

# The Ten Commandments for extraordinary relationships: Part I

Relationships are challenging. When two individuals commit to navigating life together, there are bound to be bumps in the road. In fact, approximately 80% of the differences in preference and opinion a couple face will never be fully resolved. Instead, a couple must learn to manage these differences in a safe, satisfying, and respectful way. The key to a healthy and happy relationship lies in how a couple negotiates solutions to the inevitable differences and conflicts that arise. To assist our work with couples, my father and I have identified 10 principles that are essential to making the most of intimate relationships. We explore these concepts in our CD "Relationship Toolkit II: The Ten Commandments for Extraordinary Relationships" (available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)). Below are the first five commandments in abbreviated form. Next month I will present you with the final five commandments. I encourage you to begin putting these concepts to use in your relationship today.

**Commandment # 1: Assume 100% Responsibility for Your 50%:** In any relationship conflict each party is responsible for creating the context in which the conflict arises. Sorry, but there are no innocent bystanders. When a couple find themselves in the middle of a conflict, it is beneficial for each partner to take time to reflect on his or her own contribution to the impasse. This can be difficult as it is much easier for us to focus on our partner's contribution to the problem and to blame him or her for our dissatisfactions. After all, if he or she would just change the issue would be resolved. Even though it is not always easy to do, acknowledging our part in the problem is essential for achieving a satisfactory and lasting solution.

**Commandment #2 — Speak Your Truth:** Ignoring problems in a relationship can lead to its demise. Care must be taken not to allow debris from unspoken words or irritations to build up in the relationship. Silence can erode a relationship's foundation. Intimate relationships require both partners to speak their truth, listen, and be willing to act when either member of the relationship identifies a problem. A mantra we suggest couples

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adapt is this: "If I bring this up, I run the risk of losing this relationship." "If I don't bring this up, I am guaranteeing the loss of this relationship." We teach couples to speak their truth, and to listen to the complainant as if the relationship is at stake, because it is.

**Commandment #3: Listen Now, or Pay Later:** Listening is even more important than talking. While many of us appear to be listening, we are often preparing our response or forming our rebuttal to what our partner is saying. In times of trouble it is critical for at least one partner to

be able to drop into a reflective listening mode. This involves listening intently to the speaker and reflecting back what he or she has said: "This is what I heard you saying. Is that correct?" If the speaker believes that the listener has not heard correctly or completely, the speaker will clarify what was meant. This process continues until the speaker feels understood. Then the roles are reversed and the listener becomes the speaker. The reflective listening process continues until both partners feel completely heard. It is not uncommon for this process to resolve a conflict in itself, as often arguments intensify as each partner struggles to be heard.

**Commandment #4: Know The Odds:** Noted relationship researcher Dr. John Gottman has found that

successful couples have a ratio of five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. This ratio helps a relationship maintain positive momentum and allows the build-up of positive feelings. Dr. Gottman warns that negative interactions such as criticizing, defensiveness, giving the silent treatment, or demonstrating contempt are especially corrosive to relationship intimacy.

**Commandment #5: Know That Love is Not Enough:** Falling in love is a temporary chemical and spiritual event, but it differs from long-term intimacy. Scientists have discovered that the chemicals being released in the brain during this phase of a relationship are similar to those that are released when someone uses cocaine or heroin.

True intimacy is possible when two people make a commitment, have pertinent information about how to relate to each other, and use healthy intimacy building tools.

In next month's column I will present the final five commandments, which include issues related to self-esteem, unresolved emotional baggage, and protecting your relationship from invaders.

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