

Hello, Goodbye: Transitioning to a Stronger Marriage Part 2

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_____ Last blog post we talked about how Dr. John Gottman, in his book *What Makes Love Last? How to Build Trust and Avoid Betrayal*, says that his research over the last 40 years has shown that the way you say hello and goodbye to each other is crucial to establishing a connection or what he calls Attunement with your partner. The last post listed suggestions about how to handle the transition of parting or reuniting with your partner. If you would like to review that information pull it up in the archives. This post is going to focus on an activity suggested by Dr. Gottman in his book.

Six Seconds Goes a Long Way

One activity Dr. Gottman suggests is for couples to have a “six-second kiss” when you are leaving or coming home. Why six seconds? Gottman’s research shows that six seconds is just “long enough to feel romantic.” This provides a temporary oasis from a busy day and creates a deliberate break between the on-the-job mentality and a couple’s one-on-one time together. In fact, the six-second kiss counts as a small part of what Dr. Gottman has called the “magic five hours.” This is the amount of

time that the most successful, happiest couples devote to their relationship every week.

Protection Against Negativity

Dr. Gottman states that being attuned with your partner at these transitions is an important way for couples to protect themselves from falling down the slippery slope of negativity. For this reason, it is important that you are present with your partner at these junctures rather than having your mind elsewhere. When you are distracted, this communicates to your partner that something else is more important to you than them. If this becomes a regular practice, your partner may begin to wonder if they are important to you anymore. This feeds negativity in a relationship which often leads to betrayal.

Dr. Gottman points out that, “betrayal was not only about turning away from one another, but it’s also about this negative comparison where one partner is saying in [his/her] mind, ‘Who needs this crap? I can do better.’” This negativity leads to feeling contempt towards your partner and is the beginning of detachment.

It may seem crazy that something so small can have such a powerful impact on a marriage, but it does. By taking time to listen to and acknowledge each other while parting or reuniting, couples build protection from the erosive feeling of not being appreciated. Often the way we say hello or goodbye sets the tone for the time in between. As a result, simple things like paying attention to your partner during these times and letting them know they are important to you will strengthen your relationship and fortify you against negativity. But as Dr. Gottman says, “It’s the small things done often that make the difference.”