

How To Win The Battle Without Going To War

By Toby Lieder

In every marriage, it is inevitable that there will be disagreements and frustrations, as expected in any relationship. After all, we are coming from two completely different backgrounds of life, that only we ourselves have independently experienced like no other person has, obviously. That is the beauty in marriage – that we take two very different personalities (never mind the fact that one is female and one is male, that alone makes up a world of differences!), yet we blend these two completely opposite souls into one entity, living under one roof, forever, expecting to raise and be a role model to their family, and expecting this new entity to now get along well with each other, in peace, love and harmony.

Reality has another game in store for us. Because the human brain is so complex, each individual is wired with their own unique complexities and influences, from life's challenges and experiences, and varied backgrounds (different family upbringing, influences, education etc). Therefore, there cannot be a specific book of rules that will apply to everyone alike – there is no 'one size fits all' advice for getting along well with your spouse.

Still, there are some helpful tips that may alleviate some of the unnecessary pain, heartache, stress, anxiety, and misunderstandings that come when we get sucked into a disagreement. We know that we will be friends at the end anyway – so why must we hurt so much, and waste a bitter few hour that could've been avoided?

How can we have a 'good' fight that breeds a successful outcome? In other words, a painless fight, or rather, an intellectual disagreement where we both agree to disagree like two mature adults in a meeting.

Let me propose a suggestion that may alleviate the stress and pain of disagreements which may help avoid the unnecessary ugly confrontations and emotional drainage these fights bring into our relationships repeatedly (not that those confrontations solve anything, anyway!).

My suggestion is the following: I'm a firm believer in Timing and Presentation. This discussion must take place at the right time, and in the right setting. Some examples include a hotel lobby with a drink in hand, or when the house is asleep, sipping a cup of tea with soft music in the background, or when the two of you are taking a relaxing stroll around the block.

There needs to be a mutual agreement about whether or not your past methods were successful. If they weren't, then it's time for change. (If you keep doing what you did, you'll keep getting what you got!) Are we ready to try something new?

Rule Number One: We are not allowed to fix or criticize the other at all 24/7, minus 2 hours. When are those two hours? When you feel the need to fix or criticize the other, go and write it down in a certain place, like in a document on the computer or your cell, or in a designated notebook. You will both then set aside an agreed time once a week, called a

'business meeting' and utilise this business meeting time of 1-2 hours to go through both your lists (one at a time) and share what's bothering you, or needs fixing or change of some sort.

Interestingly enough, some things will fall off the list by the time you read it, since you will realise it is no longer relevant or important! You will also notice that since you are NOT emotionally attached to the issue at this specific set up time (say, every Wednesday evening at 8:00pm), you can deal with it intellectually and come up with good, happy results that actually make real changes! (Whereas in the past, when we criticised a situation and kvetched about it over and over again, we kept going in a vicious cycle of negativity and blame, actually leading us nowhere good whatsoever!).

This meeting once a week for an hour or so will enable you to know that once a week, any problems will be dealt with and can actually be resolved! What a way to avoid a whole lot of tension and unnecessary pain! You know you love each other more than anything, so why would you choose to hurt each other, and let it get out of control?

The most valuable and important skill that must be respected and used in order to succeed is the skill of listening. In this case, listening without interruption to the other while they have their turn explaining what's on their mind. Listening without judging and blaming. Real, pure, uninterrupted listening, so that the other feels truly understood. Only once they have finished their piece, ask some questions about what they said so you understand it completely.

Another skill worth using is to talk about how it makes you feel when your spouse does something that bothers you, rather than blaming or attacking him/her. For example, phrase your issue as, "I feel that when you come home late, it makes me stressed," rather than, "You promised to be home at 6 and you came home late!" etc.

Imagine that all the time together, all week long, will be criticism-free and the home energy will be only good vibes! By controlling yourself from any negative remarks and criticisms all week and knowing you will be able to deal with any problems during that 'business meeting', you will create a warm, happy environment in your home, and what's more, will be more successful at solving any issues that may arise, given that they are addressed in a calm, mature environment, without the usual emotional attachment. What a way to go for Sholom Bayis!