

MAINTAIN A 'LOVE MAP'

In the previous article we talked about the success ratio of five positive interactions to one negative. This creates a climate for successful marriage. In this article we will discuss a suggestion by John Gottman, a research psychologist who suggests that married couples maintain what he calls a 'love map.'

While conducting longitudinal studies of marital satisfaction, Gottman found, not surprisingly, that marital satisfaction declined for 67 per cent of couples after the birth of the first child but for 33 per cent of couples, surprisingly, it did not. In studying the two groups it became apparent that the 33 per cent were those who continued to have a large amount of "cognitive room" for their spouse. In other words, the 33 per cent did not let the additional responsibilities of child care distract them from thinking about their husband or wife. They maintained an awareness of what was going on with their spouse (their spouse's interest, concerns, needs, etc.) after the transition to parenthood. Gottman calls this "cognitive room" the "love map." The love map is our knowledge of the current psychological world of our spouse.

The "love map" guides us towards positive interactions. It is a blueprint of our spouse's favorite books, music, movies, friends, joys, frustrations, worries, aches and pains, satisfactions, etc. The people in the 33 per cent group seemed to have a natural propensity to gather and use this kind of knowledge or "love map" in daily conversation. They also tended to know this kind of information about the worlds of their children.

Those of us who do not easily do this need to practice constructing a "love map" concerning our spouse's psychological world, and keeping it up to date. This love map will be a guide to positive interaction. For example, it might prompt a question and statement to your wife such as "How is your friend Sally? I know you are worried about her." A wife might be prompted to say, "You haven't been fishing for a long time. If you and Joe want to go, we could arrange a weekend for that." This kind of exchange prompted by the "love map" helps create the positive five to one success ratio which means so much to a successful marriage.

For Catholic married couples, awareness of each others spiritual needs is an important dimension which can increase a sense of deeper sharing and commitment and a "love map" would prompt spouses to encourage each other to grow in the practice of their faith and to live a more intentional Catholic family life. Research shows that couples who share spiritual meaning and encouragement have a very low divorce rate.

How about you, do you need to give some attention to your "love map" of your spouse's psychological world? Does it need updating? How about a date together during which you take time to update each other on your joys, frustrations, your serious and silly sides? You originally chose each other because of qualities and interests which you admired. Updating and reacquainting each other with your current world will rekindle a sense of closeness and kick the positives up a notch.

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