

CONTINGENCY MARRIAGES: STUCK IN A TUG-OF-WAR

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“I won’t do this, until you do that!” “You haven’t changed this, so why should I change that?” Sound familiar? These are sentiments expressed by couples who are stuck in a “blame-game” due to years of disappointment in each another. Whether the above words are actually stated is unimportant, the impasse clearly exists. This conditional relationship takes the position that, *“I’m not going to do a thing to help our marriage, until you do!”* A woman’s marriage had grown distant and unhappy over the years. Her husband had not been open or shared with her for quite some time, so she decided to treat him the same way by ignoring him. The distance and disconnection only grew worse between them. One day she finally asked her husband if he wanted a divorce. He stated, “No, but you need to change!” Instead of taking offense and responding with *“I’m not going to change until you do!”* ... she made a suggestion. She proposed that she would tell him something about herself, if he would tell her something about himself. To her surprise, he agreed. This began the easing of a chronic tug-of war they had experienced for years. Instead of being punitive toward each other, they made a peace offering. Now when either begins to feel distant from the other, one of them will make the suggestion, *“I’ll tell you something about me, if you’ll tell me something about you.”* Isn’t it interesting how when one person decides to change, others often follow suite?

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