

BRAD & TAMI MILLER | TANDEMARRIAGE.COM

READY TO SURRENDER

POOR COMMUNICATION IN MARRIAGE
IS A BATTLE YOU CAN WIN

**FREE
ABBREVIATED
VERSION**



Abbreviated, Third Version
2020

Please allow us to introduce ourselves...

We are Brad and Tami Miller from Southern California. We have been married for over 30 years and have spent much of that time trying to figure out how to have a great marriage. For some people, having a great marriage might come easy, but not for us.

Divorce has surrounded us our entire lives, it has left it's ugly scars on both of our families, and many of our friends as well. So how do we break out of a culture of divorce and broken families? By working very hard and being intentional to do so, that's how!

We have been working on our own marriage for over 30 years and have been helping others with their marriages for most of that time as well. We have always said that there is no back-up plan for us, no Plan B, and no other option, except to stay married. And to pull that off, we needed a plan.

This book, *Ready to Surrender*, is part of our plan and contains some of the most important things we have learned over the years. Specifically, we have had to learn how to de-escalate a conflict so we could continue to communicate well, rather than allowing a conflict to escalate on its own to a point where things feel out of control. We are so happy to share our insights here and hope you learn them with less effort than we did.

Brad & Tami

P.S. This abbreviated version of Ready to Surrender does not contain a Table of Contents.

Section 1: Laying the Foundation

At one point or another, every married couple deals with poor communication that is caused by unresolved conflict or conflict that is caused by poor communication. These two intruders always barge into an otherwise great marriage at about the same time. This is because they are siblings and, unfortunately, they have always been partners in crime.

Since one of these intruders always brings the other with them, how do you know which one to get rid of first to get your marriage back on track? The answer to this question is especially easy since these two troublemakers are always together. Get rid of one of them and the other leaves as well.

Tami and I have found that good communication skills which are learned and practiced over many years will help to keep conflict to a minimum. There will still be some conflict in any marriage, but if we are able to reduce both quantity and quality (severity) of the conflict, everyone is better off.

We have also found that good conflict resolution skills aid in healthy communication, keep married partners from feeling emotionally alarmed, and contribute to an all around sense of contentment and happiness in a marriage. Can good conflict resolution skills truly accomplish all of that? We can answer with a resounding yes!

This section of this book is intended to give you the background you need to understand that conflict and poor communication go hand in hand. It will also provide an adequate foundation for making the most sense of the rest of this book. Read this section first, and you will glean the most wisdom and understanding from the concepts that are to follow.

CHAPTER ONE [abbreviated]

Do we really need to be *Ready to Surrender*?

We all need motivation to change. We need motivation to better ourselves, our futures, and more specific to our current conversation, our marriages. If you feel like you are at the end of your rope in your marriage, let that be your motivation to dig in and learn something that is beneficial, something that will improve your marriage. If, on the other hand, you want to be intentional to maintain the great thing you already have going in your marriage, let *that* be your motivation.

We have titled this book *Ready to Surrender: Poor Communication in Marriage is a Battle You Can Win* because sooner or later, most of us will arrive at that place where we just want to give up. We want to surrender and stop the arguing and fighting. This can be the beginning of change for you and your marriage, if you seize the opportunity!

Every married couple will go through at least one extremely rough patch together. Most couples will see many more rough patches than just this one. When you learn how to make it through a rough patch, you come out together, stronger than ever.

Can't we just learn *not* to fight?

Over the years, Tami and I have been able to help many couples learn to resolve conflict better. Often, this has occurred while doing premarital counseling with them. We just love weddings and we love doing premarital counseling. It is such a happy and fun time for the couple, and it's an opportunity for Tami and I to pour into that couple some of the wisdom we have learned in our 35+ years together.

Typically, one of the first things we will tell a premarital couple is that we want to teach them how to *fight fair*. This involves using skills that will actually help them *resolve* their differences without leaving a wake of damage behind them. To be fair, we intentionally use the phrase, *fight fair* to be a bit on the provocative side and get their attention. Pretty early on, it becomes clear to all involved that we are really promoting healthy *conflict resolution* in hopes of *avoiding* a fight altogether. Additionally, conflict, handled well, promotes better communication in marriage.

When we brought up this topic with one particular couple, they responded by saying, “Oh, we don’t ever fight so we won’t need to go over that part.” Tami and I softened the language a bit and explained to them that we actually wanted to teach them about conflict resolution. Furthermore, we explained that this was a skill and set of tools that every couple would need at some point in their relationship together. Every single couple! Undeterred, they replied, “We have never had a disagreement and we never will.” We were stunned into silence for a moment because we know this is just not possible.

While this couple was beautifully idealistic in their resolve, they were also a bit naive. You see, it is just not possible to take two people from different upbringings, different families, and different pasts and put them in a committed relationship while expecting no conflict ever. If you have been married for more than a year, you already know this to be true. So, the question is not *if* couples will argue, the question is – *When* they do argue, will they have the ability to resolve conflict well? If you can learn to resolve conflict well, you will have a happy, loving marriage that will truly last a lifetime!

Unfortunately, the opposite is true as well. If you do not learn to resolve conflict, you will erode the quality of your relationship in such small steps that you will never see the breakdown of your marriage coming. It would be like driving your car for years and never providing maintenance of any kind. Various parts of your car would be slowly breaking down and wearing out until one day, your car blows up and is almost beyond repair. It doesn't have to be this way for your car, or your marriage!

Is it enough to merely learn the conflict resolution tips provided in this book?

In a word, no. When we talk about marriage conflict, there are the behaviors that you and your spouse will exhibit on the outside (like harsh words, poor communication, or stonewalling), and there are the underlying issues (triggers) beneath those behaviors. In this book, we will talk mostly about those outside behaviors and how to improve them. While this does open the door to dealing with the deeper issues, in this book we will just scratch the surface in regards to those underlying issues.

It is our hope that in learning how to de-escalate a conflict by controlling your *behaviors*, you will have the emotional margin needed to take the next step, and dig deeper. This is how issues are resolved once and for all. This is how we keep from having the same fights over and over. Lastly, this is how we get communication in marriage back on track.

Remember that de-escalating a conflict is the first step, and understanding the emotions beneath our actions is the second step. *Ready to Surrender* is only the first step in that process, but it is an important one.

What do we all really want?

We all want fewer conflicts in marriage. If you have already had too many conflicts in your marriage, or simply want to be prepared to resolve a conflict well when you eventually do, we have written this book for you to help you do just that. And even though I (Brad) am doing all of the typing and communicating with you, Tami and I have honed these principles over many years and many, many long walks together. As a point of clarification, whenever I use the word “we,” I am using that word to refer to Tami and I unless otherwise stated. Either way, you will find a great deal of time-tested and practical advice in this book.

Additionally, you need to know that contentment in marriage is not due to the absence of problems, but the presence of mutual solutions. Every marriage will have its share of challenges. The key to a great marriage is learning how to work through these challenges together.

How to make the best use of this book.

Think of this book as more of a reference guide or cheat sheet, especially chapters 3, 4, and 5. It is not meant to be an exhaustive guide on the subjects of communication and conflict resolution, there are many great writers who have already done that. This book, on the other hand, is intended to be used primarily for quick reference and as a reminder of larger concepts. We believe that adding this book to your happy-marriage toolbox will give you a brand new tool to use and in a brand new way.

The information in this book will be most helpful if you take the time to wrap your head around the principles

in it *before* you have an argument. To do this, you need to have a plan.

If you don't have a plan for how to handle conflict when it occurs, you will soon grow tired of the arguing, poor communication, and relational distance that follows.

The fewer arguments you can have, the better, right? We agree. It means less damage done and less working so hard to fix things. Nonetheless, some of the information here will be especially poignant *after* you have an argument. You will be able to look back and see where old, destructive patterns have yet to be changed for the benefit of your relationship. Don't give up or get discouraged. After all, Rome was not built in a day. Creating new habits for you and your marriage is worth NOT giving up on. Tami always says it's better to fight *for* your spouse and not *with* them. Wouldn't you agree?

Lastly, *please* do take the time to talk with your spouse about the helpful insights in this book. Doing so will only serve to bring you both closer to being on the same page. This also allows for a little more grace when, not if, you mess up. You *will* mess up! In other words, if your spouse knows that you are sincerely working on better ways to resolve your conflicts with them, they will be more likely to see your baby steps of progress and show you some grace when you revert to your old habits from time to time.

We have heard many encouraging stories from couples just like you that have talked about the ideas in this book *together*. When you talk about these ideas together, it fosters a spirit of collaboration between the

two of you that will serve as a constant reminder that you are on the same team. #TeamUs

Also, we want to remind you that the full unabbreviated version is a unique kind of book and as such we have organized it in a unique way. There are three primary chapters containing the concepts you must learn to master to keep your disagreements from turning into arguments, then into fights. By the way, all of this results in terrible communication between spouses. These chapters are 3, 4, and 5. These chapters will help you learn how to conduct yourself before an argument (in hopes of not escalating), during an argument, and after an argument. These are the chapters you will likely read over and over again until the concepts there become second nature for you.

Each of these chapters contains “tips” which are really nuggets of conflict resolution wisdom. Reading these concise book chapters entirely in one sitting may not be the best way to digest this new information, since each tip represents a larger concept. You may need some time to wrap your head around these concepts. We suggest reading those chapters in small doses, maybe just one tip or two per day, for most people.

Be deliberate to process each tip (and the larger concept) and picture the ways that it will apply to you and your spouse. Picture yourself utilizing the new tip during your next conflict with your spouse. Furthermore, try writing one of the tips out on a sticky note and put it somewhere where you will see it often. This will serve as a great reinforcement of what you are learning. Memorize it if you can, then move on to another tip or two the following day.

In this way, you will be allowing these tips to become a part of who you are and will be less likely to revert back to old habits in the heat of the moment. You can do this and we are here to help you.

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CHAPTER TWO [abbreviated]

Myths About Communication and Conflict-Resolution in Marriage.

MYTH #1

Most Couples Think They Merely Struggle With Communication at Times. Most of Them are Wrong.

Tami and I operate a group counseling practice in Southern California. We are known throughout the area for providing the best and most practical marriage counseling around. We love this reputation. With about ten licensed counselors and registered interns on our staff, we collectively see about 100 clients each and every week. All of this gives us some incredible insight into the kinds of things that most couples struggle with. Furthermore, we know what it takes to get these couples back on track when needed.

The majority of couples we see tell us that they struggle with good communication. This is either their sole marital challenge, or it is on the top of the list of marriage challenges that a particular couple brings with them. Most couples will perceive some communication challenges at some point in their relationship. And most couples will hit their first communication roadblock by the time they have been married just five years.

For argument's sake, let's say we are talking about a married couple that publicly proclaimed their love for each other and took wedding vows within the last five years. What change has occurred for this couple that is tripping up their once healthy communication? Over time, do they merely lose their ability to communicate well? Or is there something deeper, some larger concept, in play here that will serve their marriage and your marriage well if the time is taken to learn it?

There are several things in play here. Let's break them down together. In many ways, the thing that happens to couples who say they struggle with communication is – life. Life is stressful and challenging. Anyone who has been on their own for a few years knows that adulting is hard. There are many responsibilities to keep, never-ending bills to pay, and new boundaries to enforce. When we first get married, these adulting challenges are a welcomed part of the package you get when you choose to spend your life with another. These challenges often seem insignificant when compared to the benefits of sharing your entire life with that one special person. But as life marches on, these problems can weigh heavier and heavier. These stumbling blocks and the stress that comes with them will begin to erode your good communication skills and your patience as well.

Also, there is another issue we have to factor into this equation as well. That is the fact that early love and infatuation can only be sustained by most people for about two years. When you are in the early stages of love, your brain produces more of the feel-good chemicals that we have all enjoyed while we in a new relationship. This love cocktail is a mix of oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, and norepinephrine. These chemicals all play a part in new lovers being convinced that the sky is bluer, the birds sing better, and life is more wonderful than ever before.

Unfortunately, these effects will wear off. This is because your brain can only produce and sustain the high levels of oxytocin and other love-inducing chemicals for a limited time, according to researcher and author Dr. John Gottman and others (1). Furthermore, when these chemicals do start to wear off,

we will often begin to wonder what is wrong with our relationship.

Let's put all of this together. Several years into a marriage, we find that these love-induced chemicals have run their course. This is also when the responsibilities of life and the stress that comes with them have started to wear us down and we mistakenly begin to question if we married the right person since something feels wrong. Next, we will lose the profound patience we once had with our spouse—we have experienced this in our relationship and you will too at some point. The final step in this downward relational spiral is when you both begin to argue more as compromise and understanding between the two of you have reached a low level that you would have denied being possible just a few years earlier.

Let us illustrate this with a math equation:
Love drugs wearing off + life and it's challenges =
poorer communication + increased marital conflict.

Therefore, the cause of all of this marital turmoil is not poor communication, rather poor communication is a byproduct of your love drugs wearing off coupled with life and it's challenges. Since you cannot return to your former state of new-lovers euphoria, what else can you do? The answer is that you can learn new and better ways to handle conflict. This is part of maturing together as a couple. Conflict is straightforward enough to work through—if you have some solid and time-tested conflict resolution skills to help you.

One of the biggest hurdles that couples must overcome is that they often misunderstand that they are actually struggling with conflict-resolution because they mislabel it as “poor communication.” Furthermore,

calling conflict-resolution the wrong thing (poor communication) makes it more challenging to find helpful solutions. In other words, if the issue is merely one of poor communication, we may merely instruct ourselves (or others in this situation) to talk more often and try to communicate better. This rarely solves the issue at hand since the issue is not truly poor communication, but a need to resolve conflict better.

By the way, conflict in marriage is not a problem; the inability to resolve conflict well is the problem. Tami and I will maintain that any conflict handled well, brings the opportunity for deeper understanding and intimacy between spouses. But how do you get there? What you and your spouse truly need is better conflict-resolution skills.

Let us ask you this: Did you ever see your parents work out conflict in loving and healthy ways? Since some of us have parents who divorced while we were still children, the answer is no. Some would say that they never saw their parents argue or fight. Trust us, they did. But if you never saw these issues worked out, the answer is no again. And for some, you witnessed conflict, but the aftermath was not healthy. If this is your recollection, you never learned anything beneficial from this scenario either. Another no.

Now that we have defined our terms and called poor communication what it actually is, which is “poor conflict-resolution,” you are on the same page with us. Furthermore, we can and will teach you some very useful and time-tested conflict-resolution skills in this book. As you learn to recognize the rough edges in your relationship as struggles with conflict-resolution, you will agree that this is the heart of the issue we all struggle with in our marriages.

Please don't forget that conflict handled well, leads to greater intimacy in marriage. Hasn't greater intimacy been our goal and our hope all along? Yes, we think so as well. And we are going to show you how it's done.

MYTH #4

There Is Only One Perfect Person for Me and I Must Have Married the Wrong Person.

At some point, the majority of husbands and wives will wonder if they married the wrong person.

There is so much wrong with this line of thinking. We are not saying there is something wrong with you, by the way, since this kind of thinking is so pervasive in our culture. This unhealthy logic will affect us all. So then, the job falls to us to teach you *why* this mindset is so flawed.

This flawed thinking is based on the notion that there is one, and only one, perfect person for you on this planet. Only one! Remember that there are approximately 7.5 billion people on the planet. This "finding a needle in a haystack," kind of mentality tricks us into believing that when, not if, something *feels* wrong in our marriage, we must have chosen poorly. We must have chosen the wrong one.

This line of thinking is romanticized to a fault. Don't get me wrong since I would consider myself a hopeless romantic. When we love the *idea* of something that is not true and cannot be true, we leave the door open for doubt and lies to invade our thoughts and our current relationship. There will come a time when you are struggling in your marriage because it happens in every marriage. Wondering if you made a mistake by not

waiting for “the one” will only make matters worse. Much worse.

Think about this. What if “the one” lives in another country? How will you find them? What if they speak another language? How will you communicate with them? And what if *they* mistakenly married the wrong person (they didn’t wait for you)? Now what?!

I often read or hear statements from others that clearly communicate their own, and different, opinions on this matter. They say things such as; “If only I had waited for the right one, then I wouldn’t be in this situation.” Or, “When you are with that one person you are supposed to be with, you will know it without a doubt.” Then, there is this one, “Because I am waiting for my true soulmate, we will never have issues like *that couple*.”

Do you see the subtle thinking here that there is only one person who is the perfect match for a lifetime of marital bliss? By the way, many of the people I have known who espouse this mentality of “the one” are either divorced or very unhappy. Think about that.

Therefore, what is a better way to think about finding and marrying the best person for you that does not feel like you are trying to find one needle in a very large haystack? Here you go.

You should be looking for a lifelong partner that is full of character, high morals, and wisdom because these are the kinds of traits you can build a lifelong relationship around. Get to know this person and become friends. If friendship confirms their character, then start dating them and see if you can fall in love with them. Once you choose to marry that person, YOU must then become the person you want to be

married to. In other words, you must do your best to become a person full of character, high morals, and wisdom. Once you focus on *becoming* the right person, you will stop wondering if you married “the one.”

MYTH #6

Most Couples Think They Can Avoid Conflict and Communication Problems.

I have to start here by letting you know that Tami and I teach the concepts in this book often. We have honed them over the years in our own marriage. We use them in our group counseling practice to teach better conflict-resolution skills to others. We write about them too. All of this *does not* mean we will never experience conflict of our own—unfortunately. This simply means that none of us can adopt the “it will never happen to us” mindset.

Every couple is destined to experience disagreements, arguments, and fights over the course of their relationship. Yes, every couple. We often collectively refer to these situations as “conflict.” The goal during any conflict is to de-escalate (lower the intensity of the conflict), understand each other better, and find a compromise. This is easier said than done. Nonetheless, with a little intentionality and practice, de-escalating a conflict can be mastered.

A typical conflict occurs when one or both of you gets emotionally ramped up (escalated) over some misunderstanding, difference, or disagreement. When you get ramped up enough, you will enter a physiological state commonly referred to as “fight or flight.” When this occurs, you will notice that your heart starts pounding, you will often raise your voice, and you will begin to lose control over the things you

say and do. Keep in mind that fight or flight is the reason this all happens, but should not be thought of as an excuse when it does. Each one of us must learn to take responsibility for our own behavior, both what we do and don't do.

Fight or flight is a response that is intended to signal to us that we are in danger, and further, to help us get out of danger. So, learning to de-escalate our marriage conflicts is a way to avoid triggering a fight or flight response within us. A fight or flight response works well for getting you out of danger, like when a grizzly bear is chasing you, but is rarely helpful for resolving conflict in your marriage.

Let us give you a painfully honest example from our own marriage. You already know that we teach conflict resolution skills often. It's part of what we do in our work with couples. Furthermore, you are holding in your hands the very book we wrote on this subject. Once you are at the level of expertise that you can write a book on a subject, it means that you have wholly overcome that issue, right? Further, when someone like Brene Brown writes about shame (in her book, *Rising Strong*), it means that shame will never again be an issue for her, right? You can already see where this is going.

Tami and I have had a pretty rough year due to financial strains, business pressures, and loss of loved ones. If that weren't enough, I recently had a few very taxing weeks brought on by several looming deadlines. Keep in mind that these are some of the *reasons* that Tami and I had the conflict I am about to share with you, but they are not *excuses*. An excuse says, "It's not my fault," where a reason says, "Now that I know what

happened or why it happened, I can learn from it." We hope you see the difference because it's huge!

Anyway, Tami and I were very much looking forward to a quiet weekend together. We love to have the time and headroom to dream, plan, and connect. Also, Tami and I were using some of that time to finish up some articles that we had been writing together. I had been working too hard and too long and was feeling pretty stressed. This should have been my own red flag, but I ignored it. I wanted to keep pushing through and asked Tami to read through some edits I had made. Tami did not care for some of the changes I had made. She felt that I had missed capturing some of what we had decided to write together. For me, this pushed me over the edge. I didn't have much margin for problem-solving to begin with and should have recognized that within myself. Instead, as I neared fight or flight, I got very defensive, very frustrated, and I snapped at Tami. Our relaxing weekend together just incurred a huge wrinkle and it was my fault. In her words, I popped her balloon.

It took me about an hour to calm myself down enough to see the monster I had become in that moment. Regret is a harsh teacher and I felt downright awful. Keep in mind that this was not a physical altercation in any way, just some harsh and defensive words from me that Tami did not deserve. Since harsh words are not typical for us, it made the whole ordeal feel that much worse for me.

The apology. Tami and I also teach that a proper apology must be practiced and mastered in a marriage. You will need to apologize at some point, and it needs to be the kind of apology your spouse needs to hear, not the kind you want to give. So, while Tami was out

running some errands later that same day, I had time to practice my apology.

Once she returned home, I met her at the door with a pretty darn good apology, but I could tell it was either not the kind she needed, or she merely needed more time. I continued to pursue her throughout that day and apologized several more times. Whenever we are in conflict, we always assure each other that we are going to be ok, and this time was no different. Tami told me that she just needed a little more time to process what had happened and let her guard down after the balloon popping incident. This gave me an idea, a pretty good one too. I asked Tami right then and there if she would drive down to the grocery store with me. The look on her face at that moment told me that she did not agree with my timing for a grocery store run. I looked her in the eyes, deeply and sincerely, and said, "I'm so sorry for popping your balloon. Come with me to the store so I can get you another one!" Strangely enough, this was exactly the apology that she needed.

In marriage, if we can learn not to pop each other's balloons, we are doing very well. But most mere mortals (superheroes are excluded here) will make a mistake similar to mine at some point. Further, you must be ready to own and fix your mistakes.

Here's your takeaway from my incident; learn to recognize when you or your spouse is starting to escalate, learn how to de-escalate, and learn how to apologize well.

For now, I will give myself a little grace and make another run to the grocery store in the near future. One never knows when I might need to replace another balloon.

Section 2: Doing the Work

*W*e live in a world that drives us toward a perceived need for instant gratification. Almost anything and everything we want is at our fingertips. Do you need a phone number? That phone number no longer exists solely in the little black address book on your desk at home. Instead, that number is always on that electronic device in your purse or pocket whenever the need for that number arises. Do you need to call that same phone number? There's a phone in your purse or pocket too.

What about when you need the latest sports stats or you need to buy new windshield wiper blades for your car? Most of us can visit a website on our phones or open an app on our smartphones that will allow us to do both—in under a minute! Do you need those wiper blades shipped to your residence? Again, no problem. Most retailers can deliver your package in just a day or two. Or, you may even have the option to select and purchase an item while using your phone, and have it ready for pickup at your neighborhood store in a matter of hours.

Tami and I are both big fans of technology, so don't get me wrong on this point. The problem is not with technology, rather it is with the way technology drives us toward only being satisfied with quick answers and rapid solutions.

How many times have you sought out some particular information, and if you can't find what you need in about a minute, you give up and tell yourself it's not

worth that much trouble. Your marriage needs to be different. Your marriage must be worth the trouble.

Quick and easy answers to marriage problems are a lot like Bigfoot, the legendary Sasquatch of the north, they are rare and extremely difficult to find.

What we are proposing in this book, as well as in all of our work with couples, is that you must “do the work.” You will have to learn to dig in, understand the issues, then learn how to work through those issues. There will not be any quick answers or easy fixes.

There is an old cliché that says,

“Nothing worth having comes easy.”

We hope you will agree that this applies to your marriage as well. If you want a great marriage, you have to do the work—and that work starts in the next chapter.

Do not deceive yourself into thinking you can merely read the words on these pages and instantly have a better marriage. You must, on the other hand, comprehend these concepts. Then, you will need to see how these concepts can be applied in your marriage. Lastly, you must repeat what you will learn here as often as needed. For most couples, this means you need to repeat these habits daily!

Do the work, and you will find that your marriage truly is everything you always dreamed it would be!

CHAPTER THREE

Learn To Be Proactive: What To Do Before An Argument.

Tip #1 [These tips are all numbered sequentially to make them easier to reference later.]

Establish some ground rules for fighting fair.

A big part of resolving conflict happens *before* the conflict actually occurs. If you plan well, you can resolve conflict easily when it happens, or even avoid it in the first place.

When you establish ground rules, this is what it looks like. You say to your spouse,

“I think it’s really important that we resolve conflict well, so I thought we could come up with some ground rules that will help us navigate conflict better.”

You could plan a picnic at the park to do this, or coffee at a quiet coffee shop, or just some stress free time when the kids are asleep. Once the appropriate time has come, feel free to lead off with a confession. You could say, “I know that when I _____, it really hurts you. So our first ground rule should be, we don’t _____ to each other.” These could be things such as: we don’t call each other names, we don’t compare each other to family members we don’t like, we don’t use physical violence or harsh language (define what this is for the two of you), or we DO allow 20 minute time-outs, etc. These should all be things that you can agree on. Write them down together because they really are *that* important.

If the wisdom and benefit of this tip is not already obvious, please allow me to point out just a few of the advantages of establishing a list of ground rules to you and your spouse.

1. These rules are somewhat self-policing. In other words, since you agreed on them together, you won't have to say to your spouse, "You are not supposed to call me names and you just did," because they will already know it and feel awful about it.
2. Taking the time to proactively do this together is a very loving thing to do.
3. Working through a list of ground rules creates an emotional or relational safe space for the two of you.
4. Doing this builds a better sense of teamwork in your marriage.
5. Your list can (and should) be updated at any time.

Are you wondering what some of the ground rules are that Tami and I live by? Well, we don't ever say the "D word" (divorce) in an argument. As basic as this rule sounds, it's all too easy for an argument to get heated and have one of you saying something like, "Well if things are really that awful for you, why don't you just divorce me?!" Tami and I have trained ourselves well not to use the D word. When we do argue, it's never even a temptation because *not* using the D word has become the way we do things. Next, we promised never to leave the house mad. We have promised not to use any kind of physical violence or threats whatsoever. We also promised never to sleep apart when we are mad.

Now it's your turn. You should be able to come up with half a dozen or more ground rules that fit your marriage and your personalities.

Tip #3

Accept your spouse's flaws.

After reading tip #2 above, some of you will be tempted to argue your unique case. (Your case is really NOT unique, trust us, but we will assume it is for now). You will say, "But Brad and Tami, you don't understand my situation. You see, my spouse has a particular flaw since they are/are not very _____." Yeah, yeah, we hear you. We now realize that your spouse has some flaws—and so do you.

Before you get mad at us for saying that you have flaws, take a deep breath and let that thought soak in for a minute. Do you have some flaws? Or, are you completely perfect? If you answered "no" and "yes" respectively to the last 2 questions, this book cannot help you. In fact, I'm not sure what can. But the rest of us can keep reading. You see, we all have flaws. EVERY. SINGLE. ONE OF US. I do. Tami does. You do. And so does your spouse.

Does your spouse put up with your flaws? Do they put up with some of them? They most likely do. Then why is it so hard for you to put up with (or even accept) their flaws?

I see it this way, every time I am confronted with one of Tami's flaws (something that bugs me, or is quirky, or just plain obnoxious), I tell myself this, "For every flaw of Tami's, I am sure I have *at least* one flaw of my own that she puts up with." This little bit of self-talk puts things back into perspective for me and is a solid reality check!

Sometimes fighting for your marriage will mean overlooking small annoyances or offenses.

Lastly, don't make the mistake of thinking, "Once my spouse starts putting up with my flaws, then I will do the same." This is very immature thinking (sorry, but it is) and will cause you a great deal of grief. The more mature spouse will usually forgive first and act lovingly first. Be that person!

Learn to graciously accept your spouse's flaws.

Tip #6

At times, your spouse will not meet your expectations, and the problem is usually your unreasonable level of expectation.

There are two big problems with my expectations of Tami. The first problem is that my expectations are unrealistic. The second is that she does not know about them because I have not told her. Ouch!

My expectations are going to cause conflict in my marriage. Furthermore, *your* expectations *will* cause conflict in *your* marriage. These are both true statements!

We all must learn how to deal with these little buggers called expectations. Let me start with the first (and most painful) problem with my expectations, the fact that they are unrealistic.

Unrealistic expectations in marriage are essentially shifting the responsibility for doing something (taking action) from myself to my spouse.

Ouch again!

Let me give you an example of how this works for us. I like to read and I like to write as well. These moments for me are times to get lost in my thoughts. These are times when I prefer a quiet place to work various things out that have been in my head, or on my heart. This creates a problem because our home office, where I prefer to read and write, is right next to our bedroom, where Tami is often getting ready for her day.

When Tami is getting ready, that is *her* time to get lost in *her* thoughts, as she ponders everything from politics to business plans. And guess who she wants to talk to about politics and business plans? That's right, me.

So, when I think I am going to have some quiet time to focus on what's in front of me, Tami will often pop in to ask me questions, to ask my opinion, or just to share her opinions and connect with me. Honestly, there are times when this drives me crazy! Do you know why?

The reason these interruptions drive me crazy is because I allow myself to have the expectation that Tami will be having her own quiet time while I am having mine. This is completely unrealistic!

Furthermore, these are my own silent rules (aka, expectations) that Tami should know about, right? Wrong again. How can she know about these expectations (my own rules) if I don't tell her? It would be better if I simply let her know once in a while when I really needed some quiet time. I could simply ask, "Hey, I need to work on our book or magazine article for a bit, do you mind if I close the door so I can stay focused?" So easy, right?

So, the other problem with expectations is that your spouse rarely knows you have them – unless you tell them. We don't usually verbalize our expectations of *our spouse – to our spouse*. This is why they are such a huge problem.

Side Note: I cannot use the fact that I need some quiet time once in a while as an excuse to avoid dealing with life or connecting with my spouse. This would cause an even bigger problem. In fact, this would cause MANY problems!

In summary, expectations that you have of your spouse are usually not communicated well, or at all, and are unrealistic. Avoid these kinds of expectations in the same way you would avoid a drunken sailor on a narrow pier. Great word picture, right?

Tip #8

Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

In St. Francis of Assisi's famous "Prayer of St. Francis" he says the following:

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,
as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive.

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

Amen. [italics mine]

Very wise words. We all want to be understood, but we cannot expect anyone to take the time to understand us, until we have given them the time and attention it will take for us to understand them first.

With this in mind, Tami and I have used something we simply call “the repeat back rule.” Here’s how it works.

The Repeat Back Rule

Tami might say to me, “When we are talking, I feel like you are someplace else and not really engaged in the conversation.” Using the repeat back rule, I would try to understand what was being said by Tami, and repeat it back to her in my own words. It would probably sound something like this: “What I hear you saying is that I am not paying attention and giving you the consideration your deserve.”

At this point, Tami could either clarify her message if I am off a bit or simply say, “Exactly!” Either way, I have made the effort to understand her first, which will inform and influence anything I might say to her next. In other words, we are already getting closer to understanding each other and being on the same page. We are already de-escalating this situation!

Healthy communication will always hinge on mutual understanding. Seek to understand not just what your spouse is saying but also why they're saying it. This will only add to your own understanding.

Lastly, you don’t always have to wait for the other person (your spouse) to initiate the repeat back rule. If, at any time, you sense something has gone off track in your conversation, you might simply ask, “What did you hear me saying to you?” Pure gold.

Tip #9

Stop trying to change your spouse.

As much as you would like to think you can change your spouse, you really can’t. If you don’t believe me,

just ask anyone who has been married for a while and tried in vain to change their spouse in various ways. This can feel like trying to tighten a screw with a hammer; it's simply not going to work.

What are the kinds of changes we are talking about here? We are talking about fundamental changes in who your spouse is. Have they always been a messy person? You can't change that. Have they always been logical and exceedingly articulate in their conversation? You can't change that. Have you become a committed believer in Jesus Christ and they are not? You can't change that either. To be clear, *your spouse can change if they so desire*, but you cannot force them to change.

Furthermore, you can *inspire your spouse toward change*, but this is something completely different. When we are trying to change our spouse, it is because we want them to be different for the sake of things being easier, or more convenient for us. Let's say that one again:

When we are trying to change our spouse, it is because we want them to be different for the sake of things being easier or more convenient for us.

Be honest with yourself on this one.

Instead of trying to change them (or simply *wishing* they would change), inspire your spouse toward healthy changes by *being* the kind of person that *you* would want to marry! Once these kinds of changes begin to happen in your spouse, they may or may not be what you had in mind when you were trying to change them yourself. You need to be ok with that.

While inspiring our spouses toward change is important, it is really a by-product of us working hard to change ourselves first. Remember that it always starts with you. Please let that one sink in a bit before moving on. Always make positive changes in yourself first, then try to inspire others through your own positive changes.

Here is the take away from this. You have complete control over changing you and you should try to change yourself for the better any time you can. When it comes to your spouse, you should be the “wind beneath their wings” and inspire them to be the best they can be, but *expecting* them to change or even trying to *force* changes usually ends poorly.

It is ok to want your spouse to be the best version of themselves, but expecting them to conform to your idea of change is simply going too far.

Tip #11

Physical intimacy smooths out many rough edges in a marriage.

Many guys will read that title as justification for non-stop sex, but there is so much more to this. Please slow down (both husbands and wives) and try to understand how important selfless physical intimacy is to your marriage.

Physical intimacy within a marriage serves to bond a husband and wife together in ways that nothing else can. It helps spouses to connect, not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually as well. It is a mini-vacation when your finances will not allow a maxi-vacation. Handled correctly and selflessly, it is the relational glue that keeps you from falling apart when so much around you seems to be doing just that. Unfortunately, when

handled selfishly, sex will leave one or both of you feeling unsatisfied, used, and bitter.

If you want a good marriage, or even a great one, you need to understand this issue of healthy physical intimacy. And you need to understand it well.

Healthy physical intimacy is not about you getting *your* needs met, rather it is about serving your spouse in a deep and intimate way that only you know how to do. Healthy physical intimacy is an art form that is honed over the lifetime of each husband and wife together. It is a journey, not a destination. It is an answer to this question you should be asking your spouse, "How can I serve you?" Are you getting any of this?

Let's start at square one. Sexual intimacy in a healthy marriage, and the emotional intimacy that goes with it, is vital. This means that any kind of romance and flirting should be thought of as foreplay, since it will *eventually* lead to the meaningful and bonding type of physical intimacy God intended for a healthy marriage. It does not have to lead to physical intimacy (or sex) now, or in 10 minutes, or even today. In fact, thinking of the words *flirting* and *foreplay* together will be helpful since both acts should always be part of our daily marriage routine. And did you notice that we just used the words *routine*, *flirting* and *foreplay* in the same sentence? While we often start to think of routine in marriage as getting stuck in a rut, routine in marriage should be those healthy things (like flirting and foreplay) that you are intentional to keep as part of your regular marriage habits.

So, dancing in the kitchen while making dinner: foreplay. A man lovingly opening doors for his wife: foreplay. Rubbing your spouse's feet after a long and

challenging day (with no expectation for sex): foreplay. A wife flirting with her husband in a playful and sexy fashion: foreplay. A long and intentional gaze into your spouse's eyes where he/she knows what you are saying without uttering a word: foreplay.

Furthermore, every time a man opens a door for his wife, he should not be expecting that day to culminate in physical intimacy. Instead, that act of love and kindness may lead to a day down the road where they are both overflowing with love and affection for one another. That is the goal.

Husbands:

For men, this means we must continue to pursue our wives. To flirt with them, love them, and serve them daily and not just when we are "feeling it."

This means that flirting and foreplay are near daily activities that we look forward to. To accomplish this means we have to rethink our prior understanding of foreplay. Men must stop thinking of foreplay as a step to hurry through on our way to sex, and instead realize that foreplay is a vital part of what makes sex so great in the first place. Furthermore, it is the foreplay and flirting that makes our wives feel beautiful, cherished, desired and safe.

Men who choose to only flirt with their wives when they are moving toward having sex are training their wives to rebuff their flirting if she is not *already* in the mood. And trust us, she is not likely to be already in the mood. This is because men and women are hard-wired differently.

For example, women are hard-wired to multi-task and they typically do so much better than men. This means

that when men are thinking about sex only, she may be thinking about sex a little – but is also thinking about the bills, the laundry, that dead spot out in the yard, what to make for Christmas dinner (which is six months away), what color to paint the hallway, and so much more.

How does she do it? If you ask most women about this ability to multi-task, they will tell you that this ability is both an incredible talent and a curse. Nonetheless, this is how her brain is hard-wired. Ask her about it and you will see.

Men, on the other hand, are wired for focusing on a single task at a time. This means when men are paying bills (or something equally disdainful) and their pretty wife happens to walk past them, that man's mind will quickly shift to her beauty and procreating with her. And this is now ALL that he can think about. Women, with their multitasking minds, are completely different in this regard.

Men must learn that flirting and foreplay will not result in sex every time, but it *will* result in your wife feeling loved, and desired, and valued. Flirt with your wife without expectation and love her without reservation. Got it? You *will* become sexually frustrated when you focus on what your wife is not doing for you, instead of focusing on what you *should be* doing for her.

Wives:

For women, this means that you can flirt with us because we love it when you do. In fact, if you want your man to believe he can slay any dragon that comes his way, just flirt with him often.

Again, this does not mean that every flirtatious act will indeed result in sex, but sometimes it's nice when it does. It also means that physical intimacy is not a bargaining chip to be doled out when you are convinced that your husband *deserves* it and withheld when you think he doesn't.

Physical intimacy is intended to foster unity and oneness in a marriage. Thought of correctly, it is actually more emotional and spiritual than it is physical. Do you think this kind of unity and oneness will have any positive effect with regard to conflict resolution in your marriage? A million times, YES!

There will may of questions on this point (and maybe even another book) and many misunderstandings as well, but try your best to comprehend what is here and then email us if/when you need more clarification.

Physical intimacy is a gift to be given and is a gift when it is received. Learn to enjoy them both.



Chapter Three Summary:

We love that you are being intentional to learn some new and better ways to prevent conflict in your marriage. The more conflicts you can keep from escalating out of control, the better.

There are many things you can work on to keep the rough edges from taking over your marriage. Tami and I often say,

“In marriage you will either wear each other out or break each other in, and breaking each other in is greatly preferred!”

Remember that none of this is about *avoiding* conflict, rather it is about working proactively to prevent things in your relationship from getting out of balance (or out of control) in the first place. Read through this first section from time to time to see where you have room for improvement.

When we have room for improvement, but do nothing toward improving, *THAT* is the real tragedy. I always say, “Everyone has issues, some people deal with them.” Be the person that deals with your issues. Rest assured, Tami and I are working to do the same.

CHAPTER FOUR

Learn To Manage Yourself: What To Do During An Argument.

NOTE: If you also purchased the Conflict De-Escalation Flowchart (it was also included in the ebook bundle), that flowchart follows this section closely. Since it is most challenging to remember good communication and conflict resolution skills *during* a conflict, we have made this extra tool available to help us all.

Tip #13

Learn to listen!

Learning to listen well is easier said than done. It is easy to **hear** your spouse, especially when they are raising their voice. On the other hand, if you desire to **listen** to your spouse, you must be intentional. You must give them your undivided attention.

When your spouse is talking to you, this means you must NOT initially try to defend yourself against each thing they say. Furthermore, you must NOT be so busy thinking about the next point *you* need to make that you miss what your spouse is so desperately trying to communicate to you.

When we take the time to actually listen to our spouse, we are affirming them in the most validating kind of way. We are essentially saying, "You matter to me enough for me to listen to what you are saying. You are *valuable* to me!"

By the way, *not* learning to listen will escalate your conflict and make you feel like you are trapped on a sinking ship. As you take your last breath, you will

wonder what you could have done differently to save your own life. The answer: LISTEN!

Tip #15

Learn to keep your emotions from controlling your behavior.

This is easier said than done, but it can be accomplished. Your emotions will cause you much regret if you allow them to control you. Your emotions have the ability to control your words and your actions toward others, and especially toward your spouse.

Every person struggles with one or more emotions and the fallout from letting those emotions control their behaviors. You struggle here too. There is not enough space in this book to go into the details of *how* to control your emotions, but you must learn to control them nonetheless. You may struggle with anger, depression, shame, fear, or many other emotions. You need to know that learning how to keep these emotions from controlling you is doable. Many others have tamed this beast and so can you.

*If you cannot control your own **emotions**, you will feel the need to control the other person's **behavior**. And since you cannot really control another person's behavior, this rarely turns out well.*

For example, if you are angry, this will cause your spouse to feel unsafe in that moment as they try to determine if you are losing control over yourself or not. Learning to keep your emotions from controlling you will take some time. It may be several months, or even years, before you and your spouse can look back and celebrate how far you've come. Don't give up on this one. You must remind yourself that this is a marathon and not a sprint!

Remember that the goal in any conflict is to de-escalate that conflict. In other words, to bring the level of conflict down a notch or two. Furthermore, when you can de-escalate a conflict, your communication will improve as well.

Uncontrolled emotions will have the opposite effect and will escalate your conflicts until they are eventually out of control and you feel like you have lost the ability to communicate at all. You don't want to feel the kind of shame and regret that follows this kind of behavior from you. You can either work hard to keep your emotions in check, or work hard to clean up the aftermath when you fail to keep them in check. You have some work to do either way. May we humbly suggest that learning to keep emotions in check is far easier in the long run.

We are already so proud of you for wanting to deal with these issues. We know that you can do this.

Tip #18

Learn to use (not abuse) time-outs.

When parents sanction their kids to a time-out, it affords those kids the time and space to cool down. Those kids are also encouraged to consider their words and actions and quietly reflect on what those words and actions have caused. Sometimes, as adults, we need the same kind of breathing room to cool down.

I am convinced that the very best way to use an adult time-out is to count to 10 like this:

1. Take a deep breath.
2. Assure your spouse that your marriage is going to be ok.
3. Breathe some more.

4. Let them know that you need to think and clear your head for 10-20 minutes.
5. Go take a walk (or something equally useful for an adult time-out).
6. Use your time wisely and productively.
7. Breathe again. Deep breaths truly are helpful.
8. Return in the time promised.
9. Own whatever behavior you need to and apologize for it.
10. Resolve anything that you can.

As it turns out, the old “count to 10” advice wasn’t all that bad. Furthermore, research, as well as my own experience has shown that deep, intentional breathing slows your heart rate and metabolism and lowers your blood pressure. Deep breathing also increases your brain’s theta waves which leads to calmness and deeper relaxation. These pauses you take to breathe deeply help both your mind and body respond in a calmer manner than before.

Lastly, do not abuse the privilege of being able to call a time-out. If you are the one to call a time-out, you must also be the one to call a time-in. Building trust and keeping trust in a marriage is vital. If you use time-outs well and return to resolve the conflict when you say you will, you can build trust. If you use time-outs as a means to escape and avoid conflicts, you will erode trust. Just don’t.

Tip #20

Learn to communicate your feelings, not your spouse’s behavior.

It is easy to say to your spouse, “You did _____.” Or, “You didn’t do _____.” However, it is far *better* to say, “I felt _____ when you _____.” Do you see the difference? The first one communicates that there is

something wrong with your spouse's behavior. Even if there really *is* something wrong, and not just a matter of preference as stated above, this kind of accusation will put your spouse on the defensive and you will become the target of that defense. I don't know about you, but I don't ever want *my name* and the word "target" to be used in the same sentence by my spouse!

When we learn to communicate our own feelings to our spouse, we are taking ownership of ourselves and our feelings. Furthermore, we are NOT shifting the blame to our spouses. Do you want respect from your spouse? This is one way to earn it. You can earn respect from yourself and your spouse by taking ownership of your feelings so that your spouse does not get blamed for something that you felt.

And while we are talking about communicating your feelings, never assume your spouse knows what you are thinking or how you are feeling. They will not know your thoughts or feelings in any given situation unless you tell them and do so in a way that they can receive and understand.

Tip #22

Rid yourself of criticism and contempt.

There are some forms of constructive criticism that *may* have a place in your marriage, but this should be an exception. Your marriage had better be rock-solid and feel safe to both of you before too many critiques will be tolerated.

Contempt, on the other hand, has no place between a husband and wife. NONE. Zero. Zilch. Nada. You get the idea. Here is the definition of contempt, just to be clear:

*Contempt: The belief or feeling that a person or a thing is **beneath consideration** or **is worthless**.*

You will feel contempt if you allow yourself to believe that your spouse is *beneath consideration* or *worthless*. Nobody is worthless, especially the person you chose to marry.

Since keeping contempt out of your marriage is so vital, let us give you a few examples of what contempt might look like in a marriage.

- One spouse feels like they cannot stand the other.
- One spouse continually puts down and belittles the other in public settings, and feels justified doing so.
- One spouse shows a continued attitude of disgust toward the other.
- One spouse despises the other, and their attitude changes to mean and insulting the minute their spouse enters the room.

If this is happening in your marriage, you must get some outside help quickly. Find a good marriage counselor (preferred), a pastor with vast counseling experience, or a trusted mentor. No marriage can survive this kind of contemptuous behavior for very long.

The fact of the matter is that no one ever wants to be treated like they are worthless. In fact, Dr. John Gottman, one of our country's foremost marriage researchers, considers contempt one of the early predictors of divorce. If Dr. Gottman observes contempt in a relationship, that marriage only has a 7% chance of surviving. If you allow just a little contempt to get a foothold in your relationship, it will be difficult

(although not impossible) to undo. Your best bet is to keep contempt completely out of your marriage.



Chapter Four Summary:

This section will be the most challenging for the majority of us. This is because when we are in the midst of conflict, our brains will not allow us to think as clearly as we could otherwise. This is classic “fight or flight” behavior.

What is “fight or flight” behavior?

“Fight or flight” is our nervous system’s response to a perceived threat. This is our body’s way of getting us out of danger, and keeping us there. Imagine that a grizzly bear just showed up outside of your house. This bear is roaming around rattling doors and windows and trying to figure out how to get in and eat you for lunch! At this point, most people will feel a sharp increase in their anxiety that will cause them to do one of two things; find a shotgun (fight), or get away as fast as possible (flight).

This fight or flight response is the same kind of anxiety, or threat, that we often *feel* in the middle of an argument. You must work to keep this threat level as low as possible. Also, make sure that *you* are not perceived as a threat by your spouse. You need to learn how vital it is to the health of your marriage and your family that you learn to de-escalate your disagreements, arguments, and fights.

Keeping yourself in check during an argument will require the most work, but will yield the greatest benefits. Don’t give up!

CHAPTER FIVE

Be A Lifelong Learner: What You Can Learn Following An Argument.

Tip #24

Be a good forgiver.

If we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive. ~Mother Teresa

Each one of us has made mistakes with our spouse. Furthermore, each one of us will make future mistakes with our spouse. The failure to sincerely grant forgiveness when our spouse asks for it reeks of pride. Pride is the enemy of the kind of trust that a good marriage requires.

Forgiving another person does not mean we condone their behavior, rather it means we are showing them grace.

We are essentially saying,

“We both know that what you did was wrong, but I want to show the same kind of grace and forgiveness to you that I hope to receive when I need it in the future.”

This is how spouses forgive each other well.

Furthermore, when you forgive someone, it frees you from the burden of carrying a very heavy grudge.

Forgiving someone else doesn't give them a free pass – it gives you one.

Lastly, when you forgive, you leave the issue in the past where it belongs. You must not continue to bring up past issues once you have forgiven them. The rare

exception here would be if your spouse continues the same behavior and never seeks to change. This would be an abuse of your forgiveness and must be addressed. Don't hesitate to ask us if you need clarification here.

One of the secrets of long and happy marriages is to forgive your spouse for everything, and do so each night before you go to bed. After all, husbands and wives in great marriages know that even though they may not always see eye to eye on things, they can still walk arm in arm.

Tip #26

You must change the way you look at some things.

If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at will change.

Each of us needs to decide whether to entertain every thought that enters the heart and mind. In other words, you are the gatekeeper for the thoughts and ideas that you spend the most time with. You choose what stays in. Furthermore, everything that enters into the heart has to get through the mind first. To guard your heart, you must control your thoughts.

Proverbs 4:23 [NLT] says it this way, "Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life."

This means several things for you. It means that you must choose daily to think the best of your spouse! Also, you must realize that you are not always right and you will need to remind yourself of that fact often. And this means that if you happen to be right, this will not allow you to communicate any better, or avoid conflict. You both have to be willing to change the way you look at things and it needs to start with you.

For example, I can choose to focus on each and every negative thing that Tami does, my perception, or I can choose to focus on the positive things, my perception again. The amount of effort it takes me is nearly the same either way.

Let me give you a real-life example. Tami loves to buy me clothes and dress me well. If left to myself, on the other hand, I would wear many things that are fairly old and outdated because I am quite frugal when it comes to clothing. Don't judge me, I just am. This means that there are times when I get new clothes, because Tami buys them for me, but I don't feel like I *need* new clothes. Nor do I want to take the time to make room in my closet for new clothes.

At this point, the majority of women are sympathizing with Tami and feeling her pain, and the majority of men are feeling mine. This is not a problem so far. Problems can occur based on how I choose to view the receiving of new clothes that I didn't know I needed, or ask for. My two choices are generally this: I can be frustrated for the burden this places on me (since I now have to figure out where to put these clothes), or I can see Tami's heart and how she loves me by taking better care of me than I do myself at times.

The first choice will cause me to grumble and cause Tami and I to argue. The second choice will cause me to be thankful and cause us to connect. Do you see the difference?

When you are sincerely ready to change the way you look at things, you must work hard to see things from your spouse's perspective. This is called empathy. When

you learn to do this regularly, you will find yourself much happier with your marriage and your life.

Try to regularly see things from your spouse's point-of-view. Try to understand their perspective on life. Their point-of-view is just as valid as yours, furthermore, there will be times when their point-of-view is much more enlightening than yours. When you learn to see things from your spouse's point-of-view, you are allowing yourself to understand your spouse better. Isn't this always the goal in marriage? It all starts with you choosing to look at things differently.

Tip #27

Stop being afraid to get help!

Marriage counseling works. So does attending marriage seminars and retreats. Ditto for reading good marriage books together.

Tami is a licensed marriage counselor and I have coached men and women in their marriages for many years. Additionally, we operate a group counseling center together. Therefore, we have lots of experience to say what comes next.

Tami and I can tell you two very important things about marriage counseling:

1. Marriage counseling has a high success rate
2. And, most couples wait about five years too long to seek counseling

Marriage counselors are essentially relationship experts and marriage mentors. A good marriage counselor is worth their weight in gold! Waiting too long to ask for help from an expert could cost you dearly. It will cost you in terms of lost time, while you and your spouse

are spinning your wheels in your marriage. It will cost you in frustration and anger towards each other. And it will cost you in terms of money because divorce lawyers are expensive.

You see, little problems in a marriage require little corrections. But BIG problems in a marriage, the kind that happen when we neglect to get the help we need at the time we need it, will require BIG corrections. Big corrections are much more painful.

To further complicate things, there is definitely a stigma in our culture towards asking for help with your marriage. However, you must remind yourself that there will always be a bigger stigma towards the failure of your marriage—especially when marriage failure is preventable!

Would you rather deal with the fallout of asking for help with your marriage, or would you rather deal with the fallout of failing to get help?

As of early 2017, the average cost of a wedding in the United States was \$29,858. Furthermore, the average married couple will spend over \$600 just for their wedding cake, but will balk at spending any amount to keep their marriage intact. We cannot make any sense of that.

Enjoy your wedding, but *invest* into your marriage!

Read Chapter Six of the unabbreviated version of this book titled, “How to know if you need outside help” for deeper insights as to how you can know this for sure.

Tip #30

Don't ever lose hope

There will be times when you are frustrated with yourself and down on yourself. Furthermore, there will be times when you don't know if you or your marriage will ever change. During these times, you may feel very defeated. Simply put, you cannot allow yourself to ever lose hope! If you lose hope, you will lose the ability to create change in yourself.

Allowing yourself to lose hope in your marriage is akin to you deciding that you will never, ever change.

Here is a great example. There are times when couples who are completely at the end of their rope will come to see Tami for marriage counseling. At this point, they are not sure if they are wasting their time pursuing counseling. These desperate couples will often say something like this to Tami, "Do you really think you can help us?" Tami will confidently turn to that couple and say, "As long as there are two *willing* people here to work on their marriage, there is nothing stopping us from getting you the marriage you've always dreamed of. Nothing!"

Hope fuels the motivation you will need to strive for the kind of marriage you have always wanted. Don't ever allow yourself to lose hope.



Chapter Five Summary:

Hindsight really is 20/20, especially when we take the time to reflect on how we can improve. Think about your job or even about your parenting skills. If you never allow yourself to reflect on things that you have done (whether good or not so good), you will never have the insight needed to become a better person with a better marriage.

Learn to reflect on your interactions and look for patterns, whether beneficial or not, that you did not see before. Becoming aware of these patterns will become your key to freedom from making the same mistakes that you have made in the past.

We all want to be good at something. Start here. Be good at relationships by learning to reflect and grow.

Be good at marriage — your marriage.

Section 3: Enjoying the Rewards

Now that you've done some real work to get your relationship back on track, you must learn how to keep it there. The way to keep your marriage where you want it to be, to have the kind of marriage you've always dreamed of, is to learn some intentional, regular, marriage-building habits.

Think of these marriage-building habits the same way you would think of a savings account that you are using to buy something precious and long sought after. You would regularly and intentionally set an amount of money aside, knowing that if you keep it in a safe place, your savings account will grow in value. These marriage-building habits can do the same thing for your marriage and help it grow in value.

We often talk about the place your relationship was at when you were dating and pursuing each other. During that time, you were so infatuated with each other that you could hardly think of, or spend time doing, anything else. Now that the infatuation has worn off, it is time to replace those immature feelings of infatuation with something more mature and sustainable.

There will be times when you won't *feel* like performing, let alone maintaining, any of these marriage-building habits that follow. Do them anyway. Remind yourself that there will also be times you don't *feel* like showing up for work, cooking another meal for your kids, or cleaning up after your pet. But you somehow find the resolve to do these things anyway. Your marriage deserves that level of resolve and so much more!

CHAPTER SEVEN

Summary - You can do this!

Conflict leads to poor communication in a marriage and poor communication leads to conflict. It really does not matter which term (communication or conflict) you prefer to use, since they are one and the same thing. It does not matter because they will both wreak havoc on your marriage—until you decide to grow through these temporary challenges and work together as a team.

Poor communication and conflict in your marriage does not mean you married the wrong person. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Every couple struggles with communication at times. When you find yourself in this place, it is simply an invitation to grow and an individual and is a couple too. Conflict is NOT a sign that your marriage is ending or that it should end. Conflict is simply a byproduct of living under the same roof together and needing to work out the rough edges in a relationship. Tami and I always say:

As a couple, you are either wearing each other out or breaking each other in.

When you learn to handle conflict well, you will be helping to break each other in. Then you will have time to get used to each other's differences.

Besides...

There are grounds for divorce in every marriage more than a week old. The trick is to find and to keep finding grounds for marriage.

Let's be honest, if any of us could figure out how to do marriage without any communication problems or conflict, we certainly would. But conflict handled appropriately will grow you and your spouse in ways you never dreamed of.

Conflict is merely the price that couples pay for a deeper level of intimacy. And, while conflict can be a gateway to marital intimacy, it all depends on how it is handled.

Work to foster true friendship with your spouse, the way you did while you were dating. Because, you see, friends don't often argue, and they forgive readily and make up quickly when they do!

Researchers say that the top issues couples argue about are money, sex, and parenting. This does not mean that these issues need to ruin your marriage. They can, in fact, lead to better friendship, communication, and intimacy if handled well.

You can't do it all – yet!

Some of us will want to tackle all of this conflict resolution information at once. We will think we have all of the answers to our communication problems. And we will get frustrated with ourselves when we can't do it all. Our advice is this: Don't tackle these new skills all at once, instead add one or two per week so they stick.

Remember that the purpose of our marriage vows is to eliminate any chance of a *Plan B* when we hit bumps in

the road. Marriage vows are a way of saying that you are both agreeing to work through the issues that come up in life and not bail out because of them. Loving your spouse is a decision you must make daily. EVERY. SINGLE. DAY. Your spouse will be hard to love at times, choose to love anyway.

Besides, getting divorced just because you don't love your spouse is almost as silly as getting married just because you do!

We hope that you and your spouse have engaged in some deep and meaningful conversations about the content of this book. We love that we have helped to encourage those conversations. In fact, it is more important for the two of you to emotionally connect and get on the same page during these kinds of conversations than it is for you to agree with everything we have said here. Really!

Be your spouse's biggest fan and encourager, not their biggest critic. Be the one who wipes away their tears not the one who causes them.

#TeamUs



THANK YOU

If you have read this far (and are still reading!) we want to sincerely thank you for reading this book. The hope that we can help other marriages to thrive is the motivation that keeps us going, and you reading this book is just that: it is our hope that YOUR marriage will thrive.

If you would like to share this book with a friend, we would be flattered. But, we would humbly ask that you send them to our website or Amazon to download their own copy. You see, this is the only way that we can know if we are giving our readers what they need, and we need to have some direct contact to do so.

If you want someone else to have a free abbreviated copy of this book, please send them to our website at: <https://tandemmarriage.com>
We will take good care of them. We promise.

We know that much of what is contained in this book is rather hard-hitting and straightforward. We wrote in this way not to offend anyone, but rather to keep this book as concise as possible. There is not a lot of filler here.

The fact that you bought this book says that you want to be a better person. It also says that you want to have a happier marriage. Lastly, it says that you are willing to work at it and keep trying. Thank you!

“A rising tide raises all ships!”

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

We would love to tell you that we are just naturally gifted at marriage, that we have always known the right things to do to make a marriage work well. This is simply not true. We do have a great marriage, but we had to figure that out the hard way. And it is called “the hard way” for a reason.

We have been married for over 30 years and, make no mistake, this is a miracle. We always say that in marriage, you will either wear each other out or break each other in. We have finally figured out how to break each other in. Whew!



Tami is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in Southern California and has honed her craft of helping marriages to thrive while working with hundreds and hundreds of couples at the group counseling practice they own and operate. This is where she also serves as director and intern supervisor. Tami specializes in affair recovery with couples.

This is grueling work. She has often said that she wants to “affair proof” marriages so that they never have to go through recovering from an affair. This book is part of that affair-proofing strategy.

Brad is a retired professional firefighter who loves to mentor others, loves to write, and loves all things that are hard to figure out. He has served on church staff as a youth pastor and also as an associate pastor where he led a marriage ministry. As an ordained pastor, Brad has also had the privilege of marrying many couples and helping them to begin their lives as one.

Brad and Tami love working together with couples and enjoy preparing them for marriage, helping them to work through challenges at different stages in marriage, and helping couples to realize that every relationship has challenges.

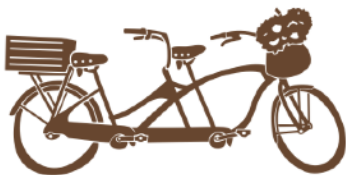
Brad and Tami also own two tandem bikes which have helped them, in many ways, to get their own marriage and communication in sync. Their love for riding their tandem bike, and passion for thriving marriages, birthed the idea for Tandem Marriage several years ago. Together, Tami and Brad make a pretty inspiring team called Tandem Marriage and have been known to use the hashtag #TeamUs.

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We hope we can meet you in person someday and share more of our story with you. It's been a pretty incredible ride!

Brad & Tami Miller

brad@tandemmarriage.com



Helping you to
enjoy the ride
through life...
together.

www.TandemMarriage.com

Ready to Surrender
Poor Communication in Marriage is a Battle You Can
Win

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