

Hello, Goodbye: Transitioning to a Stronger Marriage Part 1

Aaron Jones

07/31/2023



Hello, Goodbye: Transitioning to a Stronger Marriage Part 1

It's a common tale as old as time. Two people meet. . . and then they meet again. . . and then again. Before you know it, they don't want to "meet" with anyone else. There is so much joy and passion that it feels like it will be that way forever. Eventually, they think to themselves, "This must be love." The comedian Mike Birbiglia once beautifully described falling in love. He says,

"Falling in love for the first time is a completely transcendent experience. It's like eating pizza-flavored ice cream. Your brain can't even process that level of joy.... Deep down, our whole lives, no matter how low our self-esteem gets, we think, 'I have a special skill that no one knows about, and if they knew they'd be amazed.' And then eventually we meet someone who says, 'You have a secret special skill.' And you're like, 'I know! So do

you!' And they're like, 'I know!' And then you're like, 'We should eat pizza-ice cream together.' And that's what love is. It's this giant mound of pizza-flavored ice cream and delusion."

Yet after some time, many couples find themselves living their life separate from their partner. They start to wonder if their secret skill is special to their partner anymore or, even more than that, if pizza-flavored ice cream is even a good idea.

This could be a natural consequence of the economic principle of diminishing returns. Simply put, the more we encounter our partner the more common they become to us and the less their perceived benefit or value.

If that is true, then why do so many people have happy, long-lasting marriages? One of the leading researchers on relationships, Dr. John Gottman, provides some insights on this in his book *What Makes Love Last? How to Build Trust and Avoid Betrayal*.

What Makes Love Last?

The basic premise of the book is that at the heart of long-lasting, healthy relationships are two people who have a deep understanding of themselves and their partner. Dr. Gottman uses the term "attunement" for when couples know how to lovingly express this understanding to each other. Setting up rituals of connection is crucial to building this understanding. Gottman's research over the last 40 years has shown that the way you say hello and goodbye to each other is vital to establishing a connection. Giving attention to your partner when parting or coming back together tells them they're important to you.



Keep in mind that if you're not currently doing this it may seem awkward at first. You could start by reading this blog post with your partner or simply telling them that you want to improve your greetings and farewells. Let them know you will be trying some new suggestions and invite them to do it with you. As you consistently do this, it will begin to feel more natural and eventually become second nature. Then you will be able to focus on the sweet nuances of these interactions.

How to Transition.

Here are some helpful tips to make transitions more impactful:

- Make sure that your full attention is on your partner. This means that you pause Netflix, stop your miniature ship-building, or put your phone down.
- Begin reunions by saying that you're happy to see them and end farewells by either saying that you'll miss them or listing when you plan on seeing them again. This shows that you are already looking forward to your reunion.
- Another way to say goodbye is to let your partner know you appreciated the time you spent together or something they did for you. This shows that you are mindful of the efforts they make in the relationship.
- During reunions give your partner time to discuss their day. They should do the same for you.
- If your partner repeatedly ends up taking too long to recap their day, try setting a time limit for this interaction, maybe 5 minutes each. Limits often force us to be more creative and recognize what is most important.
- Try to find natural ways of touching each other like hugging or holding hands. Touch is an important part of connection.