

## A ROAD MAP TO HAPPINESS



### Why so Many Couples Get Lost Looking for their Treasure Chest of Love

Below is an explanation of the 5 side tracks outlined on this Map, [created by Drs. Ellyn Bader & Peter Pearson of the Couples Institute], that lead couples away from the treasure chest full of qualities that build and maintain long-term intimacy and passion. This map is a helpful tool for you and your couples to identify how far off track they have strayed, which side road they have taken and what they can do to rejoin the high road to happiness. These are the ways that one or both partners veer off the mark.

#### 1. Whine

I once heard it said that whining is anger coming out of a very small hole. I've never forgotten it. When partners whine they are basically unable to see that hard work and attention to emotional detail is what it takes to create a happy relationship. Partners who whine feel 'hard done by' whenever their spouse expects them to pull their weight. Often there is a tendency to "resign" as a default state and both partners can wander so far off the path, they completely lose sight of their treasure. Beginning to recognize what is expected of you and offering to chip in to support your partner will lead you back towards the path of happiness.

#### 2. Blame

When things go wrong for a partner who blames they will react quickly by attempting to find a way to make their spouse wrong. This is especially true once the honeymoon stage is over and negotiation over differences start to get tough. There is a lot of anger, resentment and contempt that underlies blame. Couples who blame a lot have real difficulty discussing important issues at

depth, because each wants to be “right” causing arguments to ensue quickly. When partners learn to pause, take a deep breath and get curious about the other’s side, they can begin to interrupt their blaming reactivity and head towards higher ground.

### **3. Act Confused**

This pattern speaks to the partner who doesn’t want to understand themselves or their partner enough to become a fully functioning member of the relationship. They are like the proverbial ostrich with his head in the sand. They play dumb, especially when it comes to emotional issues and things that are important to their partner. Partners who refuse to be responsible adults in their relationships or who struggle with conflict, avoid being present by ‘forgetting’ to discuss important issues or simply changing the subject whenever things get too “hot”. When a partner begins to ask good questions to seek real clarity they have turned themselves around and are heading in the right direction.

### **4. Withdraw**

The pattern is an indirect way a partner will protect himself from any perceived threat. It means retreating from conflict. A partner can withdraw by walking away in the middle of an important disagreement, hanging up the phone or giving the silent treatment and refusing to talk about what is upsetting him or her. While this is a self-protective strategy it is also an indirect way to let their partner know how ‘pissed’ they are. Learning to tolerate the tension of speaking up and expressing one’s anger in healthy ways, even if their partner disagrees will help move this couple back on track.

### **5. Resentfully Comply**

In this ineffective strategy, one or both partners agree to “go along to get along” but build up resentment. They don’t speak up and say what they really want. For some this may mean that they disregard their beliefs so much, they don’t know what they want. For others, it will mean bottling up everything inside, forfeiting what their desires, until they finally blow up or leave. Learning to stand up for yourself and speak out on issues that are important will begin to point you back in the right direction.

Any of these relational patterns will spell trouble for a couple. Helping couples to understand that these strategies are ineffective and most often, reenacting early patterns that were acquired in their family of origin. Beginning to identify blocks to better communication and connectedness is the key to their future happiness.

Until next time, I wish you much success in your work with couples.

Sincerely,

*Sue Diamond Potts, M.A.*



Sue Diamond Potts, M.A., is the Founder and Director of the Good Life Therapy Centre which focuses on helping couples and individuals create loving relationships in the aftermath of addiction and trauma.

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