

3 Surefire Ways to Ruin a Perfectly Good Relationship

By Richard Nicastro, Ph.D.

(This article takes a humorous look at behaviors that shouldn't be a part of one's relationship. By learning what not to do, the picture of how to create a healthy marriage or relationship becomes even clearer. I hope you appreciate the silliness of this one).

There are so many articles out there on relationships and marriages that it can make your head spin: How to communicate with your husband even if he's a complete jackass; The 72 secrets to lasting love, even when she can't stand to look at you; 13 fun ways to increase intimacy after your spouse has been deported.

But what if you're in a solid, happy relationship and you have absolutely no interest in improving your marriage? Then what? Where do you turn? Where are the articles for people like you? Or maybe you're eager to knock your relationship down a few pegs so it's more in line with the rest of the couples on your block. After all, it's no fun being the golden couple in a sea of mediocre relationships. Enough already with all of us self-proclaimed relationship "experts" telling you that it's possible to recapture your adolescent passion with the balding, paunchy snorer who has sawed away next to you for the last thirty-five years.

Healthy relationships like yours have been neglected for too long. But that's about to change! Here are three *guaranteed* steps that will knock the life and vibrancy right out of your relationship in a matter of days. (Please Note: Use of these methods for more than three days can lead to a spike in name-calling, profanity, door-slamming, and frantic calls the legal team of Vito and Vito.)

3 ways to ruin a healthy relationship

1) The "I doubt it" technique.

No matter what your partner says, respond to him/her with the phrase, "I doubt it." Whenever new methods of communication designed to *improve* intimacy are practiced, couples report considerable difficulty in using the new skills in a consistent and reliable manner. They commonly report that the methods feel too unnatural or artificial.

Not so with the "I doubt it" technique. Most couples report that speaking this way feels 100% natural and couples seem very eager to practice this skill. Here are a few examples of this technique in action:

Q: "Can you pick up the kids later?" A: "I doubt it."

Q: "I have something important to discuss. Can we talk later?" A: "I doubt it."

Q: "Honey, do you still find me attractive?" A: "I doubt it."

After two days of using the "I doubt it" technique, you are ready for step two.

2) The inappropriate laughter technique (ILT).

The ILT requires practice. If you don't have one already, you'll need to develop a hearty belly-laugh. This technique will only work if your partner thinks you're seriously laughing at him or her. Many people report that they practice while driving to and from work.

The ILT is to be used under two specific sets of circumstances:

- A) Every time your partner is getting dressed or undressed in front of you;
- B) Whenever your partner attempts to communicate something of importance.

For example:

Here's what your partner says: "I felt you were being unfair when you said I don't do enough around the house."

Here's what your partner's statement looks like when you add the ILT: "I felt [HA!] you were being unfair [HA! HA!] when you said I don't [HEE!] do enough around the house [HA! HA! HO! HO!]."

Isn't that better? Now your partner can't even get his/her own serious statement out uninterrupted, and you're also amused in the process. Feel free to jazz up this approach by improvising. Try bending forward while holding your stomach with each laugh—it really intensifies the effect.

3) Ungratefulness Diary.

This one requires the most effort on your part but it gives a lot of bang for it's buck. Some prep time is needed. Try to put aside all the things you love and appreciate about your partner. Then reflect on all the ways in which your partner gets under your skin—focus your attention on how s/he annoys, irritates, and bothers you. Visualizing your partner's undesirable habits adds to the effectiveness of this exercise by forcing you to relive all the ways you feel exasperated by him/her.

For example, an entry might look like this: *God, I hate the way she chews. I mean, I'd rather watch a crow pick the eye out of a dead squirrel. I don't think I can eat near her anymore.*

For maximum effect it is recommended that you keep a daily journal and add to the list. This will help you become more and more attuned to the ways in which your partner's behavior irks you. A side benefit to keeping an ungratefulness diary is that you'll begin to overlook all the kind, generous and considerate things your partner does for you.

There you have it. A solid, full-proof way to kick your relationship behind the knees so that it falls flat on its face. You'll be amazed at how quick and effective these methods are. You can thank me later.

If it turns out that you're one of those people who *insists* on building a *healthy, loving* relationship (yawn...), you can always do the direct opposite of the above:

Validate your spouse/partner's experiences; be attentive and take your partner's reactions seriously; and focus on all the ways in which you appreciate your partner. Since you're in charge of how you behave in your relationship, it's your decision.

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Author Bio

Over the past fifteen years Richard Nicastro, Ph.D. has helped couples build stronger, more fulfilling marriages and relationships. Dr. Nicastro has lectured at several universities and now conducts workshops for couples on a wide range of issues. His relationship advice has appeared on television, radio and in national magazines. A member of the International Coach Federation, Dr. Nicastro is passionate about coaching and believes that healthy relationships can add meaning and fulfillment to our lives. His goal is to guide individuals and couples as they implement the skills that will allow their relationships to flourish.

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