we have nothing to gain from anger. Punishment does not solve marital problems; it only makes your punished spouse want to inflict punishment on you, or if that doesn't work, leave you. When you become angry with your spouse, you threaten your spouse's safety and security -- you fail to provide protection. Your spouse rises to the challenge and tries to destroy you in retaliation. When anger wins, love loses.

Each of us has an arsenal of weapons we use when we're angry. If we think someone deserves to be punished, we unlock the gate and select an appropriate weapon.

Sometimes the weapons are verbal (ridicule and sarcasm), sometimes they're devious plots to cause suffering, and sometimes they're physical. But they all have one thing in common: they are designed to hurt people. Since our spouses are at such close range, we can use our weapons to hurt them the most.

Instincts often help habits develop. An angry outburst is a good example of this. I've seen what looks like an angry outburst at the moment of a child's birth, and we can be assured that there wasn't much learning that caused that behavior. And as a child grows, the way anger is expressed becomes increasingly sophisticated. But it isn't the instinct that's becoming sophisticated -- it's the developing habit of an angry outburst, supported by the instinct that makes it sophisticated.

In marriage, one of our most destructive behaviors is an angry outburst, where we intentionally try to hurt our spouse and cause massive Love Bank withdrawals. But it's something we do naturally -- it's a habit that is developed by an instinct.

We can't change our instincts, but we can short-circuit their approach to a problem. If I have an instinct to have angry outbursts, it doesn't mean that I must go around losing my temper. I can create new habits that keep my anger in check. Habits that override inappropriate instincts are usually more difficult to create than habits that are not instinct driven, but it can be done. And in marriage, it must be done if you want to fall in love and stay in love.

Most effective anger management training programs focus attention on the creation of short-circuiting habits. Whenever a person begins to feel angry, he or she practices a behavior that has been shown to prevent an outburst. In the beginning, the new behavior is a conscious choice, something that is done regardless of how it feels to do it. Walking away from a frustrating situation is one example of a behavior that can short-circuit an angry outburst. Another is to follow a routine that relaxes your muscles and lowers adrenalin in your system. Eventually, with practice, the behavior that has proven effective in short-circuiting an angry outburst becomes a habit. Whenever the person begins to feel angry, the habit kicks in and angry outbursts are overcome.

My approach to anger management focuses attention on the same short-circuiting strategies that most other anger management programs stress. But I add something that most other plans neglect. I try to help my client overcome all abusive behavior, beginning with selfish demands, because that's where abuse usually begins. From there, I teach a client to stop making disrespectful judgments, and then he or she is finally in a better position to get angry outbursts under control. The underlying theme of this approach to anger management is to make my client aware of the fact that he or she has no right trying to control anyone else, regardless of what that person is doing. From there we go on to create habits that take the place of demands, disrespect and anger, so that my client can get what he or she needs from their spouse without being controlling.

Remember, in marriage you can be your spouse's greatest source of pleasure, but you can also be your spouse's greatest source of pain, particularly if you use the stupid and abusive strategies of demands, disrespect and anger to try to get what you need in marriage. If you use them, you are almost sure to lose your spouse's love for you.

Annoying Habits

When was the last time your spouse did something that annoyed you? Last week? Yesterday? An hour ago? Maybe your spouse is humming that irritating tune this very minute!

One of the most annoying things about annoying habits is that they don't seem all that important -- but they still drives you crazy! It's not abuse or abandonment, just annoyance. You should be able to shrug it off, but you can't. It's like the steady drip-drip of water torture. Annoying habits will nickel and dime your Love Bank into bankruptcy.

When we're annoyed, we usually consider others inconsiderate, particularly when we've explained to them that their behavior bothers us and yet they continue to do it. It's not just the behavior itself, but the thought behind it -- the idea that they just don't seem to care.

But when our behavior annoys others, we soft sell the whole problem. It's just a little thing, we argue, so why make a federal case out of it? Why can't other people adjust?

As a counselor, I try to help couples become more empathetic, to see through each other's eyes. Of course, no one can fully imagine what someone else feels, and that's a great part of the problem. I often wish I could switch a couple's minds-Joe becomes Jane for a day and Jane becomes Joe. If they could only know what it felt like to experience their own insensitive behavior, they would change their ways in a hurry.

I've found it helpful to divide insensitive behavior into two categories. If behavior is repeated without much thought, I call it an **annoying habit**. If it's usually scheduled and requires thought to complete, I call it **independent behavior**. Annoying habits include personal mannerisms such as the way you eat, the way you clean up after yourself (or don't!), and the way you talk. Independent behavior, which we will be discussing next, may include sporting events you attend, your choice of church, or your personal exercise program.

Taken together, your habits and activities define your entire lifestyle. And those habits and activities can be either enjoyable for both of you, or enjoyable for only one of you (those that are unpleasant for both of you are usually quickly relegated to the trash bin). They are like bricks of a house, where each one is either strong or weak. The strong bricks are habits and activities that make both of you happy, while the weak bricks make one happy at the other's expense. The entire house is your lifestyle, and if it's made up of weak bricks, it is likely to collapse.

A house made up of strong bricks will make each day enjoyable for both you and your spouse, and that, in turn, will help build your Love Bank accounts. But every annoying habit or independent behavior drives a wedge between you and your spouse, creating and sustaining incompatibility. If you find yourselves incompatible, it's probably because there are far too many weak bricks in your marriage. Replace them as soon as possible by making an effort to eliminate insensitive behavior.

But how should you go about changing your habits so that they are no longer annoying? It begins with the realization that whenever you do something that bothers your spouse, you are withdrawing love units. Tell each other that eliminating annoying habits is a high priority for both of you. And then ask each other what it is that annoys you the most, write it down, and go to work with a plan to eliminate whatever you find.

None of us likes criticism, so I encourage both of you to avoid pointing out each other's annoying habits unless you are both prepared to do something about it. It's an enemy of good conversation to blind-side each other with criticism, ruining your time together by talking about how much you annoy each other. Many couples spend so much of their time together being critical of each other that each experience is a nightmare. How long can that last? I want your time together to be as enjoyable as possible, and criticism will have you both running for cover. If one of you does something that annoys the other, it's okay to mention it. But then drop the subject until you are able to deal with the problem effectively.

Your approach to annoying habits should be organized with an agreed upon plan to eliminate whatever it is. Unless you have such a plan, all you will accomplish with your criticism is a loss of love units whenever you bring up the subject.

Independent Behavior

Once you are married, almost everything you decide to do has either a positive or a negative impact on each other -- you are either depositing or withdrawing love units with every decision you make. So if your decisions are not made with each other's interests in mind, you will risk destroying the love you have for each other.

I define **Independent Behavior** as the conduct of one spouse that ignores the feelings and interest of the other spouse. It's usually scheduled and requires some thought to execute, so the simplest way to overcome this Love Buster is to take it off your schedule. If your Thursday night bowling, or visit to a friend of the opposite sex, or spending five hours chatting on the internet while your spouse sits alone watching TV, schedule something else Thursday night, visit someone else, and spend time doing something with your spouse. And whatever it is you decide to do that replaces independent behavior, be sure that both you and your spouse enthusiastically agree to it.

My ninth Basic Concept, the Policy of Joint Agreement, (never do anything without an enthusiastic agreement between you and your spouse), helps eliminate independent behavior -- any event or activity that is not mutually agreed to cannot take place. It forces you to take your spouse's interests and feelings into account when you forget that your spouse is an extremely important part of yourself, and should be considered in every decision you make.

Independent behavior is a problem in most marriages because we are all tempted to do whatever makes us happy, even when it makes our spouse unhappy (the Taker's rule). We don't feel the pain our spouse feels when we are inconsiderate -- all we feel is the pleasure gained from activities that are only in our best interest. That's why the Policy of Joint Agreement is so important in marriage. It forces us to behave as if we feel each other's pain -- it makes us behave as if we were empathetic.

A wise alternative to Independent Behavior is **Interdependent Behavior**, which limits your events or activities to those that benefit both of you simultaneously. You are both happy and neither of you suffers when you behavior interdependently, making decisions with each other's interests and feelings in mind.

Dishonesty

If your spouse had an affair ten years ago that was a brief indiscretion, would you want to know about it?

If you had an affair ten years ago that you ended because you knew it was wrong, should you tell your spouse about it?

These are tough questions that go to the heart of -- dishonesty.

Dishonesty is the strangest of the five Love Busters. Obviously, no one likes dishonesty, but sometimes honesty seems even more damaging. What if the truth is more painful than a lie?

When a wife first learns that her husband has been unfaithful, the pain is often so great that she wishes she had been left ignorant. When a husband discovers his wife's affair, it's like a knife in his heart -- and he wonders if it would have been better not knowing. In fact, many marriage counselors advise clients to avoid telling spouses about past infidelity, saying that it's too painful for people to handle. Besides, if it's over and done with, why dredge up the sewage of the past?

It's this sort of confusion that leads some of the most well-intentioned husbands and wives to lie to each other, or at least give each other false impressions. They feel that dishonesty will help them protect each other's feelings.

But what kind of a relationship is that? The lie is a wall that comes between the two partners, something hidden, a secret that cannot be mentioned, yet is right under the surface of every conversation.

And dishonesty can be as addictive as a drug. One secret leads to another. If you start using dishonesty to protect each other's feelings, where will it end?

That's why dishonesty is a strange Love Buster. Lies clearly hurt a relationship over the long-term, but truth can also hurt, especially in the short-term. It's no wonder that many couples continue in dishonesty -- because they feel they can't take the shock of facing the truth, at least right now. As a result, the marriage dies a slow death.

Honesty is like a flu shot. It may give you a short, sharp pain, but it keeps you healthier over the following months.

In the case of infidelity, don't you think that your own affair would be one of the most important pieces of information about yourself? How could you ever expect to have an intimate relationship with someone to whom you cannot reveal your most inner feelings?

I'll admit that infidelity is an extreme example of something you would be tempted to lie about. But "little white lies" can be just as destructive when discovered, and there's even less

justification for them. If it makes sense to be honest about something as hurtful as an affair, it makes even more sense to be honest about something more trivial, such as buying something you know your spouse would not have approved.

I wanted to use the extreme case of infidelity to underscore the curious nature of this Love Buster and how important honesty is, even in extreme cases. But whether the lie is about something as devastating as an affair, or something that would simply be disappointing to your spouse, it's dishonesty, not honesty, that makes matters worse. I draw a distinction between the pain of a thoughtless act and the pain of knowing about a thoughtless act. Honesty sometimes creates some pain, the pain of knowing that your spouse has been thoughtless. But it is really the thoughtless act itself that causes the pain. Dishonesty may defer some of that pain, but it compounds the pain later. The truth usually comes out eventually, and the months or years of hiding it not only creates an emotional barrier before it is revealed, but also destroys trust afterward.

Dishonesty strangles compatibility. To create and sustain compatibility, you must lay your cards on the table. You must be honest about your thoughts, feelings, habits, likes, dislikes, personal history, daily activities and plans for the future. When misinformation is part of the mix, you have little hope of making successful adjustments to each other. Dishonesty not only makes solutions hard to find, but it often leaves couples ignorant of the problems themselves.

There's another very important reason to be honest. Honesty tends to make our behavior more thoughtful. If we knew that everything we do and say would be televised and reviewed by all our friends, we would be far less likely to engage in thoughtless acts. Criminals would not steal and commit violent acts as much if they knew they would be caught each time they did. Honesty is the television camera in our lives. We know what we do, and if we are honest about what we do, we tend not to engage in thoughtless acts because we know those acts will be revealed-by ourselves.

In an honest relationship, thoughtless acts are usually corrected. Bad habits are nipped in the bud. Honesty keeps a couple from drifting into incompatibility-as incompatible attitudes and behavior are revealed, they can become targets for elimination. But if these attitudes and behavior remain hidden, they are left to grow out of control.

So many of the couples I've counseled have been confused as to what constitutes honesty in marriage, that I have created a policy to explain it. I call it the Policy of Radical Honesty, because so many think it's radical. But from my perspective either you are honest or you are dishonest. There is no middle ground.