

Do You Really Want a Relationship?

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By Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC

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With a divorce rate in this country that approaches 50%, and a fairly sizable percentage of marriages that aren't particularly blissful, it's difficult to avoid searching for the answer to the battle of the sexes.

Would you like to stop searching?

We've moved through the old paradigm of getting your needs met in relationships and it has proven itself to be a miserable failure. Why? Attempting to get your needs met in your relationship causes some troublesome things to happen. First, it causes you to focus mainly on your needs and not on the desires of your partner. Secondly, it sets you up for disaster because it has you believing that you deserve something that may well not be delivered.

All across this great country of ours, battles are raging between men and women: she needs to talk and connect, and he needs his space and independence. Who wins here? The answer, of course, is that both lose because of a flawed view of what a successful relationship is all about. What also happens is that both people start to blame the other for not meeting their needs.

For men who are really serious about success in their relationships, it's important to understand how blaming your partner is an enormous problem itself. It creates a bigger problem and has you convinced that you are not part of the problem. Nothing could be further from the truth. Blaming has never worked and never will. It may have you feeling justified in your position, but it will always hurt your relationship.

It's particularly important to develop the realization that your feelings can deceive you in your relationship with your partner. This can be difficult for people raised during the honor your feelings era of relationships. Your feelings tell you things like, I can't believe she could do something like that to me, or, How could she treat me so badly? These feelings are the result of your own low self-esteem and your own personal history of victimization.

While it's true that your partner may treat you in a way you don't like sometimes, it's not true that you need to react to it with strong negative feelings. These strong negative feelings are a reflection of your

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own esteem issues. They also have a way of keeping your partner engaged in the struggle with you so that you can continue to blame each other. When you are both engaged in the struggle, you'll believe that she needs to be fixed. She'll think the same of you. Nobody wins and everybody loses. This isn't very smart or effective.

What would happen for men in their important relationships if they gave up defending themselves and believing their needs needed to be met? What would happen if they worked at being kind and caring with their partners? I'll tell you what would happen. They'd have great relationships! After all, the only thing that you can do to improve a relationship is to improve you.

So stop looking over at your partner and seeing all of her flaws. Stop blaming her. She has issues just like we all do. But if you see her as a collection of flaws you'll have no chance at a successful

relationship. And it's successful relationships in life that make us truly happy.

Mark Brandenburg MA, CPCC, is a certified personal coach, speaker, and workshop leader who helps men to create balance in their lives and to immediately improve their family relationships, guaranteed! He is the author of *Fix Your Wife in 30 Days or Less* (http://www.markbrandenburg.com/e_book.htm#fix and can be reached at atmark@markbrandenburg.com or at <http://www.markbrandenburg.com>.

Can We Still Be Friends?

By Kevin B. Burk, Author of *The Relationship Handbook*

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Even when we know it's time to end a romantic relationship, we're often reluctant to let go of our partners completely. We've shared so much of our lives with our partner, it seems almost callous to simply cut them out of our lives—especially if we're ending the relationship on good terms. It's natural that we want to hold onto the loving and supportive part of the romantic relationship, and simply let go of the parts that aren't serving us. This is entirely possible: we can remain friends with our former lovers. We both need to want to build a friendship, however.

If we choose to stay friends with a former romantic partner, we will have to establish new boundaries and expectations in the relationship. The old checklists are no longer appropriate, and it may take some time to make a successful transition to the new relationship. It's best, in fact, if we do not spend any time together once we've officially ended the romantic relationship.

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A clean break is essential. We need time to separate our life from our partner's. We need to reestablish our own boundaries and our own identity. And we need to spend a little time mourning the death of the romantic relationship. It takes time for the emotional connections to adjust, and it takes time for us to gain perspective on the entire relationship.

Once we're ready to spend time with our partner again, we must recognize that any friendship that we build is a new relationship. It is not an extension or continuation of our romantic relationship. We will need to start slowly, and to build up a new level of trust. It will take some time to make sure we're using the appropriate checklists. We can't expect the same kind of support or commitment in a friendship as we did in a romantic relationship. By the same token, we may find that we could tolerate certain behavior from a lover, but that we won't accept it from a friend.

In many ways, friendships are far more demanding than romantic relationships. We look for a higher level of shared interests and compatibility with our friends than we do with our romantic partners. We may discover that our former lovers don't make the cut as friends—and there's nothing wrong with that. We have a much easier time letting friends drift out of our lives than we

do with letting go of romantic partners.

Kevin B. Burk is the author of *The Relationship Handbook: How to Understand and Improve Every Relationship in Your Life*. Visit <http://www.everyrelationship.com> for a FREE report on creating AMAZING Relationships.

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