

# How to Build a Happy Marriage

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I've written frequently about the power of "paradigm shifts." I realize, though, that not all readers of today's column have seen those past articles. So, let me describe briefly a "paradigm shift."

First, a "paradigm" is a way of looking at a given situation. There are many synonyms, such as viewpoint, mindset, outlook, perception, understanding, perspective, belief, or mental image.

A "paradigm shift" occurs when you receive new information that changes significantly the way you understand a given situation. The insight usually results in an enthusiastic "Aha!" (indicating your delight at finally having this new awareness) or a low groan ("How could I have been so ignorant?")

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

You might be thinking, "Okay, Dennis—let's get on with it. What does this have to do with building a happy marriage?"

I have to admit that I am passing along a paradigm shift I experienced. Maybe you will, too. Marriages are in such poor shape in our society that I encourage you to pass this along to at least one other person—in addition to your wife or husband!

The One Thing You Need to Know about Great Managing, Great Leading, and Sustained Individual Success is a current book by Marcus Buckingham. In the very first chapter, he gives an introduction to these three fascinating concepts. Buckingham also 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.

On the way to revealing "the one thing you need to know," Buckingham teases us with a perspective that seems to make 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, doesn't it? If you accurately understand who your partner really is, won't she (or he) feel more secure and valued? Won't you be more accepting of the behaviors you observe?

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 stunning, and well worth pondering! How often do I respond to my spouse's behavior with suspicion or irritation? When I do, it leads me down the path of insecurity and doubt, not toward forgiveness and intimacy.

How does this information fit in a column focused on building future leaders? First, leaders should seek a healthy balance between their work lives and their home lives—strong marriages are important!

Second, the same concept applies to any relationship--- with a direct report, with your boss, with a colleague, with a supplier, or with a customer. If you can generate this mindset with all the "important others" in your life, you will be far more satisfied with those linkages!

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