

# Psychotherapy Newsletter

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## Whine Tasting

Years ago I worked with an elderly male accountant who counted on his head to solve the world's problems. Our work began when his wife of several decades insisted on a divorce. Over time, he made the descent from his head to his heart and arrived in a place where he could take on the challenge of marriage once again. He made a comment about his new marriage that has stayed with me all these years later. He said he now counted on his (new) wife's emotional thermostat to bring to light nuances in their relationship he might otherwise miss. He was learning to pay attention when something felt a little 'off' to her and know that if they worked things through, they were better off for it. Though he was now much more emotionally suave himself, he knew he could easily get caught up in the distractions of life, and he felt her femaleness afforded a certain sensitivity that was necessary to catch the intricacies of their relationship. He felt they benefited greatly from paying close attention. I celebrated with him that,

paradoxically, his intuition, his sensitivity, was in tune enough now to make this very logical, rational, wise observation!

Over the years, I have worked with many spouses who come to treatment because they know things have gotten 'off-kilter' in their marriage, but the last thing they want to be is a 'whiner,' a 'complainer,' or a 'nag.' The longer things feel off to them, however, the more they find themselves becoming all three.

One of the first agenda items we attend to in our work is to validate the fact that their sense of the 'off-ness' of their marriage is accurate. We need to take their dystonic feelings very seriously – before dire consequences show up in the marriage. Unfortunately, often things have gotten so bad, and resentment so high, the repair needed is dramatic and challenging.

It is so important to keep a finger-on-the-pulse of the emotional health of a relationship. It is so easy to get caught up in life requirements – our work, our

children, our projects, our social life. Patterns can easily materialize without conscious awareness. Communication, sexuality, and playfulness can be replaced with responsibilities, obligations, and resentment. We may not even know to notice – particularly if we are raised in families where the marriage got away from our parents. It may not strike us as problematic to not communicate, to not be sexual, to not have fun with each other, if that was the model we grew up with.

As a trained, objective, outsider to the relationship, I have the role of being the one to say, "Yes, you are absolutely right – something is very off here." I know the basic requirements to look for. I can offer ways to begin addressing the 'off-ness' without going to a place of blaming or shaming – keeping the goal in mind of desiring and working toward a healthy, mutually satisfying partnership.

Marriage NEVER works well if one or both members of a couple are harboring resentment. Taking one another seriously and keeping the relationship clean, clear, and very-low-to-absent on the resentment scale is absolutely imperative. It is the only guaranteed method to 'affair-proof' a relationship, and avoid the ongoing drudgery of a dismal marriage.

So let's take our 'whine tasting' seriously and clink our glasses to relationships that feel regenerative, supportive, facilitating, fun, sexual, and satisfying. How about a little something that is smooth, robust, with a touch of oak and fruitiness?



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