

Building a Happy Marriage

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The term “paradigm shift” has existed for many years, and the power of paradigm shifts has been the vehicle for countless enlightened insights. Understanding the term is not required for this article, yet a change in thinking may be what you experience when you read the information below.

First, a “paradigm” is a way of looking at and understanding a given situation. There are multiple synonyms, such as your point of view, your perception or belief, and your mindset or mental image.

A “paradigm shift” occurs when you receive new information that significantly changes the way you understand a given situation. The new awareness usually results in one of two things. You might enthusiastically burst forth with an “Aha!” at unexpectedly gaining new insight. Or you might emit a low groan, wondering “How could I have been so ignorant all this time?”

I usually talk about paradigm shifts early in my relationships with clients. Why? Because paradigm shifts are perhaps the most powerful and effective method for changing both attitude and behavior. Having a more complete awareness often stimulates significantly improved performance.

You might think, “Okay, Dennis, let’s get on with it. How does having a happy marriage relate to enhancing leadership skills?”

I confess that I am sharing a paradigm shift I experienced. You may want to share this new insight, too. Marriages are in such poor shape in our society that I encourage you to pass this new awareness along to at least one other person--in addition to your husband or wife!

The One Thing You Need to Know About Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success is a 2005 book by Marcus Buckingham. In the first chapter, he introduces these three concepts of interest to any professional person. Additionally, Buckingham provides a surprise bonus!

There is no hint in the title that you’ll also learn “the one thing you need to know about a happy marriage.” Buckingham offers this insight as an example of research that rigorously evaluated the cause of “excellence” in something quite common in our society. (See research reference below.)

On the way to revealing “the one thing you need to know,” Buckingham teases us with a perspective that makes sense: “Replace love blindness with an accurate understanding of who your partner really is. Listen to your partner. Understand that she may see the world differently from you. Love her for her strengths, but then identify, accept, and offer support in her areas of weakness.”

All that seems appropriate and consistent with what you might expect, right? If you accurately understand who your partner is, won’t she (or he) feel more secure and valued? Won’t you be more accepting of the behaviors you observe, even if they conflict with what you might prefer?

All that may be true, but here comes Buckingham’s paradigm shift associated with happy marriages: **“Find the most generous explanation for each other’s behavior and believe it.”**

This insight is surprising--stunning even--and may be hard to believe. Still, the concept is well worth pondering, especially as Buckingham reveals more information. How often do you respond to your spouse’s behavior with suspicion or irritation? When you do, it leads you (and probably your spouse) down the path of anger, insecurity, and doubt. What often results are words of challenge and criticism, rarely the comforting tenderness of forgiveness, intimacy, and deep acceptance.

Repeating a question from above, “How does this information fit in a book focused on building future leaders?” First, leaders should seek a healthy balance between their work and home lives. Strong marriages are important to our society and a person’s satisfaction with life in general!

Second, the same concept can apply to any relationship--a direct report, your boss, a customer, a supplier, a colleague, a neighbor, or a growing student in your home. Adopting a generous explanation for the behaviors of those “important others” you influence could stimulate far more satisfying relationships. Your “standing” with those individuals will likely soar!

When I first read this concept about marriage in a leadership book, I wondered if it was appropriate. Having considered it extensively, I’ve concluded that if you can master this concept with your husband or wife, it’s transferable at least in part to your relationships with others less intimate. Such a paradigm is a superb aspirational objective!

Research for Marcus Buckingham’s reference comes from “What the Motivated Mind Sees; Comparing Friends’ Perspectives to Married Partners’ Views of Each Other.”

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0022103199914178>

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